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**CLOSING THE GAP: THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY AND
IMPLEMENTATION AT UNIVERSITIES
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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(B.A.Ed., B.Ed., M.Ed.)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor

in the

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
AND COMPARATIVE EDUCATION**

FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

BLOEMFONTEIN

PROMOTER: PROF. M. FOURIE (Ph.D.)

May 2001

Universiteit van die
Oranje-Vrystaat
BLOEMFONTEIN
28 JAN 2002
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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE**

Financial assistance provided by the National Research Foundation for this research is herewith thankfully acknowledged.

Views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and should not be attributed to the National Research Foundation or the Human Sciences Research Council.

Declaration

I, 'Mangaka Agnes Maharasoa, declare that the doctoral thesis, *Closing the gap: The relationship between academic access policy and implementation at universities in South Africa* is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references and that this thesis was not previously submitted by me for any other degree at any other university.

.....
'MANGAKA AGNES MAHARASOA

Dedication



This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Malefetsane,
my two daughters, Boreng and Nthutsoa,

and

to all children of the world; particularly the historically underserved who,
against adversities, have tirelessly sought an opportunity to better
themselves through university education.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Lord, Sustainer of Life, for giving me health and strength to accomplish this daunting task.

My sincere gratitude goes to the following dear people who supported me in various ways throughout the period of study:

- Prof. Magda Fourie for her knowledgeable academic advice and supervision of the study.
- Prof. Kalie Strydom and Dr Driekie Hay for providing academic and emotional counselling.
- Dr John Butler-Adam for willingly and promptly supplying me with statistics for the UDW.
- The Registrars, Deans and students from the University of Durban-Westville, the University of the Free State and the University of Natal for sacrificing their time to participate in interviews and focus group discussions respectively.
- Mrs Annetjie Mostert for her expertise in the typing and layout of the thesis, but above all for her inexhaustible patience, compassion and understanding.
- Mrs Elrita Grimsley for her patience in assisting me with the supply of information and for seeing a doctor in me.
- The staff of the Unit for Research into Higher Education for showing interest and supporting me all the way.
- Ms Celia Roetz for helping me with graphical designs.
- Mrs Sonja Liebenberg for editing.
- Paul Helepi for navigating the web in order to provide me with relevant information.
- My friends, Ntsotiseng and `Mabokang, for taking interest in my professional and general well-being.
- My parents, nate Pascalis and mme Francina Ramatla, for sacrificing things they would have liked to have in order to educate me. You are real visionary. My siblings `Mampho, Ramokone and Nkotseng for always urging me to go on.
- My husband, Malefetsane, for nourishing my intellectual and emotional well-being and my daughters, Nthutsoa and Boreng, who bore neglect with utmost tolerance during my period of study.

List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

CHE	Council on Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HWI	Historically White Institution
HBI	Historically Black Institution
HAEU	Historically Advantaged English University
HAU	Historically Advantaged University
HAAU	Historically Advantaged Afrikaans University
HDU	Historically Disadvantaged University
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NU	Natal University
PSE	Post Secondary Education
JMB	Joint Matriculation Board
DoE	Department of Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SAPSE	South African Post-secondary Education
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UDW	University of Durban-Westville
UFS	University of the Free State
CPP	Career Preparation Programme
QA	Quality Assurance
NDoE	National Department of Education
BC	Business and Commerce
ST	Science and Technology
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
QPU	Quality Promotion Unit

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*"...Our own lives abound with examples of
incongruences in our own knowledge and actions.
We need to inhabit our own gaps" (Komives 2000:32).*





Abstract

Key words: Academic access, student access, access policy, policy implementation, selection and admission, retention and progression, equity, increased participation, enrolments and throughput.

Without neglecting the broader scope of the phenomenon of student access, this study focuses mainly on student academic access. Three universities (one in the Free State and two in KwaZulu-Natal) are used as case studies to serve as the basis for what could be happening in other South African universities with regard to academic access policy and practice. The selected universities represent historically disadvantaged universities, historically advantaged Afrikaans universities and historically advantaged English universities. This was done to catch a glimpse of access initiatives as they occur within differing historic and contextual setups.

Theoretical perspectives on student access are provided. These shed some light on different notions of access, on multiplicity of entry paths, on the various forms of access, the targets of access initiatives and the factors propelling the need for increased access provision. The South African policy initiatives aimed at encouraging proper implementation of student access are highlighted.

Personal interviews, focus groups discussions and an analysis of universities' vision/mission statements and statistical data on student enrolments and graduation rates culminated in a triangulation of research methods and results which increased the validity of research procedures and findings.


Major findings of the study unveil that, although there is no single exclusive access policy at the national and institutional level, a myriad of higher education policies and acts have access as one of the priority areas of

implementation at universities in South Africa. Findings also reveal consensus on the need for epistemological access which places emphasis on learner success and throughput rates rather than access that is limited to admission and entry.

The study goes beyond its character as an academic piece submitted for the attainment of qualification. Based on the findings of the research, the study's major contribution is the development of guidelines with regard to the development of access policy, access policy processes, and strategies to harmonise access policy and implementation at universities in South Africa. This is in line with part of the recommendation that the provision of academic access should be guided by clear and specific policy on academic access, flowing first from the national then to the institutional level.

Abstrak

Sleutelwoorde: Akademiese toeganklikheid, toeganklikheid vir studente, toeganklikheidsbeleid, implementering van beleid, seleksie en toelating, retensie en progressie, gelykheid (gelyke geleenthede), verhoogde deelname, inskrywings en deurvloei.

 onder om die breër spektrum van die verskynsel van die toeganklikheid van studente te verwaarloos, fokus hierdie studie hoofsaaklik op die akademiese toeganklikheid van studente. Drie universiteite (een in die Vrystaat en twee in KwaZulu-Natal) is in gevallestudies gebruik om as die grondslag te dien om te bepaal wat moontlik by ander Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite aan die gebeur is met betrekking tot die beleid rakende akademiese toeganklikheid en praktyk. Die universiteite wat geselekteer is, verteenwoordig histories agtergeblewe universiteite, histories bevoorrede (bevoorregte) Afrikaanse universiteite en histories bevoorregte Engelse universiteite. Dit het geskied met die oog daarop om 'n blik te kry op die toeganklikheidsinisiatiewe soos dit in verskillende historiese en kontekstuele bedelinge/instellings voorkom.

Teoretiese perspektiewe rakende die toeganklikheid van studente word voorsien. Genoemde perspektiewe werp 'n mate van lig op verskillende begrippe van toeganklikheid, op die verskeidenheid van toetreevlakke (*entry paths*), op die verskillende vorme van toeganklikheid, op die teikens van toeganklikheidsinisiatiewe, asook op die faktore wat die noodsaaklikheid vir verhoogde toeganklikheidsvoorsiening essensieel maak. Die Suid-Afrikaanse beleidsinisiatiewe wat daarop gerig is om die behoorlike implementering van studentetoegeanklikheid aan te moedig, word ook beklemtoon.

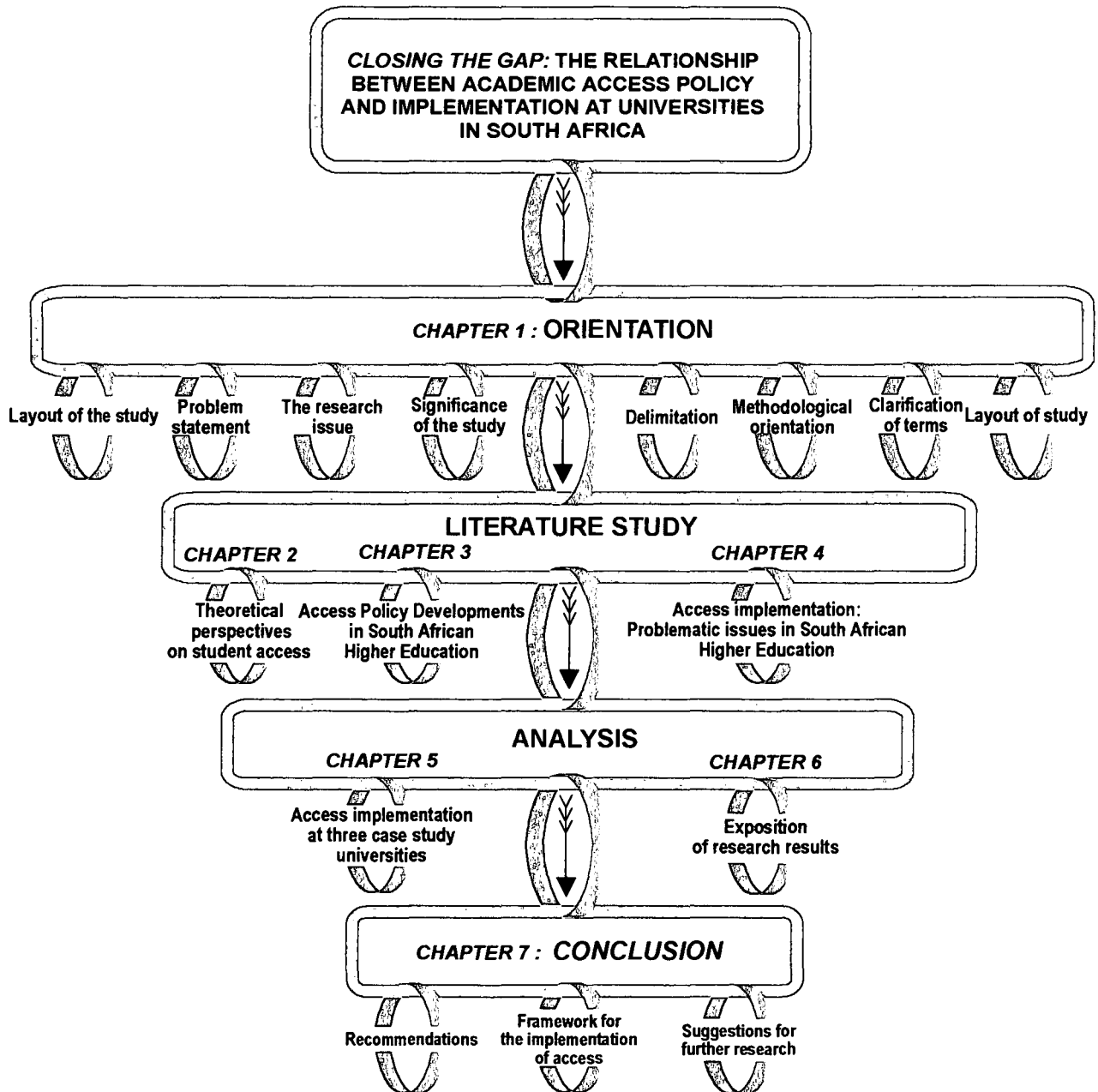
Persoonlike onderhoude, fokusgroepbesprekings, asook 'n ontleding van universiteite se visie/missiestellings en statistiese gegewens rakende

studente-inskrywings en graderingskoerse het gekulmineer in 'n triangulering van navorsingsmetodes, asook resultate wat die geldigheid van die navorsingprosedures en –bevindinge verhoog het.

Hoofbevindinge van die studie het aan die lig gebring dat – alhoewel daar nie 'n enkele eksklusiewe toeganklikheidsbeleid op die nasionale en institusionele vlak is nie – daar 'n magdom hoëronderwysbeleide en –wette is wat die implementering van toeganklikheid as een van die prioriteitsterreine aan universiteite in Suid-Afrika het. Bevindinge openbaar ook die feit dat daar konsensus bestaan rakende die noodsaaklikheid van epistemologiese toeganklikheid wat klem plaas op leerdersukses en deurvloeikoerse eerder as op toeganklikheid wat beperk is tot toelating en toetrede.

Hierdie studie strek verder as die aard daarvan as 'n akademiese stuk werk wat voorgelê word ter verkryging van 'n kwalifikasie. Gebaseer op die bevindinge van die navorsing, is die hoofbydrae van die studie die ontwikkeling van riglyne met betrekking tot die ontwikkeling van toeganklikheidsbeleid, toeganklikheidsbeleidmonitering en –strategieë met die oog op harmonie tussen toeganklikheidsbeleid en die implementering daarvan aan Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite. Dit is in lyn met 'n deel van die aanbeveling dat die riglyne vir die voorsiening van akademiese toeganklikheid voorsien behoort te word deur duidelike en spesifieke beleid aangaande akademiese toeganklikheid wat eerstens vanaf die nasionale en dan na die institusionele vlak vloei.

Structure of the study



ORIENTATION

"I cannot think of a more important challenge for South Africa and Africa than education" (Castells 2000:1).

1.1 INTRODUCTION

When examining trends in higher education (HE), one realises that - amongst others - the phenomenon of student access remains a concern in higher education circles world-wide. Workshops, conferences, seminars, symposiums and literature on HE point to the importance of student access and it is placed very high on the priority list. Weber (1999:8) asserts that "when looking specifically at students, access to higher education is the dominating theme". The following headlines were prominent on the front pages newspapers across Europe, America and Africa:

Access denied: Students left out in the cold (Goddard 1999:1).

Universities accused over dropouts (Batly 1999:3).

Widening participation statistics tell a story... (Goddard, Thomson & Wojtas 1999:4).

Exclusive grant acts to tempt women (Hinde 1999:12).

Student numbers are still declining (Pretoria News, 20 July 2000).

These topics originate from an increased interest in student access within academe and the related implications for the democratisation of higher education (Lemelin 1994). Closer scrutiny of the above headlines brings to the fore a revelation that in stark contrast to common belief, student academic access issues are not restricted to entry and admission only. Academic access covers broader ground to include student selection and admission, guidance and support, as well as retention and throughput. This contention can be illustrated by interpreting the above access headings in detail.

The topics each underline an aspect of student access. The first headline highlights problems regarding entry into HE. The second topic touches on both retention and support mechanisms, while the other headings allude to problematic issues concerning pre-entry guidance, the cost of implementing student access, attempts at diversifying access to encourage participation of designated groups like women, and providing financial support as an enabling factor towards increased participation.

South African HE shares in these concerns and is in fact moving towards the establishment of clearly defined policies that are to serve as guiding principles for the institutionalising of student academic access in universities in South Africa. These access policies and the mechanisms that are utilised to enhance policy implementation are the focus of this study.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite international consensus with regard to the pressing need for increased access to higher education, one detects that the process of access implementation in many universities of the world is in shambles, calling for urgent repair and refinement. According to Maharasoa, Letuka and Strydom (2001:18) "although the need for proper management of equitable access is

escalating, higher education institutions are faced with the dilemma of fulfilling the task simultaneously with a minimum of imbalance and tensions" with other tasks. With some institutions, implementation of academic access is relatively effective. In others, only a few aspects of it are institutionalised at some stage and for some the operationalisation of academic access is passed on from one generation of academic managers to another without review. It is imperative that "reviews are designed to evaluate the quality of educational provision and focus on the student learning experience and student achievement" (Leckey & Neill 2001:19).

Putting the South African situation under the spotlight, it becomes apparent that the transformation process that is experienced by the higher education sector has tremendous implications for student academic access into especially universities in South Africa. Ten years ago a contention was advanced that "universities in this country in addition to fulfilling their academic roles, face an enormous challenge if they wish to make a meaningful contribution to the new South Africa that is beginning to unfold. One such challenge is the question of accessibility to sectors of the population who have been grossly under-represented in our universities" (Reddy 1991:4). Opening the South African Association of Academic Development Conference (SAAAD) on *Meaningful Access to Tertiary Education*, the then Deputy Minister of Education referred to the issue of student access as a "critical area of the higher education terrain" (Mkhatshwa 1996). Six years after the transition to democracy Morrow and Toni (2001) remarked that despite the dismantling of legal barriers to access, there were still rampant inequalities to education opportunities. In support of the above views, Hay and Fourie (2000:2) posit that "the transformation of higher education in South Africa has a dual purpose; transforming in order to stay relevant and competitive in the international arena, as well as living up to the expectations of those who previously were denied access to higher and further education".

Equitable access encompasses accepting learners into a university (in this case); letting them participate equally in different faculties and departments within a university; and helping them succeed in whatever programmes they enrol for. In this evolving South Africa, the phenomenon of student access is highly linked to the legacy of the past and as such places much emphasis on equity. Equity is one of the four priority areas which need to be addressed by the three-year rolling plans of higher education institutions as demanded by the National Department of Education. The other three priorities are efficiency, size and shape, and interinstitutional co-operation. Translating these national aspirations into practice manifests as a daunting task for all concerned. As Coetzee (1999:31) aptly observes, in South Africa, "universities" role is made even more complex by the policy of national reconciliation and consensus-building and the needs for redress in the South African higher education context".

While there are policies guiding the operationalising of academic access, it is important to investigate whether the implementation processes at universities conform to the policy stipulations. This study occurs at a time when effective administration of academic access is critical for the survival of universities in South Africa. Lategan (s.a.:11) observes that "the barometer for the quality of access is the enrolment of students at a particular institution... if students do not receive the education they are looking for, they will definitely not enrol at a particular institution". According to the researcher, this poses a major threat to the already fragile higher education sector in South Africa. Another handicap arising from poor management of academic access would be a possible inability of the higher education sector to "respond to the demands of a new and diverse set of clients and agencies representing them" (OECD 1999:22).

Coupled with the scarcity of the documentation regarding the proposed topic, the above observations emphasise the necessity and relevance of this research. The

study is relevant in that it sets the stage for self-evaluation by higher education institutions and highlights the underpinnings of increased student participation, e.g. the need to revise admission policies, the need for curriculum diversification, and the new framework for lecturer and learner development as some of the means of enhancing the provision of academic access in universities in South Africa. The findings of this research will assist policy-makers, university managers and other stakeholders in their planning and other efforts geared at affording meaningful access to higher education to all deserving South Africans.

1.3 THE RESEARCH ISSUE

Given the above background, the purpose was to investigate answers to the main research question and the subsidiary questions outlined below:

Main research question:

What national and institutional policies exist to facilitate the effective implementation of academic access in selected South African universities?

To deal with the main research question in a detailed manner, a set of secondary questions were posed in a way that builds on the main research issue.

Subsidiary questions:

- What is access?
- What are the various forms of access?
- Through which access routes do learners enter universities?
- Is there a relationship between access and quality in HE?

- Is the implementation of academic access aligned to the selected universities' vision/mission, institutional strategic plans and other institutional access policy initiatives?
- How does academic access influence (contribute to or inhibit) attainment of equity?

In view of the above, the research investigated whether any gaps exist between academic access policies and the implementation of these policies. Following on this investigation, recommendations are made regarding the model for the effective management of academic access in selected universities in South Africa.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In addition to revealing the *status quo* with regard to the management of academic access in selected universities in South Africa, the study investigated whether gaps in the implementation of academic access policies in respective universities exist and on the basis of that propose a model for improved management of academic access in South African universities. The model, it is hoped, will advance proposals to universities to alleviate the problem of underrepresentation of some groups of learners (and so contribute towards greater equity) and increase throughput rates which will, in turn, contribute to sustainability and the financial viability of these institutions.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF FIELD OF STUDY

Careful consideration was done by the researcher to ensure that the scope of the study expands to manageable limits within the requirements of a doctoral thesis while at the same time maintaining credibility and integrity – the content and research processes.

1.5.1 The focus area

The researcher admits that access is a phenomenon of considerable magnitude both in breadth and depth. Within the context of higher education, access discourse is normally engaged in to include issues pertaining to staff and students. In highlighting this problem, Strydom (s.a.:1) observes that "access to the higher and further education and training sectors is unequal at both student and staff levels in terms of 'race group' as well as gender". However, it is not in the interest of the current study to deal with staff access, thus the spotlight will focus on student access matters. Research into broader student access issues alone can culminate in several doctoral studies. To be able to compile one study for the present purpose, a further narrowing down of the scope proved inevitable.

The prime focus of this study is student **academic** access and the other forms of student access (financial, geographical, physical, gender) will be addressed only in as far as they have an influence on the provisioning of academic access. It is worth noting that the researcher realises the challenge she is confronted with in trying to separate the different forms of access, since - realistically speaking - the different types of access are a ramified web of intertwined concepts and variables. The study will be restricted to the undergraduate level of study. The postgraduate level would be another interesting area for research, but the scope of this research will not allow the inclusion of postgraduate studies.

1.5.2 Institutional type

The study will be conducted at universities only. The researcher is aware that access is a concern at other levels of the education system too, but for the

manageability of the research and the fact that the researcher functions at a university account for the choice to focus at universities.

1.5.3 Geographical delimitation

The study was be conducted in two provinces of South Africa, namely the Free State and KwaZulu Natal. The University of the Free State (UFS) is a historically white Afrikaans university which, as can be judged from the name, is situated in the Free State. KwaZulu Natal hosts the Natal University (NU), which is a historically white English university and the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) which falls within the classification of historically black university. Detailed background information on the three universities is furnished in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Though it was not part of the reason why the study was carried out in these two regions, it is interesting to record that they present contrasting characteristics in demographics which might have implications for certain practices in student access. The UFS is situated in a traditionally Afrikaans and agricultural-oriented province, whereas NU and UDW are situated in a metropolitan area.

1.5.4 Time specifications

The literature study, especially relating to the South African context, tends to dwell more on the post 1994 era, since it was then that the demand for access to higher education escalated. The open access hype gained momentum in this era and, as such, the understanding is that universities are still grappling with ways of how they can bring access aspirations into effect. The empirical investigation also falls within this era, but concentrates more on the later years in order to keep up with the speed with which the transformation of higher education takes place in South Africa.

1.6 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

The entire study is a situation analysis of what is taking place at South African universities with regard to academic access policy and implementation. Therefore it is in that light that the content and techniques employed should be understood. While the contribution of a situation analysis could be doubted, Sizer and Cannon (1997:101-102) reassure the reader that "the challenges facing higher education today can best be addressed by institutions through the conduct of rigorous scenario analysis and effective strategy formulation planning and implementation" which may result from such an environmental scan.

Sizer and Cannon's (1997) observation supports the researcher's viewpoint that, in order to achieve quality in access, South African universities should take stock of achievements they have recorded in academic access initiatives and identify gaps that remain to be filled. It is this self-evaluation process (with academic access as a focus area) that will enable universities to coin strategies that will enable universities to respond effectively to national, regional and international demands pertaining to student access. To arrive at an effective analysis of the access situation at selected universities, methodological and data triangulation will be employed as research techniques in this largely qualitative study.

1.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to a process by which, when a situation is investigated by using a number of different methods, each method partly transcends its limitations by functioning as a point of comparison with the others. Several different methods may thus seem to converge on one interpretation, thereby giving grounds for preferring it to other interpretations which are suggested by only one method of investigation (Zuber-Skerritt 1991:12).

Although the controversy surrounding the principle of methodological and data integration may surface, some literature points to the merits of employing a variety of research methods when pursuing a scientific study of this nature. The contention is that methods or designs may supplement one another and fill the gaps where one method would have proved inadequate. In advancing an argument in favour of a multiple-method approach, Brewer and Hunder (1989 in Krathwohl 1998:610) stipulate that "our individual methods may be flawed, but fortunately the flaws are not identical. A diversity of imperfection allows us to combine methods not only to gain their individual strength but also to compensate for their particular faults and limitations". Niemann (2000:284) merits triangulation for its contribution in "limiting random errors during qualitative research".

Advocates of a multi-method approach include Brown and Dowling (1998); Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994), and Brannen (1992). They all concede the invaluable contribution of this approach alluding mainly to the multifaceted nature of mankind and life in general. They contend that one can gain a lot of mileage towards understanding human nature and the broad environment in which people exist. Krathwohl (1998:621) believes that methodological triangulation can provide the optimal combination required for the powerful development of evidence and explanation that will gain a consensus around the interpretation of the data, and summarises the usefulness of the multiple methods approach in the following manner: "Multiple research methods can play many roles in strengthening a study. For example, they may be used in making numeric data come alive, in precisely summarizing data, in checking on the validity of data, in developing rationales, in catching side-effects, in eliminating rival explanations, in determining a study's next steps and in determining the demand conditions".

For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Results are outlined as indicated below:

- (a) A literature review for a theoretical exposition of key concepts with particular reference to the different forms of access and an in-depth investigation into academic access.
- (b) An in-depth critical analysis of three-year rolling plans of selected universities in relation to equity in student numbers and output, efficiency and student academic access.
- (c) Data collection:
 - (i) Statistical data reflecting student enrolment and graduation patterns for the past five years in selected South African universities were obtained from sample universities and other statistical sources.
 - (ii) Personal interviews with registrars and deans of Faculties of Economic and Management Sciences, Humanities and Natural Sciences were conducted in an attempt to collect additional information and to clarify any contradictions and gaps in their respective institutions' planning and other documents. The interviews supplemented the researcher's critical analysis of three-year rolling plans and other documented information.
 - (iii) Focus group interviews with students from selected universities were convened. In addition to verifying data from administrators' interviews (registrars and deans), the students' discussion groups bring the end-user perspective into the study.

(d) Data processing

Data processing was done by means of content analysis. This method of analysis implies bracketing – grouping categories to form units of meaning. In view of this study pieces of information from interviews (with registrars and deans) and focus group discussions (with students) were classified in order to “identify common themes or patterns in the views of all respondents” (Van Heerden 2000:276-277). Connections between themes and patterns in various categories were identified in order to further clarify certain viewpoints.

(e) An action research approach was adopted by submitting a draft model for the management of academic access to the participants in the research for their comments and feedback. These were incorporated into the final proposed model.

(f) The sample:

Three universities formed the basis of the study. These were purposively selected to represent a historically advantaged English university (HAEU), a historically advantaged Afrikaans university (HAAU) and a historically disadvantaged university (HDU). In the researcher’s opinion, the selected universities typify traditional categories used to describe universities in South Africa and would thus “provide information-rich cases suitable for in-depth study” (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:378) like this one. A registrar, deans of three faculties at each university were interviewed while a focus group of learners from the three faculties will be randomly selected to reflect a racial and gender profile of the total student population in the three faculties.

(g) The instrument:

The items in the interview protocol and focus group discussions were derived from literature on quality assurance, HE policy and academic access. Copies of the two instruments are attached as Appendices 4 and 5 to the thesis.

1.6.2 The literature study

The literature study forms the peak of the triangle. This is an imperative form of research, as it lays the foundation for the rest of the investigation. It serves as a point of departure in the quest for in-depth knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being researched. It is the creation of a scientific basis (Minnaar 1997:6). A portion of this study embraces a theoretical extrapolation of issues pertinent to student access, e.g. like the different notions, the driving forces behind the heightened demand for academic access policies, as well as other developments which precipitate the efficient provisioning of academic access.

1.6.3 Qualitative research

The use of qualitative procedures as posited by Krathwohl (1998:228) "keeps us close to the persons in the situation and helps us learn what lies behind qualitative numbers, qualitative researchers' view [respondents] as collaborators or teachers from whom they learn rather than subjects to be held at arms length and studied". Garbers (1996:284) advances the notion of participants' involvement and sees it as of prime importance in qualitative research. He explains that in qualitative research the researcher's position as outsider shifts to that of an intersubjective position of insider. The researcher's subject orientation within the critical theory with its concomitant ideal of emancipation is even more radical.

The researcher who is a HE scholar who is well conversant with issues affecting events in the sector. In one instance, the case study university is a host institution for the researcher - a situation which enables the researcher to associate with some of the experiences shared by the respondents. This situation provided several advantages in terms of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of research results.

Qualitative research assumes "the phenomenological approach whereby researchers strive to understand the meaning of events and interactions with people in specific situations" (Garbers 1996:283). Here Garbers refers to the contextual nature of qualitative research. To this effect, Sherman and Webb (1990:5) postulate that "human behaviour-experience is shaped in context, that events cannot be understood adequately if isolated from their context [resulting in] context stripping". It is on the basis of this observation that the empirical study adopts an institutional approach, tackling the issue of academic access as it is perceived by relevant roleplayers in universities in their natural settings, allowing them to recollect and fall back on available information.

The objective of qualitative research is to promote better self-understanding and increase insight into the human condition; to understand the ways in which different individuals make sense of their lives and to describe those meanings (Garbers 1996:283). For purposes of this research, data relating to views of universities' registrars and faculty deans were collected by means of open-ended questions in an individual interview setup. Through this, the intention was to assist respondents to do some professional introspection regarding the way in which they deal with academic access policies and their implementation, thereby gaining a better understanding of themselves and their professional practices.

1.6.3(a) The case study approach

Although the original idea was to investigate academic access policy and implementation at all South African universities, the high number (21 public universities) and the geographical spread of these universities did not permit coverage of all of them. The researcher then chose to employ a case study approach for the purposes of this study. In addition to facilitating an intensive investigation of the universities in question, Huysamen (1997:168) suggests that the case study approach assists the "understanding of the uniqueness and the idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity". This is aided by the fact that "case study research examines phenomenon in its natural setting". In accordance with the foregoing posit, the researcher conducted fieldwork at case study universities. This proved helpful in that the researcher could get a holistic picture and background of, among other things, the location and other variables influencing the implementation of academic access policy at these universities.

The concern in utilising the case study approach is not merely to describe what is being observed, "but to search, in an inductive fashion, for recurring patterns and consistent regularities" (Huysamen 1997:169). The selection of three universities to represent major categories of universities in South Africa was done with a view to corroborate findings in a way that attempted to explain access policy and practice in individual cases and to further identify recurring trends (among all three) that would suggest similar patterns which could probably be generalised to other universities outside the study.

1.6.3(b) Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are increasingly gaining popularity as a method of data collection in the social and human sciences. One of the reasons is that practitioners in these fields recognise the need for researchers to put a halt to

the traditional role as "mother-God" according to which they could observe human behaviour from a distance and interpret it in a way they deemed fit, which did not always reflect the participants' perspectives. Through focus group discussions, the researcher served as a facilitator of discussions and a documentor of respondents' own opinions. Carefully done, this brings authenticity into the research, as verbatim responses can be recorded.

Advocates of this method of research moot that "focus groups have been used in educational research for their success in unveiling the roots of educational/institutional problems and for providing a forum to role-players to suggest ways by which problems could be solved (Sapp & Temaris 1993:81). A similar view is shared by Freeman (1996:37) who argues that "those who are involved or studied should provide a participant's perspective of the events studied".

The researcher's choice of using focus group discussions as a means of collecting opinions from learners is further backed up by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993:103) who observe that the "group interview is a more normal situation for students; ...if a student talks, this can stimulate comments from others". Gall, Gall and Borg (1999:297) add that in focus group discussions, "participants are more likely to express feelings which might not emerge if they are interviewed individually".

1.6.3(c) The personal interview

Personal interviews were conducted with registrars and deans of selected faculties (Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences) both to accommodate the very full programme of the participants, but also to create an atmosphere of confidentiality of response. Grouping university

managers from different faculties together would, for some, have been intimidating, especially in cases where they thought their faculties were not doing as well as others claimed in access endeavours. An additional benefit of employing the use of personal interviews is that they "enable and facilitate the personal engagement of the researcher in the collection of data; they allow the researcher to provide clarification, to probe and to prompt" (Brown & Dowling 1998:72).

Altrichter *et al.* (1993) and Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1994) highlight the following advantages of using personal interviews in educational research:

- (a) Flexibility is one of the advantages of using an individualised interview in that the interviewer can rephrase questions to suit the level of the respondents.
- (b) The physical presence of the interviewer allows for opportunity to interact with the respondents and the circumstances within which he/she is responding.
- (c) The open-endedness of questions in the personal interview permits greater freedom of expression in that the participant can respond to questions in detail in order to achieve clearer meaning. This could, however, be very time-consuming.
- (d) Greater completion rate is achieved through the use of personal interviews. Because the interviewer is there in person, it might be difficult for respondents to abandon some questions or reform from responding.
- (e) In cases where questions are answered insufficiently, the interviewer can press for more information.

- (f) The personal interview is highly effective in seeking responses to complex issues that require the participants' application of analytical thinking and linkages of causal factors to a problem being investigated. For this the personal interview became very relevant for the purposes of this study.

Criticism against the personal interview is that, among other things, it is very costly both in terms of time and money. Although it can be an advantage in some cases, the physical presence of the interviewer may turn out to be intimidating to respondents or may even contravene the respondents' trust with regard to the confidentiality of responses. Some sensitive questions may not be responded to with utmost honesty.

1.6.3(d) Elements of action research

"Action research" refers to ways of investigating professional experience which link practice and the analysis of practice into a singly productive and continuously developing sequence and which also link researchers and research participants into a single community of interested colleagues. It is about the nature of the learning process, about the link between practice and reflection, about the process of attempting to have new thoughts, about familiar experiences, and about the relationship between particular experiences and general ideas. Action research provides the necessary link between self-evaluation and professional development. These characteristics merit action research as highly appropriate for the intentions of this study. The researcher's exclusion of such a relevant device would have been myopic. Admittedly, not much literature has attempted to integrate principles of action research with other designs but Zuber-Skerritt (1996) believes that researchers can gain dividends from such a combination. The following observation also has a lot of relevance for advocating the combination of action research with other methods: "Research is a creative act,

do not confine your thinking about it to specific approaches. Researchers creatively combine the elements of methods in any way that make the best sense for the study they want to do. Their only limits are their own imagination and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly" (Krathwohl 1998:27).

The researcher was inspired by the above contention into integrating elements of action research into the methods described above. The reflective nature of the current study necessitated the participatory, emancipatory, self-evaluative and empowering approaches, all of which are characteristics of emancipatory action research. Mouton (2001) recommends a combination of action research with other methods because, on its own, it can be a very subjective design.

Action research adopts a problem-solving and decision-making approach. Through this study, the researcher hoped to bring to the fore the problem of the complexity of effecting academic access in South African universities and attempted to tackle the problem in a scientific way. To involve participants in taking decisions on how the problem could be solved, the researcher invited participants to comment on the suggested model for the effective implementation of academic access at South African universities. The participants' responses were built into the model to come up with the final framework. By so doing, the researcher aimed at participants taking ownership of the framework in order to be more likely to utilise it as a matter of experimentation in their future access initiatives. In applying the framework to their work situation, practitioners would concur to Rantsöai's (2000:123) submission that "action research is mainly aimed at appraising the quality of the context in which it is carried out".

1.6.4 Quantitative research

As Garbers (1996:282) postulates, quantitative research is aimed at testing theories, determining facts, statistical analysis, demonstrating relationships between variables and prediction. This type of research is based on the view that if one knew what exactly ailed mankind one could control and effectively fight and prevent all evils and defects. Statistical data on the enrolment trends of undergraduate students in the Faculties of the Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences and the Natural Sciences were used in the study to complement descriptive data which the researcher collected from personal interviews and focus group discussions. Graduation statistics were also used for the same validation purpose.

The inclusion of statistical data was based on the conception that statistical data is often likely to increase reliability of results and the integrity of findings. Brown and Dowling (1998:82-83) agree with this school of thought and emphasise that the "considerable advantage and a high degree of coherence [which] enables issues of reliability and generalisation to be addressed with a high degree of consistence and a high degree of transparency". The use of quantitative analysis (enrolment and graduation statistics) may also control subjectivity on the part of the researcher.

1.6.5 Integrating qualitative and quantitative paradigms

Among the proponents of a reconciliation of qualitative methods one may refer to Strydom (1997), Krathwohl (1998) and Holtzhausen (1999). They reach consensus that, in order to counteract the dilemma of which method would be more appropriate than the other and to get the best of the two worlds, one should adopt "a dialogical use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative

methods" (Brown & Dowling 1998:83), thereby surpassing the problem of "naive empiricism".

The concept of the qualitative–quantitative continuum is strongly substantiated by Krathwohl (1998:25). The author postulates that, although qualitative and quantitative techniques are at extreme ends of the continuum, they actually go a long way in compensating for each other. They become very useful in validating each other's data and afford rigour or flexibility as situations demand. Because the present inquiry deals with perceptions, the act of describing these perceptions may become a "nuisance variable", but this will be controlled by the use of statistical data (in some instances) as provided by institutions under investigation.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

To establish a common frame of reference, the researcher clarifies the terms below as they are used. They should therefore be interpreted within the context of this study.

Academic access

The inclusion of undergraduate learners from different backgrounds into university programmes and the provision of the necessary support to ensure that such students successfully complete their study programmes in record time.

Academic access policy

Any statement, law or regulation principle which guide the provision (delivery) of academic access to undergraduate learners at universities. In the South African

context, these would include admission requirements and guidelines for the provision of support to promote learners' throughput rates.

Academic access policy implementation

Academic access policy implementation refers to the translation of policy into practice. This would include all initiatives that universities undertake to facilitate entry, progression, retention and graduation of undergraduate learners in South African universities. Although it is referred to (in the study) as **policy** implementation, variations have transpired in some universities where implementation is just common practice which occurs more from tradition than the actual, clearly defined policy stipulation.

Quality access/Quality in access

Quality access/Quality in access will be used interchangeably to refer to conditions that lead to or signify the effectiveness of access. It would also mean access for success.

Historically advantaged university (HAU)

A synonymous phrase is historically white university (HWU). These terms are used to refer to universities in South Africa which, during the apartheid era, were exclusively set up to educate learners from the white community. The medium of instruction in these universities was either English or Afrikaans, in which case further distinctions of historically white (English) university and historically (Afrikaans) university were used respectively.

Historically disadvantaged university (HDU)

This type of university is also referred to as a historically black university (HBU). HBUs were established by the apartheid regime to serve or admit only learners from the Indian, Coloured and African sectors of the South African population. Most of them were set up in the homeland areas and were believed to offer education of inferior quality compared to HWUs.

1.8 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

In order to complete an investigation of the relationship between academic access policy and implementation at South African universities, the study will unfold in the following manner:

Chapter 1 explains the orientation of the study in terms of the necessity for the study, the aims, the scope and research designs envisaged for this research. The content for different chapters is also outlined in this chapter.

Theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon of student access are extrapolated in **Chapter 2** of the study. Extensive literature review covers aspects such as notions of student access, forms of access and the relationship between academic access and quality in higher education.

A further exposition of literature is entered into in **Chapters 3** and **4** where the focus is on the South African higher education system. Chapter 3 outlines historical perspectives and policy developments guiding the delivery of academic access to South African universities. Chapter 4 highlights milestones in access

implementation in South Africa. It also elaborates on some problematic issues encountered in efforts to open access to a larger number of learners.

The quantitative-qualitative investigation begins in **Chapter 5** where an analysis of the selected universities' mission statements, strategies and enrolment patterns is carried out. This ushers in the presentation of research results in **Chapter 6**. Responses from personal interviews with registrars and deans of selected faculties and results from learners' focus group discussions are discussed.

Chapter 7 culminates in conclusions and recommendations, and postulates the model for the effective implementation of academic access policy in universities in South Africa. Limitations of the study and suggestions for possible areas of further exploration in the field of student access are advanced in this chapter.

1.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has advanced an argument for the need to investigate issues of policy and practice relating to student participation in universities in South Africa – an issue which has for years featured as one of the priorities of higher education debates in South Africa. The scope of the study was delimited in terms of geography and focus area and reasons were given for the delimitation. A presentation of research methods to be employed and justification for the choice also formed part of the content for this chapter. The next chapter delves into an overview of theoretical perspectives on student access.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT ACCESS

"Access without quality is a cruel deception, while quality without access is a betrayal of the ideal..." (UDUSA 1993:3).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of student access is a highly diverse one, the definition of which transcends various boundaries relating to the field of higher education. The complexity of the notion of student access arises from the fact that it embraces and is embraced in most, if not all matters affecting higher education like enrolment patterns, quality, curriculum design and policy framework. This view is shared by Parry (in Fulton 1989:7) who points out that "the notion of [student] access is popular and problematic. As a focus for discussion of policy and practice it engages with diverse issues, interests and activities external as well as internal to higher education, yet as a framework for analysis and action it disappoints – and often frustrates; it takes rather than makes educational problems, and confirms rather than transforms administrative and academic categories".

Steyn (2001) concurs with the above view and further reiterates that student access is a complex phenomenon, the discussion of which is characterised by vested interests and prejudices. It is this multifaceted nature of the concept of student access that has complicated the discourse concerning these issues and given rise to a variety of approaches to it. Regardless of the approach

followed, "there is widespread recognition that access to higher education is something which should be widened, in particular to include groups who have not in the recent past successfully entered such institutions" (Bird 1996:9). In an attempt to delimit the debates student access deliberations in different parts of the world and in different settings have focused on answering specific questions addressing critical issues at the time. Such questions normally seek answers to matters relating to issues like access for whom (a specific group of learners or individuals); access to what (an institution or field of study); why access is necessary (what benefit will the learners from the broader society reap from such access); and access through which mechanisms (the multiple entry paths available for a specified group of learners).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of perspectives regarding the concept of student access. It will do so by elaborating on factors influencing demand for access, the differing notions of student access, various forms and dimensions of access, target groups of initiatives, theoretical perspectives on student access, and access criteria. Because access and quality do not occur in isolation, a brief theoretical exposition of the relationship between quality and access will be provided. To inform the study, literature was collected from higher education systems internationally, but a broad overview has been opted for instead of a discussion of student access in specific systems.

2.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS DEMANDS

Not so long ago, universities received more applications than they could accommodate. Because employment was also in abundance, it did not matter much what degree a graduate possessed; one was sure to find employment somewhere. With the ever-changing needs of the modern learners and employer communities, "the mystique of the *ivory tower* has largely been replaced with an insistence for practical credibility and an education that is a good investment" (Lanthan, Cambling & Steger 2000:2). The driving forces

behind the escalating demand for access can be categorised into various disciplines of life to include the technological developments, political context, the economic context, the social context and the fast-emerging concept of globalisation.

2.2.1 Technological developments

Technology is fast changing and affecting the whole world today. Like other sectors, the knowledge industry cannot function without technology. In many countries, access to higher education is now offered through satellite campuses which deliver tuition mainly through technology-related devices. Internet tuition is also a now commonly utilised access device. The benefit of this revolution is that "increased technology and global competition demand that we develop our students' skills and mental capacity so they can share in the tremendous prosperity of our nation" (Patton 1999:1).

2.2.2 The political environment

The politics of a country (normally) determine to a large extent the direction which the country will follow in different aspects of life. Educational matters are no exception to this fact. Based on the country's constitution and the inherent priorities, access to higher education usually forms an integral part of the ruling party's initiatives towards transformation. The political set-up in many modern democracies, including South Africa, has prescribed an inevitable shift from élitist to massified higher education systems. Taking South Africa's example, it is observed that "education reform since 1994 has attempted to provide equal education for all, while overcoming the legacy of apartheid" (*The Teacher*, July 2001:4).

2.2.3 The economic environment

In most countries, access is perceived as an effective way of advancing economic growth and responding to the needs of the labour-market. This view is supported by Eisemon (1992) who postulates that student access is a means towards "increasing the production of university graduates and fostering greater institutional responsiveness to changing labour market requirements". With specific goals like increasing enrolments and retention in the fields of Commerce, Science and Technology, there is substantial hope for flourishing economic advancements.

Another angle from which to examine the economic context concerns the universities and the learners. Smit (1994:16) observes that most learning "organisations run on a very tight budget". Massive cut-offs in universities' subsidy and dwindling international donor funding have left institutions having to innovate ways of acquiring additional funds for themselves.

In some countries, the funding formula for universities is linked to enrolments and completion rates. This has alerted universities to the urgent need for support structures which, if well managed, may boost retention rates and assist learners to succeed, within the stipulated time, in their various programmes of study.

2.2.4 The social environment

Because higher education institutions exist within the society, they are expected to assist in solving societal problems. To this end, Boadu-Ayeboafoh (2000) perceives education as a critical variable in constructing societal values. Particularly in developing countries, one of those societal values is cultivation of the principle of economic sufficiency among communities.

Emanating from broader human rights principles, access to educational opportunities has been declared a basic right for all. It is one way of achieving social justice whereby designated groups like women, the disabled, the poor, and the minority groups will enjoy equality of opportunity in higher education, affecting - as it may - social equity.

2.2.5 Globalisation

The emergence of a knowledge-based era has drastically influenced the way the world operates today. Whereas in the past higher education systems secluded themselves in their own comfort zones, the situation today is such that global trends fiercely penetrate into national systems of higher education; bringing with them internationalised private institutions with massive bulks of finance and technologically inclined private education – promising more rewards for learners than the traditional public higher education institutions. “With limited resources public universities have been unable to cope with the demands” (Maxwell, Provan & Fielden 2000:2). The consequent scramble for learners means that more access strategies have to be devised, either from the student bursary point of view or from the curriculum redesign perspective.

The foregoing list of forces shaping the demand for access to higher education is not exhaustive, but it only serves to highlight some of the acute concerns affecting the phenomenon of access around the globe. What follows in the next section is an extrapolation of various definitions of student access.

2.3 DEFINITIONS OF STUDENT ACCESS

The concept of student access is defined differently by different interest groups depending on the purpose it is meant to fulfil at the time. "Politicians, academics and the public have defined student access in a number of ways, with some definitions having a broader scope than others" (Baker 1992:4).

2.3.1 Student access as equal educational opportunity

Riley (1994:13) appends a notion of equality of opportunity which involves levelling the playing field and ensuring that the administration of access to courses is, among other things, clearly defined and publicised.

In this case access means providing black and other (non-traditional) students with the opportunity of enrolling in all levels of post-secondary education (Baker 1992:4). This concept is referred to in some literature as egalitarianism. Hall (1991:9) defines egalitarianism as a means of "fostering equality through inclusiveness and opportunity for all people". It is a demand-driven approach advocating that universities have an obligation to respond to the needs of the society without hesitation. In a sense the egalitarian view to student access relates to the fitness of purpose view of quality. It ties universities down to the responsibility of analysing and providing in societal needs.

2.3.2 Student access as distribution

Two types of distribution can be identified, namely university distribution and field distribution. The former refers to the learner's freedom to study at a university of his/her choice, while the latter gives the learner the opportunity to enrol and major in the field of study suiting his/her preference. The distribution of students in fields of study is a critical issue in the debates

surrounding student access in many countries, but particularly in new democracies such as South Africa today. Morrow (1993:3) adds a third type of distribution which he calls epistemological access. By this, Morrow refers to the distribution of knowledge which, according to him, is a better indicator of the quality of access than formal access (which is accomplished once a student is registered at a university).

2.3.3 Student access as persistence

The definition of access as persistence lends itself to the view that "opening the doors of higher education is only a small part of the process" (Bird 1996:9). The bigger challenge lies in the availability of support structures to encourage the retention of students. Persistence involves the opportunity of remaining in a university and obtaining a degree in a timely fashion (Baker 1992:4). The notion of persistence relates very closely to progression and throughput. Advocates of the progression viewpoint are interested in investigating the learner's progression over time. This includes progression in comparison with their counterparts from other groups and progression at various levels and in various fields of study. The significance of this notion is that, while it is a component of access, it is also a criterion through which the quality of access can be measured and validated. Does it really matter whether a learner enrolls with a university or not, if such a learner cannot make it through to completion of the programme? Universities must therefore aim at translating the cliché of "opportunity for access" into "opportunity for success".

Access should actually be viewed as a continuum, encouraging participation, retention and graduation at the specified times. This view is in alignment with the concept of equality of outcomes. "It has been an essentially interventionist strategy aimed at redistributing resources and opportunities to disadvantaged groups" (Riley 1994:13). Neave (1996:150) also calls for

remediation by cautioning that "in those systems with a high non-completion rate their apparent inefficiency in converting the unqualified add to the clamour for improvements to be made in teaching".

2.3.4 Student access as parity

Related to the ethos of persistence is the notion of parity. Parity in the access arena manifests in a twofold manner: student parity and institutional parity. "Student parity is defined as proportional participation by black students in higher education measured by high school completion rates, enrolment according to type of institution and field of study, and persistence until graduation" (Baker 1992:6). While increasing participation rates by the historically disadvantaged learners are a milestone, the question is whether numbers are "enough" cause to celebrate. The learners' development from high school to entry into and exit from the university, making sure they enrol at universities that will enhance their development both as individuals and as a group, is an enormous responsibility which can, however, not be ignored. Studies have shown that the majority of historically disadvantaged students tend to register in fields of study that may not increase their prospects of obtaining a job or benefiting either themselves or the communities in which they live.

Institutional parity, on the other hand, is "defined not only as increased proportions of black students at every level, but also as increased proportions of black faculty, staff, and governing board members; more explicit definitions of institutional roles; and more equitable distribution of funds and programs between black and white" (Baker 1992:6). Although research and literature have turned a blind eye to the issue of institutional parity, it is a somewhat self-imposing imperative since it underpins a reform of the whole institution to accommodate the changes brought by the inclusion of the previously disadvantaged students.

2.3.5 Student access as the university-going rate of the age cohort

This view of access is restricted to the admission of a specific age group of first-time entrants to the university (high school graduates). The élitist approach to access utilises this criterion to gauge the "quality" of an institution and it refers to this age cohort as the traditional students.

Exclusiveness underlies this viewpoint, particularly when one considers the plight of historically underserved learners who experience late entry into the education system, interrupted schooling due to lack of finance, and other socio-economic factors and finally graduate from high school when they are already older than the acceptable age for starting university education. On the basis of these, some of the universities barred this group of students from gaining admission into higher education. In the South African higher education system, for example, the issue of age differences has been identified as a critical diversity matter especially for first-time entering students (Letuka 2001:2). Providing opportunities for non-traditional learners may reverse the situation.

2.3.6 Student access as diversity

Diversity is about providing for different needs and tapping distinct niches. Access and participation are contained in the sphere of educational diversity, or what one might term "second generation educational rights". This is not to suggest that equity is not still a primary intention of access, but rather that the pursuit of diversity is now generally seen as intrinsic to achieving equity and participation (Gourley 1999:84). According to the foregoing argument, diversity is seen as changing the face of the institution to include more people from different backgrounds. Although it is an end in itself, it can also serve

as a means to advancing the cause of equity promotion and encouragement of increased participation.

Hall (1991:11) relates diversity to pluralism (promoting diversity by increasing institutional breadth and outreach). Pluralism allows for conditions which facilitate multiple or optional responses to social demand. Although it has taken various forms in the past, multiculturalism is currently the most pressing emerging expression of pluralism.

As far as the researcher is concerned, diversity is tantamount to wealth. It is a reservoir of knowledge and skills. In the higher education terrain, a university that comprises students from different backgrounds becomes rich in culture and open in perception. As they come together either in class, in residences or in extra-curricular activities, black and white students (individually or as a group) bring with them a wealth of life experiences which they have acquired first-hand from their respective settings. It is in sharing these experiences that learners improve their life skills and widen their outlook on life. The researcher also regards diversity as an invaluable tool towards transformation. Is transformation not about changing the culture of the place, the attitudes and practices of people? Is it not about bringing the pieces of a puzzle together, to allow them to fit into different spaces without necessarily changing their shape, but arranging them in a way that will result in a complex but unified piece?

Diversity on university campuses has previously been recognised as one way of stimulating cognitive development. "[S]tudies on cognitive development show that critical thinking, problem-solving capacities, and cognitive complexity increase for all students exposed to diversity on the campus and in the classroom" (Smith & Schonfeld 2000:20).

Diversity is not only confined to the student body. The very reality of a diverse student body implicates strongly on diversifying the curriculum, the fields of study, the academic and non-academic staff, and the physical structures of an institution to cater for the needs of the diverse population. The diversity of structures other than the student population will be revisited in depth later in the chapter.

2.3.7 Student access as transformation

Access as transformation borrows from the evolutionary perspective of access. Transformation and evolution suggest movement from one phase to another or from one era to another. At the heart of transformation lies the intention to change things, usually for the better. In the higher education jargon, student access is viewed as transformation if it is able to redress the discrepancies within an institution, resulting in equity. It is about affirmative action, aiming as it were, to bring on board those who, due to the history of being disadvantaged (economically, socially, politically, etc.) have not had the opportunity to participate in higher education. In this sense, transformation suggests a move away from élitist higher education systems. In support of this argument, Van Niekerk (1999:6) reiterates that transformation "has to do with a **global transition** of universities from institutions that still cater for an intellectually élitist tradition of acquiring and producing knowledge, to people's institutions where technological skills and knowledge in the broadest sense are provided".

Some literature (Hall 1991; Vuyst in Brennan *et al.* 1999) equates transformation with innovation. Innovation takes on three forms, namely egalitarianism, individualism and pluralism. According to Hall (1991:9) the egalitarian value appears when individuals or groups find that they cannot obtain access to required goods, services or structures. Their needs are translated into social demands. Vuyst (1999:96) postulates that "the term

egalitarianism is far from unequivocal, and has different meanings depending on the purposes it has to serve". Egalitarianism is defined as a demand for equal opportunities for individuals. This interpretation of equality differs from the individualistic perspective suggested by Hall (1991). While egalitarianism approaches access from a group's point of departure, individualism advocates for an exclusive recognition of a person's merit, an élitist view that holds excellence in high regard. Individualism also has "mobility" as its point of departure. Practitioners of this perspective believe that an individual is free to progress either vertically or horizontally for as long as he/she has the capacity to do so. Another side of the mobility coin is that an individual should be allowed to move from one institution to another.

The third component of transformation is pluralism. "Pluralism describes conditions which allow for multiple or optional responses to social demand. Although it has taken various forms in the past, today multiculturalism is the most pressing emerging expression of pluralism. It is a powerful force for change, compelling new demands on curricular, on... academic organization, and on student life" (Hall 1991:11). One way of shedding more insight into the concept of student access is by mentioning that student access manifests in many forms and has many dimensions to it. These forms and dimensions are discussed below.

2.4 FORMS AND DIMENSIONS OF ACCESS

2.4.1 Forms of access

The concept of access is a ramification of multiple dimensions which constitute, among others, academic, financial, gender, disability, physical, geographic and cultural access. Although separating them is not an impossible task, all the forms of access are so intertwined that discussing one

without touching to some degree on the other, is a mammoth challenge. A brief description of a few types is undertaken below for illustrative purposes.

a. Academic access

Academic access implies the ability of a higher education system to create an environment whereby learners can **enrol** in, **persevere** through and **graduate** out of the various programmes and fields of study. Academic access (especially perseverance and graduation) is linked to the concept of access with success because, as Strydom (1998:4) points out, "barriers to effective access are not so much at the entry point... but in the throughput rate". Academic access emphasises the relevance and responsiveness of academic programmes to the needs of the labour market, the society and the students themselves. Didactical procedures that are suited, as far as possible, to the learners' level of preparedness are integral to the provisioning of academic access. Another golden thread in the fabric of academic access is the proportional distribution of learners into broader fields of study like the Humanities, Commerce and Science and Technology.

b. Financial access

Financial access is directly linked to the economic status of the learners. It underscores the learners' ability to pay for tuition and other university levies, without which, as is common knowledge, a learner may not gain access to higher education. The issue of finance is increasingly putting a strain on higher education institutions and learners alike. In the past, higher education institutions claimed enormous chunks of the countries' budget, but the situation has changed dramatically in recent years. Governments world-wide are continually decreasing subsidy allocations to universities, thereby subjecting them to severe conditions of financial squeeze, with a snowballing effect to learners as fees are raised from time to time. Regrettably, those

worst hit are learners from the economically disadvantaged population groups.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that financial access is woven deep into academic access because a lack of finance may inhibit inclusion into higher education. The strategy of increasing costs for students was almost inevitable because universities which were "sympathetic to the poverty of the communities from which many students came, and the demand to avoid financial exclusions found themselves on a slippery slope towards financial bankruptcy" (Morrow & Toni 2001:1).

c. Gender access

Education for women has been liberalised insofar as there has been considerable movement towards equal access to higher education (Habu 2000:45). This, according to Humphries (2000) was a reaction to the fact that women gained less access to higher education due to male prejudice, obligations in the domestic sphere and limitations, in financial resources. One of the success hallmarks in access is the elimination of "all gender stereotyping in higher education, to consider gender aspects in different disciplines and to consolidate women's participation at all levels and in all disciplines, in which they are under-represented" (World Conference on Higher Education 1998:23). So far, efforts to increase the participation rates of women in higher education have made an initial breakthrough. However, the monitoring and evaluation of gender access in a number of countries unveiled the profound need to recast the participation of women in the niche areas of Commerce and Science and Technology.

d. Geographical access

Besides keeping learners close to classrooms, libraries and other facilities, the campus residences "intended to enable people to know one another on a sustained basis to trade academic debate or gossip and enjoy a 'manageable' environment" (Hannan & Silver 2000:97-98).

The importance of geographical access is highlighted by Yorke (1999:111) who observes that, on deciding to enrol for university education, "the student does not only choose an institution; he or she chooses a geographical locality as well". The tradition, however, has been that universities were built outside the cities in secluded areas where learners could not easily reach them. The critical question to ask is: What can be done to make universities more accessible? Should more opportunities be provided for students to lodge in campus residences, or should there be transport arrangements? Both could apply, but the other obstacle could be the availability of finances.

2.4.2 Dimensions of access

The quality-access integration process is a planned and structured exercise which embraces time, location, cost, physical facilities, content and style as focal points - often giving each one attention at a specified time. A study conducted in Malaysia revealed that fees, duration of course offerings, facilities of the university and distance of the university from home are major considerations in judging the quality of student access (Patton 1999:312).

a. Time

The dimension of time involves the timetabling of courses at different times of the day to suit the time schedules of special/non-traditional students. Beillard (2000:473) views this as a possible arrangement and suggests that "given a

reasonable amount of planning in the scheduling of courses, it will be possible to gather a sufficient number of students". In the case of the previously disadvantaged learners, a majority, although registered for full-time degrees, are working re-entering learners who cannot attend during the day. Some of them, although not working, stay far from campuses and battle with transportation, which makes it difficult to attend either the very early morning classes or the late evening lessons. "Bringing to practice these consequences brings forward a combined organisational and educational model like short condensed curricula tailor-made for the student" (Eggink 1997:1).

The duration of the courses is another side of the time coin. A successful university gives consideration to the time students spend on their undergraduate studies. The longer the time, the more chances of dropping out, which is not what either students or universities want. The desired outcome is to see a student making it "through to the exit portal with a degree in hand" (Abeles 2001:2).

The emerging lifelong learning concept is taking over in the USA and in other parts of the globe. After several years of study, a student may stop to attend to some pressing issues occurring in other walks of his/her life, only to return at a later stage to re-evaluate, build on or to re-adjust his/her career plans. It is in these circumstances that universities are expected to "create and support [an] environment that nurtures continuous learning" (Henschel 2001:11).

b. Geographic location

In dealing with the issue of geography, Toohey (1999:113) cautions universities to realise that the notion of the student as someone fully available to the university has changed considerably.

A dimension that encourages geographic access is the location of a university. Traditionally, universities would be spotted in urban settings or sometimes at a beautiful place some kilometres away from the main city. What this means is that, apart from the residing students, only those students who can afford private transport can access the universities. The less privileged students either have to rely on commuter buses or hire city shuttles for awkwardly scheduled lessons. In some way this can be a great barrier to access, since some of those struggling students may opt for a sometimes less credible university nearby. The dilemma that these universities find themselves in is, given that physical structures cannot be uprooted and erected somewhere else, how do they become geographically accessible to the previously disadvantaged groups? To address this problem, one may suggest the setting up of satellite stations, smaller campuses and other forms of outreach programmes that may assist in alleviating the problem. Related to the issue of geographic access is that of financial access.

c. Costs

Costs and financial access are closely related in the higher education access debates specifically affecting the disadvantaged students. The demand for access spirals despite rising costs of university education. The predicament of the whole situation is that money is a "concern upfront, causing students to limit their search; during the application process it hangs like a sword over people's heads; and it's a concern in the final decision for many students who [finally] choose the least expensive alternative" (Geoghegan 1999:29). The hike in tuition fees can be attributed to, among other things, the fact that, since recently, "higher education is expected to earn its funds ...rather than receive government support" (Ramsden 1998:14).

While cognisance is taken of the preceding cloud of financial stringency which universities find themselves encumbered with, the commitment of these

universities and the governments to financial access leaves much to be desired. From the researcher's point of view, there are no vivid cost reduction efforts from the universities - a behaviour that can be interpreted by some suspicious minds as deliberately orchestrated to exclude the previously disadvantaged learners from these typically élitist institutions. Governments, on the other hand, are gradually shrugging off their responsibility for the nations' education and their ensuing well-being. This is evidenced by the recurrent calls from governments for increased participation of the private sector in financing, among other things, higher education.

d. Physical facilities

Physical facilities are yet another dimension needing attention in the integration of quality and access. The availability of facilities is considered by (Verkleÿ 1999:5) a success factor in the implementation of academic access, who posits that physical "facilities need to become visible and influences as an area of excellence and national expertise". When they were originally founded, universities set out to serve a limited number of learners and the physical facilities were erected to accommodate only the privileged few. With the advent of massification of higher education worldwide came an increase in the enrolment statistics. Ideally, even before the onset of massification universities should have built additional facilities or extend existing ones so as to create a conducive learning atmosphere for everyone. The expansion of the physical facilities should include student support services which will assist the often underprepared learners from historically disadvantaged communities. By doing so, the university will discourage the possibility of high dropout rates in favour of high throughput rates and a recognised commitment to quality access.

e. Content and style

Having crossed the first hurdle (i.e. admitting non-traditional learners), the next bridge to cross is the ability of the institution to provide the historically disadvantaged with the content they will really benefit from in such a way that they can easily absorb it. It does not help much to open doors to the underserved only to trap them inside the furnace of irrelevant content which they cannot even grasp well due to exposure to new instructional methods that are totally different from what they are used to. When that happens, the chances are that only a few will hang in there, but for the rest the next "best" thing to do is to either look for or be forced to find the first available exit from the university, e.g. quitting the institution or shuttling from one field of study to another. It appears imperative, therefore to "re-profile not only content and pedagogy, but also the organisation and modes of delivery of training to cope with trainees who have different characteristics and weaker basic skills than those who entered training in the past" (Levin 1999:9).

While the increase in the enrolment statistics of non-traditional students into universities is cause to celebrate, it is disturbing to note that "very few institutional changes have been made in response to the introduction of this new student population into the colleges and universities that are accessible... changes in institutional policy and procedures have been confined primarily to what is described as marginal areas of the [university]: admission policies, remedial training, student support services and financial aid. The core of the academic heartland (curriculum, modes of teaching and learning, faculty counseling, program requirements and structures) has remained essentially untouched" (Orfield 1990 in Bergquist 1995:227).

The relationship between forms and dimensions of access is notable from the foregoing discussions. The greatest link between them is that each one of

either the forms or the dimensions counts as a factor in the promotion of access to higher education. A defect in one or some of the forms and/or dimensions translate into barriers to access. Academic access and the dimension of physical facilities present a good example of this relationship in that even if students were to be admitted into various fields of study limitations in the physical facilities would make it difficult for them to benefit sufficiently from academic programmes. The forms and dimensions of student access are important considerations which are often aligned with who the beneficiaries of student access are.

2.5 TARGET GROUPS OF ACCESS INITIATIVES

The prioritising of any form of access rests on both the national and institutional contexts and as such varies from country to country. "Programmes for at-risk students that try to improve their academic performance and persistence are among the most important ways that institutions can promote educational quality and ensure the democratisation of education (McGrath & Townsend 1997:21). Depending on national and institutional policy priorities, access initiatives can be targeted to some or all of the following designated groups:

- i. Minority ethnic groups.
- ii. People with disabilities.
- iii. Women.
- iv. Low income groups.
- v. Mature students.
- vi. People in remote/rural areas.
- vii. The educationally underprepared.
- viii. Part-time students.

Following from the identification of priority access groups every university has the responsibility to curb any unlawful discrimination on the basis of gender, race and/or disability within their institutions. "Students from non-traditional academic backgrounds and from under-represented groups have been particularly encouraged to participate where some institutions have made a strong point of including access in their missions" (Yorke 1999:1). However, academic access discourse applies to all students, irrespective of ethnic, racial, economical, gender and social background.

2.6 ACCESS IN FOUR MODELS OF ACADEMIC CULTURE

Depending on among other things, their founding mission, universities develop certain cultures which shape for instance, their approach to issues of access. It is within these cultures that "access groups" are admitted and so it is important to discuss some of them.

2.6.1 The collegial culture

Universities that are collegially inclined strive to be élitist; they often go for ethnicity for as long as they can get hold of the cream of the learners from the underserved ethnic groups. To this effect, diversity is achieved within the parameters of socio-economic status, age and occupation. Brennan, Lyon, McGeevor and Murray (1993) postulate that in Britain, employers prefer graduates from socially prestigious universities. This preference is not necessarily based on the quality of programmes offered, but rather on reputation of the institution.

2.6.2 The managerial culture

The keyword for this model of access is "affordability". The major concern for the administrators of the managerial culture is to lower the cost of education

in order to accommodate the financially disadvantaged learners into the university system. Careful management of available resources is a critical imperative if the university has to be accessed by the less privileged. What remains a problem in view of this perspective, is the degree to which individuality and distinctiveness of learners are addressed. The credibility of the managerial culture transpires better in situations where "sufficient resources exist to accommodate disparate goals" (Hardy 1990:409) in access provision. However, the financial stringency under which these universities often operate, becomes a stumbling-block in efforts to offer individual attention to students.

2.6.3 The developmental (professional) culture

Practitioners of the academic culture are highly progressive and daring in their efforts to implement quality access. Like the populist perspective the developmental culture prioritises access and diversity while at the same time paying serious attention to the issue of quality. Quality and access, according to this culture, go hand in hand. They should, according to Lategan (s.a.:7) be "treated as 'next of kin' and not as 'distant relatives'", because without the necessary connection it would be an almost impossible task to contribute meaningfully to the education of all deserving learners in higher education.

2.6.4 The negotiating culture

This culture adheres vigorously to the populist approach to quality. The quality of access is measured by the degree to which such access is extendable to the majority of the collegiate community. The negotiating culture has its origins in the ideology of social justice and equitable society. This organisational culture is engraved in principles of the "democratic consent over the educational task" (Valenkamp (1999:15) of universities as a reflection of societies within which they operate. Fourie (1996) reiterates that

the collegial nature of the negotiating culture emphasises consensus, common commitments and aspirations and consultation. This approach is regarded by the researcher as having the potential to assist access initiatives in that all stakeholders would be geared towards a similar goal.

The principles of a negotiating culture are closely aligned with those of the process-oriented approach (to be discussed in detail in 2.8.3d) where the diversity of teaching and learning processes designed to match a highly diverse population is a burning issue.

The matters pertaining to the institution's definition or conceptualisation of quality and access also form part of the access debate. In addition to the different academic cultures, the delivery of student access is influenced by the model of access which a particular institution subscribes to. The various models of student access are described in the subsequent section.

2.7 INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS MODELS

In the search for excellence, higher education reforms have brought with them a revolution in paradigm in the lexicon of academic access-speak. "Here it is useful to recall that one of the more significant shifts which took place... was the recasting of higher education from an institution conceived in terms of values – [or] 'public virtue' – to a role construed in terms of economic return, whether to the public or the individual" (Neave 2000:17). Although this theory has been gaining popularity in recent years, Meek (2000:27) asserts that there is danger inherent in this market-driven higher education theory in that it "relegates issues of equality and access low priority". The following section outlines the different access models which are commonly used by practitioners and institutions of higher education.

2.7.1 The élitist perspective

The élitist perspective is closely linked to the pragmatic view that learning paves the way to prosperity "for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole" (Bachkirova 2000:293). According to Bergquist (1995:10), The élitist perspective is particularly influential with regard to input criteria of quality (cf. 2.8.3a). Highest quality is defined by the amount and superiority of resources at the institution as well as selectivity in the admission of students and the hiring of faculty". Another dimension of the élitist perspective is added in an observation that élite institutions of higher education could base their claims to quality and excellence on selectivity: only the "best" were admitted as students, only the most able were allowed to teach them (Brennan & Shah 2000:20-21). The primary concern of the élitist perspective is to develop the future leaders of the country. The élitist perspective suffers from the ivory tower syndrome where quality is measured in terms of how aloof a university is from the rest of societal structures. In this paradigm "universities were largely perceived as fulfilling a deferred role: a future rather than a present need. Indeed it was less universities that contributed to social development and economic growth than their graduates; somehow the institutions themselves were thought of as outside time; certainly detached from current economic responsibilities" (Gray 1994 in Goddard 1997:8). It should not come as a surprise therefore that this perspective prioritises exclusivity and "high" standards. Some characteristics of the élitist perspective include the following:

- The implementation of interdisciplinary programmes like the common first-year system where first-year entrants are exposed to core courses from different departments and fields of study in order to aid their choice of careers.

- The introduction of distributive programmes which allow for more choice of subjects and fields of study.
- Considerations regarding the size and complexity of an institution. The highly selective system permits stability resulting from small numbers of students. Socio-economic class serves as a means for selection. A brief history of the American higher education system unveils that between the two world wars, "restrictive admissions policies could have dictated the selection of students on the basis of their intellectual potential alone, but social class rather than achieving was central to the selection of ... students" (Levin 1997:510). Despite exorbitant fees charged, some very poor learners continue to co-exist with their highly prosperous counterparts because the former are sometimes provided with scholarships for affirmative action purposes.

Unlike in the past, stakeholders currently require clearly stipulated mission statements. This may compel élitist universities to revisit their mission statements. A clear official mission statement can help in the planning and management of a university. It can also serve as reference for the evaluation of a university's degree of compliance with its mission in its daily operations. Effective student enrolment practices may also spin off from a formally and clearly articulated mission statement.

As far as capital and educational values are concerned, the élitist perspective assumes that "with sufficient resources, there would be exceptional education" (Bergquist 1995:121). Apparently, "personal capital" or reputation is what learners can get from an élitist university. This reputation becomes highly crucial in the employment arena and in changing from one university to another.

The personal capital value employs a very snobbish and discriminatory attitude, which has been aggravated by the diminishing institutional resources. This scarcity of resources has led to "those who are more privileged [derogating] those who have less as undeserving of support" (Lavin & Hyllegard 1996:244).

Critics call for a halt in the implementation of the élitist approaches to student access, because - in addition to depriving countries of the labour force required to remain economically competitive - they deny many citizens the opportunity to actualise themselves in ways that could have led to a desired quality of life often associated with the attainment of university education (Brand 1997:4).

2.7.2 The populist perspective

Unlike the élitist perspective, the populist theory of access calls for inclusive rather than exclusive university sectors. According to Howe (1998:214) the populist perspective's principles are engraved in "enabling good, whereby individuals acquire the knowledge and skill associated with educational transformation. "Populism was forged not only in the furnace of practicality but also on the anvil of equity... populist values and aspirations, particularly those concerned with equity, arose in the expansionist era" (Bergquist 1995:126). The populists concern themselves more with "access, need and quality" (Baker 1992:12). According to this viewpoint, access bears the trademark of quality if it responds to the needs of society. Shatlock (2000:99) believes, that for universities "to retain or regain public support, they need to demonstrate both through the way they train students and in the way in which they address public issues". Bergquist (1995:140) asserts that, "[i]n the populist curriculum, size was paramount - numbers of courses, majors, enrolments and growth - a banking model approach to learning... departments and discipline areas became the centres of power - especially

departments that reflected the overall growth patterns in enrolments and courses”.

Some characteristics of the populist perspective will be extrapolated within a framework of common prerogatives featured in the higher education terrain. These are the size and complexity, the mission and boundaries, capital and educational values, as well as leadership.

a. Size and complexity

In a populist institution, “success is measured largely by growth rates. Rapid growth is typically taken as a sign that the institution is successful and that it is effectively serving its mission of access” (Bergquist 1995:142). The challenge that a growing and diversifying institution must rise up to, is the ability to harmonise the conflicting imperatives of differentiation and integration. Populist views promote equality of treatment which they believe can be achieved by maintaining uniformity within the higher education system:

“A basic assumption of populism and the managerial culture that undergirds the populist perspective is that the organisation and its dynamics are essentially non-distinctive and therefore unimportant in terms of defining a unique and specific educational experience for the students attending the institution. Formulas and statistics are at the heart of the populist operation. From the populist perspective, distinctive differences are signs of the failure of the institution to develop and maintain uniform standards, thereby opening the door to the muddled and arbitrary organisational processes of the pre-modern world” (Bergquist 1995:143).

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From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the populists' major priority is seeing more and more disadvantaged learners being accepted into universities, but as to what happens to them when they are there, is a matter of little concern to them. One feels that populism, although it is a starting point into student access to higher education, neglects another important milestone in the operationalisation of access - the development part. If one dares to contrive to find answers to the question, "Why access?", then one will realise that access does not happen only to increase numbers of previously disadvantaged learners, but it is meant to transform those learners into mature beings that are ready to deliver service to their society. The populist theory should aim at "establishing a dynamic link between academic knowledge and community service" (UWC Three-year Rolling Plan 1999:1). Related to the issues of size and complexity are the views on the institutional mission and boundaries.

b. Mission and boundaries

The populist university's mission regarding access is normally very unclear and often keeps changing with the situation. Graduate employment patterns and admission to a higher level of education are some of the few issues usually incorporated in the mission of the populist university. One of the reasons advanced for focusing on job placements and admissions is that they can be easily measured in quantifiable terms. The inherent danger is that these criteria of measuring quality are highly susceptible to external factors like the economic situation of the time and the change in admission policies (which themselves are open to multiple interpretations). In order to stay focused, universities must realise that "such a mission requires constant monitoring and attention in order to respond effectively to changing social, political, and other environments" (Purser 2000:454).

The populist perspective suggests the following people as the beneficiaries of access if equity and the upliftment of the historically disadvantaged learners are to be attained:

- First-generation students.
- Students from lower socio-economic levels.
- Minority ethnic groups.
- Mature students often making a career shift (Berquist 1995).

The populist theory is problematic in that it encourages uniformity of teaching and learning. While bridging the gap is necessary, we cannot in any way assume that people who come from different backgrounds with peculiarly harsh educational, social and economic realities can join their counterparts from the other extreme of educational, social and economic realities and fit like a hand in a glove. There has to be diversity in the teaching and learning (didactic) procedures to match the level and circumstances of respective groups.

c. Capital and educational values

The populist practitioners define capital in tangible terms based on the physical structures (buildings) and the financial muscle of an institution. If we bear in mind that the central point of departure for the populist is the increase in student intake, it does not come as a surprise then that buildings and finance serve as criteria for measuring capacity. Increased intake of students, especially from diverse backgrounds often necessitates the opening of new sections or an expansion of existing one – and when a situation like that emerges “all of a sudden, the teaching costs have doubled; another room is needed; other library resources are needed, etc.” (Beillard 2000:473). The more and bigger buildings an institution has, the more learners it is likely to take. The same applies with regard to finance:

Upward mobility and professionalism are other indicators of success and the potential status of the middle class populist. Development in its broad sense can either be vertical or horizontal. For the populist to attribute success to vertical mobility only is, according to the researcher, a myopic and restrictive contention. The greatest strength of the populist view is that there is a "clear understanding of how valuable universities are to socio-economic development, and a very clear priority for their expansion so that they can provide access for much larger numbers of students" (Fox 1997:3).

Active student participation is one way of enhancing diversity and benefiting maximally from it. The differing attitudes of learners and lecturers may to a large extent inhibit this practice but there are tremendous benefits for those who believe in diversity, because a diversified university breeds richness of educational experience and mixed groups enhance learning for both lecturers and students.

While the populist theorists' concern about the accessibility of higher education to all members of the society is appreciated, one would like to raise a concern stemming from the populist preoccupation with access without paying much attention to quality. The reason for this is that, if the populists would like to see the upliftment of the civil society in all spheres of life, they should strive to strike a balance between quality and access and not treat them as two antagonistic concepts.

2.7.3 The beleaguered perspective

The beleaguered perspective operates in a low quality and low access environment. It is a forced survival strategy. According to Gultig (2000:65) universities in the beleaguered situation are "beset with crisis and dearth of ideas about their new role, and contextual factors like financial crises, student

unrest [and] loss of key academics". Beleagued universities would have been slow or unable to adapt to a changing environment, "unresponsive (even blind) to competition and lumbered into tarpits that slowly sucked them out of sight!" (Hazel Jr. s.a.:1).

New strategies are needed to save institutions from finding themselves in the beleaguered position. Marketable programmes that are sensitive to the demands of the communities around them and the ever-changing times may save them or at least alleviate their problems.

a. Size and complexity

A strong populist start led to the beleaguered institutions accommodating too many learners but failing to adjust their resources at the same rate to ensure continued effectiveness. Diversity of learners require integrative structures like diverse curricula and a diverse student services framework, but these fall short in the beleaguered universities.

Differentiation of services and roles is one of the limitations of the beleaguered perspective. Fragmentation in a beleaguered institution results from the multiple governance structures that prevail, that is, the formal administration structures like the Senate, academic staff unions and the staff working in development bureaus. All these parties have specific interests which they set out to protect, thus they are in constant competition and conflict. Fragmentation is aggravated by contradicting perceptions of new and old, traditional and non-traditional perspectives which lead people in "different directions without co-ordination by a central authority" (Fourie 1996:92). These attitudes embrace the students, the lecturers, the programmes and the curriculum. Some staff hang on to the original perspective of the institution, be it populist or élitist, while others are

obsessed with rescuing the sinking ship (the institution). New ventures are seen as short-term, not as tangible changes by the traditionalists.

In an effort to attract more students (who are bringing money with them) boundaries of student enrolment are lowered to the detriment of quality of education and of the very access that is provided so liberally. By so doing, the practitioners of a beleaguered perspective violate Dowling's (1999:12) contention that increasing access "does not entail a lowering of standards. On the contrary, ... it means providing well-structured and pro-active training programmes that prepare previously disadvantaged graduates" for participation in higher education.

As far as size and complexity are concerned, a beleaguered institution is a lost institution; it has lost grip of its reasons for existence and compromises heavily on quality of service and of education. Because such institutions realise this, they try to regain control by over emphasising bureaucracy, an act which in itself hinders progress in many ways.

b. Leadership

The leadership style in a beleaguered institution corresponds with the organised anarchy or garbage can model of institutional governance.

The nature of the beleaguered university makes leadership an almost impossible task. The style of leadership is inconsistent and unpredictable, not unlike the circumstances and the future of the beleaguered institution. This triggers another problem for the institution. Mistrust and lack of confidence in the university management result from an incoherent management style. Anomaly, the chaos in this type of leadership can be attributed to some organisational characteristics of universities, which include goal ambiguity and environmental vulnerability (Hardy 1990). Higher education institutions have

also been accused of being "very bad at fixing clear priorities (Weber 1999:12). This could also be identified as one of the factors contributing to inconsistency in the beleaguered leadership style.

c. Capital and educational values

In their preoccupation with struggling to survive, the beleaguered universities do not strive for the establishment of either the capital or enduring values. Given the opportunity, it would be of interest to find out from leaders of these institutions, why - in their opinion - they should continue to exist in an environment where the credibility of an institution is traded off for low credibility courses and a change in student enrolment policies.

2.7.4 The post-modern expedient perspective

Contrary to the disorder and lack of clarity on transitional moves that are characteristic of the beleaguered perspective, the expedient perspective becomes an example of a successful and innovative way of responding to challenges of the post-modern era regarding size and complexity, mission and boundaries, leadership, and capital and educational values.

a. Size and complexity

The expedient institutions employ a hybrid of organisational models in their delivery of access, because - if they are creative - they utilise their own resources and benefit from the resources of other universities which they normally take satisfaction in affiliating with. In this way the expedient institutions enjoy an unfamiliar status of being "simultaneously both small and large" (Bergquist 1995:187). The lifeblood of the expedient institution is innovation and this is carried out through the establishment of satellite campuses and regional/interinstitutional initiatives (consortia).

Satellite programmes assist in the provision of geographic access. Instead of moving from their homes to study, the university brings its services to the people. Satellite programmes are usually applauded by the local communities, as a conscious decision is normally taken by the relevant university to tailor-make them to suit community needs. The quality control or accreditation bodies, however, view this outreach initiative as a possible threat to quality. It is not just the community that reaps benefits from the satellite programmes, the expanding university itself reaps sizeable financial benefits in reduced costs for administrative duties since these are normally handled at the main campus. The question of equitable distribution of resources becomes inevitable in this regard. Do universities not find themselves investing more into the main campus and allocating just a fraction of the cake to the satellite programmes? What about the efficiency and effectiveness of the administrative procedures? Do the study materials reach the satellite campuses on time? How often and promptly can students' grievances and general well-being be addressed given that they have to be handled by the main campus?

Another achievement of the entrepreneurial expedient university is the pursuit of a cluster model of adaptation and diversification. In this model, an institution secures more clientele by establishing additional smaller (branches) or cluster organisations. Based on the decision of the main campus, these clusters can offer different specified courses or offer diversified programmes. This cluster model of operation can elevate the status of individual institutions towards national recognition spinning-off in increased student participation and eligibility for funding - attainment of the selfhood of many expedient universities.

b. Mission and boundaries

At the root of expedient-oriented universities lies commitment to fund-raising and programme development activities that both do not reflect the original mission of an institution. What these universities need to do, given the shift in focus, is re-assess their missions and re-adjust them from time to time to incorporate the additional focus points. The importance of revising mission statements is mitigated by Fourie (1996:28) who suggests that the "mission and goals of higher education institutions require periodic review to ensure that they meet not only the needs of the institutions themselves, but also the needs of society".

Central to the revisiting of the mission statements should be concern for quality and access. The quality of the new programmes that are being developed should be predetermined and enacted in a mission statement. The same should apply to student access. Even before commencing the programme redesigning process, a consensus should be reached on who should enrol in the programmes and which of their needs the curriculum targets to fulfil. According to Weber (1999:6), universities should listen more carefully to society to learn and understand its changing needs and expectations... Universities should be more responsive to needs when offering new study programmes". It is by means of this approach that universities can attain distinctiveness and win recognition of stakeholders in terms of being responsive to the pressing demands of society - a popular measuring stick for quality in student access.

The opportunistic tendencies of the expedient administrators pose a serious threat to quality. Sometimes the enterprising character of these institutions gets overshadowed by the tendency to design programmes that are more likely to source funding for the institution than those that are more aligned to the founding mission of the university. Expediency should be guided by the

entrepreneurial spirit - which adopts a proactive, not reactive strategy of development. Instead of seeking funding and linking it to institutional priorities, priorities should be identified first and funding sought to achieve them.

Echoing the process-oriented criteria of measuring quality, the expedient universities are more concerned with didactic techniques and assessment procedures than the actual subject matter. It becomes difficult, therefore, to judge the quality of access as clear objectives are often not stipulated. This approach is, however, illustrated by Hart, Bowden and Watters (1999:305) who point out that "content is no longer the sole focus. The process and context of learning and the impact of assessment tasks on learning are given close attention".

Additional characteristics of the expedient institutions are a lack of clarity on the students' needs, wants and expectation regarding the university. The provision of multiple entry points, mechanisms for student support services and the random, unexplained assignment of statuses to the working staff and the learners are features of expedient institutions. Although they should be applauded for widening access routes, the discrepancy arises from failure of these institutions to provide support for the previously disadvantaged (academically underprepared) students. "The expedient institution simply leaves the new students to sink or swim" (Bergquist 1995:202).

c. Leadership

The expedient perspective prescribes multiplicity of roles for leaders. According to this theory, a leader of an expedient institution must assume the roles of a strategic planner, a "taskmaster", a personnel manager, a student in life and a community developer, depending on the circumstances (situational leadership). This is an approach that covers a lot of mileage

towards the integration of quality and access. A successful expedient leader should be able to divorce the self, capitalise on teamwork and advocate for institutional well-being. The development and professional growth of students becomes an integral part of the expedient leader's long-term plans. "To perform these functions effectively, a leader must step down from his or her hierarchical position and work more as a colleague, in partnership" (Bergquist 1995:205).

Although it has its own pitfalls, the expedient perspective breaks ground towards a more contemporary leadership style. While pointing to the weaknesses, it should be with the spirit of improvement, making it a more entrepreneurial than an opportunistic approach, usable by the many universities which are grappling with issues of integrating quality and access.

d. Capital and educational values

The expedient perspective describes capital in terms of money. It could be money collected from student tuition fees or money from other sources of capital and these differ from institution to institution. The other form of income is the money generated through fund-raising efforts. The expedient university places enormous emphasis on efforts like these.

Given the entrepreneurial approach to quality and access, the expedient institutions are highly reputable but unfortunately the reputation never lasts long, since publicity is gained only for as long as the media can put it in the spotlight. The short-cycled gains of the expedient institutions are that, because their educational values are market-driven, the value of programmes is measured in terms of how suitable they are to the specific student population. The latter is usually affiliated in one way or another to industry. While this standpoint would "guarantee" employment for learners who would enrol in the "valuable" courses, the effects on the other students are

continued inequalities and a jeopardy of their future prospects as job-seekers (Gouvias 1998).

The money-centred orientation of the expedient university gives it an unfamiliar perception of the students. While other institutions see learners as coming in the quest for knowledge, the expedient institution views students as customers whose presence in the institution signals an increase in the institution's financial muscle, both during their study period (when they pay fees) and after completing their studies (as a pool of committed alumni and obliged taxpayers).

"The primary product of the [expedient university] becomes its own financial achievements - a shift from the concern of both the élitists and populists (students' growth and development, and tracking student numbers in response to the demands of the civil society respectively) to something above and beyond the institution itself" (Bergquist 1995:210). Coming back to the issue of quality and access, the researcher contends that the expedient perspective's preoccupation with money leaves much to be desired in terms of the quality of such access. Although it may not surface so clearly, it can be deduced that in admitting learners to the institution, preference is given to learners who exhibit signs of strong financial background, either related to their socio-economic status or the potential of receiving grants from the government or other sponsoring agencies - a replication of an élitist approach and a clear barrier to financial access.

On the whole, the foregoing four perspectives dominate or direct the discourse of quality in student access in the American higher education system. The élitist and the populist are more traditional notions, while the beleaguered and the expedient are more contemporary perspectives of quality in access. Because of the deficiencies experienced in each of the four

perspectives, the fifth and more collaborative, more inclusive and more effective perspective is advocated.

2.7.5 The unified perspective

The unified perspective balances high regard for both quality and access. It is an integrative approach which relies on creativity, commitment and co-operation in its strategies to harmonise quality and access. The unified perspective seeks to locate an interface between quality and access. The size and complexity of an institution is at the centre of the discussions relating to the integration of quality and access. This is an acceptable stand point as Maharasoa *et al.* (2001:1) posit that "concerns about equitable access should be balanced by concerns for quality assurance and management".

Quality and access serve each other in that improved quality raises the reputation of the institutions resulting in the fact that students' and institutions' qualifications will receive more recognition. This is critically important for all learners, but even more for the previously underserved. The previously underserved students are hereby singled out because, having come from a lower socio-economic class, credibility to them is a critical issue in their attempts to better their lives. Studying at a reputable university is a paddle with which they have to wade through the sea of unemployment till they reach the promising employment bank. Again, being associated with a highly regarded university boosts the usually low self-esteem of the historically disadvantaged students leaving them as a fulfilled and hopeful generation.

According to the unified perspective, one way of striking unity between quality and access is by acknowledging the learners' past experiences and integrating them into their studies. This can be achieved through the use of interactive teaching methods whereby learners are given a chance to demonstrate their skills and competencies. Credited internship and

community service programmes are an alternative/additional learning devices through which students can acquire information and experience. It is also a different and more exciting way than the traditional classroom-based learning.

Added to the institutions' clear commitment to quality and access is a co-operative strategy which involves "making decisions and designing systems of control and co-ordination that direct the work of others so that compliance with policy and directives is assured" (Middlehurst 1995:85). As indicated in the examination of the expedient perspective, integrating quality and access cannot be one person's responsibility. The leadership of the universities must bring the other members of the organisation on board in the operationalisation of the integration process. Co-operation can also embrace interinstitutional initiatives, formation of cluster colleges and matrix models of co-operation.

Although other perspectives regarding quality and access have their own strengths which should not be downplayed, the unified perspective happens to gain an upper hand due to its merits and the high probability of success - and as such would be recommended by the researcher - as a possible intervention for a paraphernalia of ailments surfacing in the implementation of academic access. The adoption of a unified perspective approach would, in the researcher's opinion positively influence the quality of access to higher education.

2.8 ACCESS CRITERIA FOR QUALITY

2.8.1 Notions of quality in higher education

In education fitness for purpose is usually based on the ability of an institution to fulfil its mission or a programme of study to fulfil its aims (Lategan 1997:80). This definition of quality stipulates that an institution

should stick to the basic functions that it promised to accomplish because these functions account for the institution's very existence.

The value-added definition of quality expands on the fitness for purpose view. According to this school of thought, quality can be described "in terms that emphasize the functions of institutions to develop human talent and provide some value added to their students" (Baker 1992:8). Quality as value-added is a useful concept that can help to monitor if the learning experience provided is achieving the intended educational outcomes and social objectives. A focus on quality in the sense of value-added will also emphasise an education process-led approach to identifying which learning materials, structures and practices are appropriate for achieving the outcomes and objectives desired (Lategan 1997:77). From the two definitions offered above, one is able to infer that the concept of quality is linked to the overall objectives of an institution, but it presupposes going an extra mile in fulfilling the institution's mission.

Quality can also be thought of as the degree to which an institution has appropriate objectives and uses its resources effectively to achieve them (Baker 1992:8). The interpretation of this definition boils down to the notion of fitness **of** purpose which, in the researcher's view, poses a question of relevance and responsiveness. Is the university offering a service that is needed by the society at that particular time or is the service more of a self-serving agenda? The call for higher education that is relevant and responsive has intensified in recent years and a warning has been signalled that, "if we cannot imagine forms of life that respond effectively to the situation at hand, we will be limited in what we can do. Instead of finding a voice that speaks to the unique contingencies of our own situation, we repeat the cliches and dogmas of other epochs. Instead of creatively participating in a contemporary culture of awakening, we confine ourselves to preserving those cultures of a vanishing past" (Batchelor 1997:2).

Universities are a country's wealth of knowledge and skills, but if they do not engage in processes that aim to predict, detect and alleviate society's ailments then their efforts defeat the whole purpose of their existence; consequently they can be declared null and void. Baker's above definition of quality adds the issue of cost-effectiveness. Governments in many countries have bought the public view that universities are wasteful, extravagant and luxury icons and have as a result significantly reduced subsidy to these institutions. This has led to the addition of a new dimension to the definition of quality which is specifically related to the issue of mass education and increased participation, namely cost-effectiveness. In the eyes of the public, quality manifests itself in an institution that is able to spread the resources it has to differing sectors of its operations and to provide its services at minimal costs while keeping to preferred standards culminating in value for money.

Another school of thought subscribes to the definition of quality as transformation. The role of university education as perceived in this definition centres around the betterment of mankind. It should encourage and nurture the development and empowerment of its learners, both for the individuals' sake and for the sake of the society at large - the common good. This perspective coincides with one of the notions of student access, as discussed in Section 2.3.7.

Baker (1992) also adds some traditional and more élitist definitions of quality. The notion of quality as institutional reputations refers to cases where universities are judged in terms of their social standing, acquired over a period of time. This definition of quality is highly linked to the notion of excellence and high standards. Quality as associated with the quantity and level of institutional resources is an élitist interpretation of the institution's capital according to which availability of resources contributes positively to the

status of the university. This theory also believe that the more resources an institution has the better the quality of education.

This aspect has to do with quality as determined by the number of teaching staff with doctoral degrees. It could be regarded as a very myopic way of defining quality, since it does not take into account the teaching practices of those lecturers, implying that a qualification is all it takes to yield the required results. This notion falls out of place because academics themselves realise the need to put more focus on the learning process. According to El-Khawas (2000:37), academics "in diverse settings have called for more attention to the learning needs of students and the ways in which educational environments can be made more supportive of learning".

This refers to quality in terms of levels of input (raising standardised aptitude test [SAT]-scores). Traditionally, SAT scores were used to assess the ability or aptitude of applicants for being culturally biased and as such failing to portray a true reflection of the potential of students from other cultural backgrounds. The use of SATs is as a result being revisited. In America, for instance, "a new wave of efforts to find other measures, in addition to standardised tests that can be used to provide an approach to [university] admissions that will promote both fairness and diversity" (St John, HU, Simmons & Musoba 2001:131). In itself, this is very exclusive, promoting the traditional concept of access for the best candidates only.

The exceptional, consistency and the perfectionist views of quality can also be added to the list. Here quality is described as something special and outstanding, it rises to the set standards (depending on who sets standards) and maintains them. Perfection conforms to the stipulations of the ideology of the "zero defect" or flawless outcome as it is otherwise known.

Although they are a mixture of both contemporary and traditional perspectives on quality, the above definitions advance understanding of the different ideological orientations regarding student access and account for ways in which institutions interpret and implement the phenomenon.

2.8.2 The relationship between quality and access

The democratisation of higher education in many countries brought quality and access closer together. The relationship between the two concepts is reciprocal in that while the quality of higher education is on the one hand evaluated on the basis of how accessible that education is for the majority of deserving learners, on the other hand, features of quality higher education like efficiency of outcomes and relevance of purpose serve as indicators of effectiveness of access initiatives. The researcher finds it an appropriate point of departure to discuss the two concepts as a frame of reference for the conceptualisation of access as expatiated in the remaining part of the study.

The foregoing extrapolation of the relationship between quality and access access serves to prove that quality and access are inseparable priorities in higher education; if one receives more attention than the other, they are both deemed to suffer. Moreover, the discussion takes us back to the contention that student access happens for a purpose; it is not an end in itself, but it is a means through which a myriad of societal needs can be addressed. It answers the question: why access? To reiterate on the merits of being responsive to the needs of the society, Baker (1992:8) observes that, "a higher education system that fails to equip large numbers of its students to meet requisite standards can never be deemed high in quality, no matter what peaks of performance it inspires in a few". The citation carries very strong undertones of the value of increased participation and inclusion. Having elaborated on the theoretical definitions of quality and access, the

next befitting move is to explore answers to the question how quality is measured and how one can tell that there is quality in access.

2.8.3 Access criteria for quality higher education

One way of measuring quality is by using four basic criteria, namely input criteria, output criteria, value-added criteria and process-oriented criteria. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, both quality and access are relative and complex terms bearing different meanings at different times depending on who defines them and in what scenario they are defined. The same observation can be made in connection to the criteria for measuring quality in access. Different criteria for measuring quality are applied at different times and these are closely affiliated to different schools of thought.

a. Input criteria

The scope of "input" covers both students and resources available for their education. The type of students, quality of programmes, physical resources and the student:staff ratios are some of the indicators of quality inherent in the input criteria. Universities that are inclined towards the input criteria are usually self-serving in that preservation of existing resources rather than the academic well-being of students is their major concern. Advocates of these criteria fail to accept that taxpayers' money "should be spent on students who require considerable help to get through" into university (Aronowitz 2000:103).

By implication, the input criteria encourage the discrimination of applicants on the basis of being academically disadvantaged. While the value-added heralds underprepared students as a challenge to universities and the academic staff, the input criteria view this group of students as a financial

burden. According to the input criteria investment in student support services is a waste of public resources.

b. Output criteria

The output criteria concern themselves with throughput rates. They pay attention to the nature and extent of institutional products, including the number of graduating students and their characteristics, i.e. the quality of graduates. Output criteria are a contemporary measure of quality-sharing characteristics with the "product-based" and "user-based" concepts of quality usually associated with the industrial terrain/corporate world. According to these criteria, "educational quality and reputation are being determined totally by "the standards of student attainment and the student experience...[by] the opportunities and means which students have to attain and demonstrate those achievements (learning programmes)" (Brown 1999:12). Quality undergraduate education is recognised by its ability to equip students with the skills to positively influence the environment which they enter after graduating.

The output criteria consider access as quality if it conforms to the institution's mission and retains integrity by adhering to the expectations of society in recognition of the institution's accountability to the public.

c. Value-added criteria

At the heart of value-added criteria is the interest in whether the institution has made a difference to the students' total development, be it intellectual, moral, social, vocational, physical, spiritual or in other domains of human functioning. The emphasis of value-added criteria is on what the universities are able to achieve in preparing the learners and the ability of universities to commit resources in order to promote equity of outcomes (Fox 1997). An

institution that is oriented towards value-added criteria accommodates poorly prepared learners and perceives them as a challenge not a burden to the institution. Stemming from the value-added approach, an interpretation can be coined that the merit of an institution is embedded in the lengths to which it goes in its attempt to respond to the developmental needs of the society around it.

The entry-level competencies and the ensuing preparation of students are critical elements of student access and development in the eyes of the value-added practitioners. The practitioners of the value-added criteria argue that quality access should be based on the talent development concept of education whose "basic premise is that true excellence lies in the institution's ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance their intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives" (Bergquist 1995:41). This school of thought is in direct contrast with the principles of the input criteria.

Despite the apparent merits of applying the value-added criteria, there are some problematic areas affecting the actual implementation process. Student development (which forms the root of the value-added criteria) is a vast area in itself. It is further compounded by the complexity of human nature and as such evokes questions of whether to assess development in totality or only in certain areas of human functioning and, if so, which areas would be the focal point and what reasons would be advanced for singling them out. In attempting to find answers to the above questions, institutions must note that "quality is achieved when there is a balance between cognitive and affective challenge and support, and when a student overcomes the fear of inadequacy by overcoming real obstacles established to ensure high quality of student performance" (Bergquist 1995:61). As they implement the developmental theory, institutions must be careful not to generalise the developmental patterns of students. They must acknowledge the fact that students, although

in the same programme and in the same cohort, develop at varying paces. We must take cognisance of the fact that students are "people with considerable background in the real world and ... this must be respected and honored" (Bergquist 1995:62).

The other dimension to student development is the production of graduates who are equipped with skills that will benefit them and the society at large (Fox 1997). Pertinent life skills here include team work, personal development and community service. This assumption heralds serious consideration of cultural access. If students are to serve the communities they grew up in and to which they must still go back, they surely need the curriculum that reflects a way of life of their people.

d. Process-oriented criteria

According to this school of thought, the way learners acquire knowledge is more important than the actual content they learn. Emphasis is on the process, not the product. Hardy (1990) refers to the process-oriented criteria as the bureaucratic process model in which routines and processes are key to the attainment of goals.

The process-oriented approach makes learning an exciting experience worthy of maximum dedication and commitment. This attitude has an effect of spreading within the campus and positively culminating in a culture of learning within an institution. The frequency of interaction between students and staff is highly important, as it is believed to be capable of promoting a warm and lasting "friendship". Well formulated as it may be, Hedges (1999:112) cautions that like other major innovations in higher education, this theory could "be over-optimistic".

Authority is one of the indicators of quality as entrenched in the process-oriented perspective. Authority, as it were, may be status-/position-related or it may be directed towards establishing a relationship with learners. The notion of authority is a social process meant to give guidance and support to the learners, but it becomes effective if learners respect the institution and have confidence in its management.

Although they may not be all-encompassing, the foregoing criteria are the commonly used measures of quality in access. They include selectivity, the social class of students enrolling in an institution, the responsiveness of the curriculum of a given institution to the societal, economic and educational needs of students, distribution of historically disadvantaged students in various fields of study, and the usability of such learners after completing their studies. As postulated earlier in the chapter, underlying the yardsticks for measuring quality is a series of varying perspectives on quality and student access.

2.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter it was demonstrated that student access is a complex phenomenon which takes up different forms. Because of its multifaceted nature, access has been defined differently by various schools of thought and this influences the ways universities implement it. The notion of access adopted by a university seems to determine the approach taken in dealing with issues of access to learners in the main stream, while also paying special attention to groups that are at risk, e.g. the economically disadvantaged, the educationally underprepared, learners with disabilities and minority ethnic groups. The ultimate goal is to eradicate or minimise barriers to academic access. Chapter 3 deliberates on policies directing the implementation of access in the South African higher education system.

ACCESS POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

One approach to thinking about the future is an inquiry into the past. We look for below-the-surface trends, forgotten cases, and obscure histories. We use this background to impart new ideas, give us fresh insights, inspire challenging visions, trigger marvelous dreams, and guide us on unknown paths (King 1998:9).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon of student access. This chapter will begin to narrow down the discussion to focus on access policy in the South African higher education context. According to Beckham (2000:4) a strong education system that focuses on access and excellence must be the corner-stone of democracy. This observation becomes particularly relevant in the South African context where - to a large degree - apartheid ideology has moulded the composition, shape and size of the South African higher education system. For almost half a century, all education in the country was divided along racial and ethnic lines, effectively excluding black people from quality academic education (Badsha & Harper 2000:11). This system of education has generated many racial inequalities in institutions of higher learning (HSRC 1999:4), the effects of which still burden the higher education field to date.

As the government's determination to enforce the ideology of apartheid gained momentum, the education policy development process did not remain

behind. An extrapolation of some of the most influential legislative and statutory stipulations is provided in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

3.2 THE BANTU EDUCATION ACT OF 1953

Following their victory in the 1948 elections, the National Party's immediate policies emphasised, among others, "separate development as the mode of continued white political domination and black subordination. These policies were in turn, to profoundly shape state policies relating to black higher education" (Badat 1999:49).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 perpetuated the agenda of white superiority over black people. It further encouraged the pursuit of binary higher education systems in South Africa. According to this Act, black students could only enrol in historically black universities, thus limiting their choice. The extension of the University Education Act of 1959 "established racially-based universities, the University of the North and the University of Zululand were established for Sotho-, Venda-, Tsonga- and Zulu-speaking Africans respectively, and the University of the Western Cape and the University of Durban-Westville for Coloured and Indians respectively. The University of Fort Hare (then South African Native College) was restricted to Xhosa-speaking Africans" (NCHE 1996:29). Vista University is a multi-campus institution where black students would pursue education courses whereas the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) was established specifically to train black doctors. A leeway was issued for those white universities that were liberal enough to admit black students to do so. However, this did not last long, as an amendment was made to the University Education Act of 1959, affording the Minister the power to regulate admission of black students into the universities reserved for whites:

"Whereas the white universities, governed by the Universities Act of 1955, enjoyed, despite some limitations, a considerable

degree of academic freedom and administrative autonomy and were regulated by the Department of Education, Arts and Science, the black colleges were under the direct control of the Department's Bantu Education, Coloured Affairs or Indian Affairs. Thus they were subject to extensive and authoritarian state control with responsible minister enjoying *de facto* control over both academic and administrative appointments" (Badat 1999:70).

The appointment of personnel to black universities was done by the government who appointed male Afrikaners and/or white conservatives. Although the current study's focus is on the quality of academic access, one cannot help swaying to the personnel profile, since it impacts heavily on the quality of student access. Given the background that the personnel recruited into historically black universities (HBUs) were charged with the task of perpetuating the ideology of a low-class/low quality education for blacks, the imperative inclusion of this aspect may hardly be questioned.

Regretting the discrepancies in the quality of black students' access to higher education institutions where issues of less importance gained priority over the more basic and burning issues, a student in one of these HBUs was quoted as describing the apartheid education system period as a time "when blacks... had to suffer gross insults and bitter attacks on their human dignity. When academic discourse and intellectual development were constricted by the most trivial codes of conduct. When the wearing of a tie by male students and a dress by female was exalted as an important precondition for continued academic pursuit. Rules and regulations designed for a place, which was fittingly described as 'glorified high school'. Where arbitrary suspensions and expulsions were used to lambaste recalcitrant students into line" (Morgan & Hendricks 1987:11).

Although the future was still very bleak, the beginning of the nineties saw signs of transformation in terms of black student enrolments in historically white universities (HWUs). Education policies also began to change face in their approach to the issue of black students' access to HWUs in particular. To highlight an evolution in South African higher education, Jansen (2000:86) postulates that, while the 1990s were characterised by a scramble for access policy development, "the next period could be described as the race for 'policy frameworks'".

3.3 THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY INVESTIGATION (NEPI)

The 1990s experienced what one would consider a positive step towards rethinking the nature of education in South Africa. The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1992) was an initiative of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee which set out to navigate policy options for the establishment of an equitable education system in South Africa. (This study will focus mainly on the activities of the Post-secondary Education Research Group.) In carrying out its operations, NEPI was to adhere to the basic principles, of amongst others, non-racism, redress, democracy, and the ultimate establishment of a unitary education system.

Despite its frequent use in everyday life, the notion of redress is somewhat problematic and thus requires detailed contextualisation. Redress involves levelling the playing field in a form of counteracting inequalities and creating equity.

Two schools of thought conceptualise redress differently in South Africa. For most South Africans, redress bears egalitarian undertones. In this view, true redress should be preceded by an equal distribution of society's resources, be they educational or otherwise. For practitioners of an egalitarian perspective, no form of inequality is justifiable.

A contrasting view of redress and equity sees equality in the distribution of resources as unattainable in the context of the modern society. What seems to be possible according to the practitioners of this theory, is to create equality of opportunity for all citizens to compete. Inequalities are acceptable for as long as they can be justified.

The opposing perspectives on redress and equity can be perceived in the higher education debates, particularly on issues of student access to South African universities. The practitioners of the egalitarian view believe that differences in the participation rates of black and white students are unacceptable and totally unjust. Egalitarianists advocate for "pluriformity in access (Eggink 1997:1). Their contention in this regard would be for equal distribution of places within higher education institutions. Their counterparts, on the other hand, would opt for providing students (both black and white) with equal opportunities to compete for spaces in universities. Should the results of the competition manifest in unequal opportunities, there should be a way of accounting for the discrepancy and once that has been done, the intentions of redress and equality would have been achieved. However, triggered by awareness of the racially discriminatory education policies of the apartheid regime, Badenhorst, Foster and Lea (1990:39) raise doubts "about the adequate comparability of standard entrance criteria" to South African higher education institutions.

These views, interesting as they may be, leave some gaps to be filled. Egalitarianism, for instance, should suggest how vacancies at universities should be divided equally between black and white students. It is common knowledge that currently most applicants from previously disadvantaged schools do not meet the admission requirements of universities (especially HWUs). What options would there therefore be to make them access fifty percent of places in universities?

In similar vein, the "equality of opportunity view" should come up with strategies of balancing the situation between learners from historically disadvantaged communities and their advantaged counterparts who have reaped the fruits of a better education system. Vacancies to study may be open to all interested parties, but considering disparities in the educational backgrounds, it becomes apparent that - although applicants will be contesting for an equal number of spaces - the fact that they are not competing on an equal preparedness footing calls for the questioning of the effectiveness of the redress notion concerned.

In tilting the ground for the possible emergence of new higher education policies, NEPI had to source out answers to the following matters of concern:

- What should the student enrolment quotas be in various types of South African universities?
- In addition to English and Afrikaans, should there be provision for some institutions to offer tuition in other languages?
- Should admission to universities rely only on the students' matriculation performance or should there be possibilities of other avenues?
- Acknowledging imbalances in the education system of the day, what support structures should be erected for the previously disadvantaged learners?
- What role would the government play in financing student support programmes in universities that would have ventured into such?
- Should remedial programmes for underprepared students form part of the formal universities programmes or should they be implemented as separate bridging programmes?

Deliberations on the above concerns led to some access policy options being tabled.

3.4 NEPI'S POLICY OPTIONS FOR ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (PSE) IN SOUTH AFRICA

With a view to promote equality of participation in South African universities, policy planners would have to settle for one or a combination of options based on the NEPI results of 1992 and the forces influencing demand for more access.

3.4.1 Factors influencing policy initiatives and goals

Against the backdrop of political crisis in South African higher education institutions, the current South African government "gave considerable attention... to the development of a new national education policy framework, as a critical element of social transformation" (Fisher 1998:121).

The challenges of redress, transformation, the need for service to the new social milieu, the need to meet the demands of the rainbow nation and to address emerging realities and opportunities, confront the South African higher education as we witness the start of the new century. It is the aforementioned challenges that have necessitated/influenced policy developments in South African higher education to a measurable extent.

- **Social factors**

Higher education is expected to embody norms of social interaction such as open debate and argumentative reason; to emphasise the autonomy and self-reliance of its individual members; and to reject discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religious belief, or social class. This is an ideal that is not often realised, but is nevertheless a standard against which to measure national systems (Bloom & Rosovsky 2000:44).

- **Economic factors**

Participation in the knowledge economy requires a new set of human skills. People need to have higher qualifications and to be capable of greater intellectual independence. Without improved human capital, countries will inevitably fall behind and experience intellectual and economic marginalisation and isolation (Bloom & Rosovsky 2000:18) resulting in chronic poverty, especially for the already disadvantaged communities.

In South Africa, part of the economic agenda is to create equal job and wealth opportunities for all deserving citizens and in particular to improve the economic status of designated groups like blacks. To achieve this, higher education institutions in South Africa are charged with the responsibility to produce learners that are equipped with multiple skills that will afford them a competitive advantage in seeking and creating jobs and tackling the challenges of the world of work.

- **Educational factors**

One of the major educational goals in South Africa today is to achieve a single and coordinated higher education system. Realising this ideal will enable learners to compete on equal educational footing and gain mobility within the higher education sector.

- **Individual choices**

Learners come to institutions as individuals with specific needs and aspirations. It is these personal differences that influence learners' preference and ultimate choice of field.

- **Political factors**

Redress, promoting the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and attaining social equity are some of the priorities in the new dispensation. In South Africa all other factors can be linked to the political situation since education, the economy and societal systems were previously stratified to benefit one minority group of South Africa.

The following section outlines access models as they were suggested by NEPI.

3.4.2 Access options

To form a basis for future access policy development, NEPI (1992) suggested a number of alternative models for government to consider.

- **Equal access for all**

This would be a free choice option for all whereby anybody who wishes to enrol with a university in South Africa would be free to do so. The admission would, however, depend on the democratically set criteria, based either on the academic merits of the applicant or on some other acceptable criteria like affirmative action considerations.

Strategies to ensure the effectiveness of this option would include the equalising of the schooling system so that the percentage of black students who matriculate equals that of white students. The increasing participation rates by the black typical age cohort (18-24 years) entering universities would be another measure. In the past, black students entered universities when they were older than the normal age group of first-time entrants referred to above – a variable which could impact negatively on their self-esteem and thus hinder their learning.

If they should go this route, policy-makers should realise that despite its good intentions, this policy option requires a relatively long time to be actualised. It also has the potential of being very costly for the government, taking into account the imbalances in the general education sector which is a breeding-ground for universities and the inequalities in the post-secondary education system itself.

◦ **A modified equal access option**

Like "equal access for all", the modified equal access model insists that every citizen has the right to access post-secondary education. The main difference is that, although it guarantees admission of "qualifying" candidates to post-secondary education, this access option is more controlled than the "equal access for all". Whereas with the latter students are guaranteed places at PSE institutions of their choice, the former may restrict the number of students enrolling in certain institutions and go further to suggest placement in others. This is a more internationally accepted model, because it ensures an even distribution of learners into all sectors of PSE, reducing the pressure on the traditionally popular ones like universities.

In addition to the potentially heavy financial burden for the state, other repercussions may result from government's control over the size and shape of PSE institutions. Ironically this control - which is meant to provide meaningful access - may become a barrier to access. By the look of things, residential universities are likely to gain preference of students and parents over technikons, colleges and non-residential universities. Without clearly stipulated criteria for the acceptance or non-acceptance of students, the principle of equity may be at stake. This is a sensitive issue which policy-makers have to handle with care because even with set criteria, those who would not obtain admission to PSE institutions of their fancy would feel rejected and unfairly treated anyway.

The quality of such academic access may be threatened as well. If, for some reason, a learner is compelled to study at an institution that - given a choice - he/she would not have chosen or in some cases to follow a different programme, one may be justified to question the student's motivation to study and the commitment to make it through the course.

- **An equal opportunity option**

This model differs from the preceding two in ruling out access to PSE as a right. What it accepts as a right, is the enabling of all citizens by the authorities to compete for admission into PSE institutions on an equal basis. Price (2000:226) moots that success depends "on the conjunction of preparation and opportunity". It is critical therefore for the government to take a lead in facilitating proper inclusion of designated groups. To ensure fair competition between black and white learners in South Africa, the government has to engage in ground levelling activities like setting up and continuously supporting access promotion programmes within universities, changing the language of communication of some universities and seriously implementing affirmative action. Setting participation rate targets within strict timeframes can help speed up the process and act as a yardstick for the measurement of progress and/or success (self-evaluation for improvement purposes).

Compared to the other two options, the costs involved in implementing this option would not be so high. However, the dilemma regarding whether to increase tuition fees or lower government subsidy to higher education institutions still persists; in part because it may put the quality of access on the block or it may completely exclude students from deprived socio-economic communities.

3.4.3 Factors related to access

Issues of student development and inequalities in staff and student profiles were identified by NEPI (1992) as matters of concern.

- **Access and student development**

Student support and development should form an integral part of all programmes in higher education institutions. NEPI (1992) emphasises this fact and suggests that a review of student support services should be conducted to determine whether they should continue to provide remedial services or should play a developmental role in eliminating prejudice within higher education in South Africa.

- **Access and staffing inequalities**

To neutralise the predominantly white staff in historically white universities, "a future national education authority will almost certainly have to lay down as a requirement that all PSE institutions implement equal opportunity employment policies, and that all set acceptable targets for changing the racial and gender compositions of their staff" (NEPI 1992:114). At face value, the issue of staffing may look irrelevant in the debates on student access, but the truth is that, being the major role-players in transferring knowledge, the staff at a university must be representative of the diverse student body. This will allow students from different backgrounds to role-model people they can identify with and with whom they share norms and values. An environment like that encourages ease of mind with regard to the environment in which the teaching and learning process is consummated.

- **Access and inequalities in the student body**

Taking stock of low numbers of black students in the professional programmes, the NEPI's PSE Research Group emphasised the need for policy binding universities to "institute programmes that would be designed to redress racial inequalities. It could set targets for these changes and could use its subsidy funding as a "lever" to ensure that these targets are met.

With NEPI having broken ground, the ball was now in the policy-makers' court to react to the recommendations and adopt whatever policy options they would deem potentially effective.

3.5 THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION (NCHE) (1996)

"A central feature of post-apartheid education policy, as reflected in the White Paper on Higher Education and Training (DoE 1995) has been the 'integrated approach' to education and training. In the traditional structuring of the curriculum and its inequalities of occupation and social order. It is assumed that such an approach will make South African higher education more flexible, efficient and accessible for all learners" (Strydom, Hay & Strydom 2001:38).

In February 1995, President Mandela commissioned a number of experts in the field of higher education to put their heads together in investigating means and ways through which the South African higher education system could be transformed. The transformation was meant to culminate in an inclusive higher education system that would serve all sectors of the population justly while simultaneously contributing to the overall development of the country.

One of the five task groups of the commission focussed on programme, institutional and qualification framework. It was under this band that student access and development would receive attention. The finance task group concentrated among other things, on student financial aid which envisaged exploring possibilities of providing financial access to learners from the historically deprived socio-economic class.

3.6 THE GREEN PAPER ON HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION (1996)

Subsequent to the submission of the NCHE Report in August (NCHE 1996), the higher education policy development process evolved into the *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation* in 1996. Regarding the reversing of imbalances of the past, the Green Paper departed from the premise that redress is an imperative that cannot be negotiated. It is a must. According to Minister Bengu in the Foreword, "redress must operate partly in terms of access: it must ensure that no one with the capacities to succeed in higher education is barred from doing so. And redress must also operate at the institutional level in ensuring that inherited inequalities and disparities are identified and addressed" (RSA DoE 1996). With this view in mind, the Green Paper took a stand on specific access matters like increased participation and growth and admission and selection procedures.

3.6.1 Increased participation and growth

It is postulated in the Green Paper that larger numbers of students must be encouraged to enrol in higher education institutions. These students should however, include those who had previously been excluded from higher education. This kind of growth, it is envisaged, will be aligned with the principles of capacity-building; will occur within the limits of available resources; will address the national human resource needs; and will enhance the quality of academic access to higher education. Increased participation must, in particular, rectify discrepancies related to race and gender.

Inevitable ramifications to the issue of growth are observable and to this effect the Green Paper states the following:

"Expansion will mean more than a mere increase in enrolments. It will also see a series of greater numbers and the maintenance of quality. These include: the composition of the student body; the diversification of programmes, curriculums and qualifications; the introduction of multiple entry and exit points; new relations between study and the workplace; and shifts in institutional functions and missions" (RSA DoE 1996:18).

3.6.2 Admission and selection procedures

In addition to matriculation exemption, there needs to be flexible entry and exit points for learners wishing to participate in higher education. Recognition of prior learning is one of the recommended entry pathways. To achieve these goals, "selection instruments that are sensitive to the educational background of potential students" (RSA DoE 1996:33) should be developed.

3.7 THE EDUCATION WHITE PAPER 3 OF 1997

The Green Paper on Higher Education (RSA DoE 1996) heavily influenced the *Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for Higher Education Transformation* (RSA DoE 1997). Much of the content of the White Paper 3 was actually derived from the Green Paper.

Among the challenges confronting higher education after 1994 are contentious issues of equity, growth, redress, admission, as well as selection and language which is a mode of knowledge transmission and acquisition. Kaburise (2000:111) links these challenges to the notion of social justice. He observes that notions of access, curriculum content, teaching and delivery modes, gender sensitivity, race, class, and power require deconstruction to

explicate the tie between them and the broad social and political forces that are contributing to the construction of the new South Africa.

3.7.1 Equity and redress

The White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997) stipulates that the issues of equity and redress will be tackled in the following way:

The Ministry of Education's commitment to changing the composition of the student body will be effected through the targeted redistribution of the public subsidy to higher education. The relative proportion of public funding used to support academically able but disadvantaged students must be increased.

In addition, in the context of limited real growth in public expenditure, making progress in achieving equity and redress goals will require institutions, in turn, to mobilise greater private resources as well as to reallocate their operating grants internally. This is already happening at many institutions in response to the recent rapid increase in black student enrolments.

The Ministry will require institutions to develop their own race and gender equity goals and plans for achieving them, using indicative targets for distributing publicly subsidised places rather than firm quotas.

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 drop-out rates. In this respect, the Ministry is committed to ensuring that public funds earmarked for achieving redress and equity must be linked to measurable progress toward improving quality and reducing the high drop-out and repetition rates.

This 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.

In the short to medium term, in order to improve equity of outcomes, the higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners' school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes. It will be necessary to accelerate the provision of bridging and access programmes within further education, but the learning deficits are so widespread that systematic changes in higher education programmes (pedagogy, curriculum and the structure of degrees and diplomas) will continue to be needed. The development and provision of student support services, including career guidance, counselling, and financial aid services, are other essential requirements. In addition, an enabling environment must be created throughout the system to uproot deep-seated racist and sexist ideologies and practices that inflame relationships, inflict emotional scars, and create barriers to successful participation in learning and campus life. Only a multifaceted approach can provide a sound foundation of knowledge, concepts, academic, social and personal skills, and create the culture of respect, support and challenge on which self-confidence, real learning and enquiry can thrive.

Thus academic development structures and programmes are needed at all higher education institutions to promote the development of teaching skills, curricular, courseware and student support services as a mainstream programme development.

The Ministry will ensure that the new funding formula for higher education responds to such needs for academic programmes including, where necessary, extended curricula. Such programmes will be given due weight

and status as integral elements of the higher education system committed to redress and to improving the quality of learning and teaching.

3.7.2 Admission and selection procedures

The White Paper (RSA DoE 1997) makes clear that the Ministry is committed to ensuring that the minimum statutory requirement for entry into all higher education programmes will in future be a pass in the proposed Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC). Institutions will continue to have the right to determine entry requirements as appropriate beyond the statutory minimum. However, in exercising this right, they should ensure that selection criteria are sensitive to the educational backgrounds of potential learners and incorporate the recognition of prior learning, which is an essential concept in the elaboration of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The NQF provides for the different routes - formal schooling, adult basic education and training and recognition of prior learning, or a combination of these for obtaining the proposed FETC. The Ministry strongly supports developmental work and pilot projects which will help institutions to develop criteria to assess applicants' prior learning and experience, so that those with clear potential to succeed in higher education can be admitted.

In the period prior to the full operationalisation of the NQF and the introduction of the FETC, the existing matriculation requirements will remain in force.

A National Higher Education Information and Admission Service (with regional centres) will be established to facilitate the administration of student applications, satisfy the information needs of applicants, and provide career guidance, including information on labour market trends.

3.7.3 Language policy

The Constitution gives full recognition to the fact that South Africa is a multilingual country. South Africa's rich language inheritance offers many opportunities and challenges to the higher education sector, but thus far there has been no national policy framework within which the higher education institutions could establish their own institutional language policies and programmes and which would enable the Ministry of Education (MoE) to lend support to the achievement of national language goals.

The creation of an authoritative and representative Council on Higher Education (CHE), provided for in the White Paper, will enable the higher education sector to take collective responsibility for investigating the language situation in higher education institutions and offering advice on language policy to the Ministry of Education. According to the White Paper (RSA DoE 1997) this matter is sufficiently urgent that the Ministry will request the Council for advice on the development of a national language framework for higher education as an integral component of the first national higher education plan. In doing so, the Council will be expected to seek the advice and collaboration of the Pan African Language Board.

The policy framework will need to address, among others, the following questions:

- The language or languages of learning (medium or mediums of instruction) in higher education institutions, bearing in mind the fundamental right of persons to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public education institutions, where it is reasonably practicable to do so, and the duty of the state to ensure effective access to and implementation of this right [Section 29(2) of the Constitution].

- The language or languages of communication within higher education institutions.
- The role of higher education in promoting and creating conditions for the development of all South African languages, including the official languages.
- Once the national higher education language policy framework has been approved after full consideration, it will be given effect through the three-year national higher education plan and the respective institutional plans through which the public funding of higher education institutions will be negotiated.
- Higher education institutions will be empowered, in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997, to determine their institutional language policies, subject to the Constitution. In their institutional plans, they will have the opportunity to demonstrate how their institutional language policies will contribute to the achievement of the goals of the national higher education language policy framework (RSA DoE 1997:13-21).

The language issue becomes relevant here again because of its contribution to the academic practices of universities and for the development of individual students. In reinforcing this point of view, Castells (1997:52) argues that "language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality and less exclusive than ethnicity".

3.8 THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT NO. 101 OF 1997

Although the issue of student access has not been directly extrapolated in the Higher Education Act (RSA 1997), the Act does recognise the importance of the matter. This it does by delegating the access agenda to the CHE which

the Higher Education Act set out to establish as part of the broader transformation of higher education. The Act also emphasises the need to "REDRESS past discrimination and ensure representativity and equal access [and to] PROVIDE optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge" (RSA 1997:1) for all citizens of the Republic of South Africa, irrespective of race, colour, gender or creed.

3.9 THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION (CHE) (1998)

"The mission of the CHE is to contribute to the development of a higher education system characterised by quality, responsiveness, equity, and effective and efficient provision and management" (CHE 1999a:1). Promotion of student access to higher education is one of the Council's greatest challenges. The CHE has been charged with the responsibility to advise the Minister of Education on a number of issues in higher education. These would include student access and related matters ranging from student support services to financial aid. Advising on access policies, legislation and regulations forms part of the core functions of the CHE. Policies regarding participation would encourage "increased participation within higher education to meet personpower needs and advance social equity " (CHE 1999b).

"Language has been the focus of educational debate for a very long time. In South Africa that debate culminated in the 1976 riots when students and teachers challenged the policies of the government on the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction" (Lategan & Smit 1999:5). Unfortunately, up to this point in time, no policy has been promulgated to confront differences in language practices evident among higher education institutions. Here again, the CHE has been mandated to explore avenues towards the establishment of a "language policy in higher education that would reflect the language provisions of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, [and] advance equality of access and opportunity in higher education" (CHE 1999b:56).

To accomplish these enormous tasks, the CHE would have to establish task groups, each concentrating specifically on a given task. Although this has already been done, it would be unrealistic to expect more in terms of delivery than the workshops and consultative processes in which the Council has been engaged for the past year. There is reason to believe that, with the CHE steering and keeping in the fast lane like it is doing, the future promises to shed more light on academic access agendas.

3.10 THE HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

In order for South African higher education to achieve the transformation agenda as spelled out in the White Paper 3, there has to be some organised and well thought-out planning framework to guide the process. The National Department of Education (DoE) took cognisance of this fact and embarked on an initiative to direct, co-ordinate and monitor the planning framework. This framework, according to the higher education planning guidelines of 1998, is targeted at two different but related levels, namely the national level and the institutional level.

According to the White Paper 3 (1997) this construction of the National Plan will continually be fine-tuned. It will evolve in three three-year phases over a span of five years covering the period from 1999 to 2003 as illustrated below:

- The first phase is scheduled to last from 1999 to 2001
- The second phase will cover the period from 2000 to 2002
- The third phase will expand from 2001 to 2003.

The first phase will lay the foundation for the development of the planning structure, while the other two phases serve to refine the implementation process based on the lessons learned from the first phase.

Working in collaboration with the CHE, the National Department of Education identified four policy priorities for the first development plan. These priorities revolve around some of the burning issues in higher education, namely the size and shape of the higher education system, equity in higher education, efficiency in higher education, and interinstitutional co-operation.

Notably, all four policy priorities are heavily embedded in the access debate and will thus be discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

3.10.1 Size and shape of higher education

Under the size and shape issue, the CHE (1998) gives attention to the following specific focus areas:

- **Participation rates for a diverse student population**

Diversity in this context is gauged by age, gender and population group. Here the spotlight is cast on increasing participation of not only the black typical age cohort, but of mature learners as well. The balance between the number of male and female students enrolling and succeeding in higher education is also targeted. As it is clearly stipulated in the White Paper 3, one of the aims of redress is to ensure that learner statistics for the higher education system are reflective of the broader South African demography.

- **Proportions of student enrolment by level of study**

While there have been significant improvements in the enrolment statistics of undergraduate students, one of the challenges still facing higher education in South Africa is to bring postgraduate student enrolments on par with undergraduate enrolments. The situation as it stands now is such that there are fewer postgraduate students in the higher education system in comparison with the number of undergraduate learners.

- **Student distribution in respective fields of study**

Disparities surface in learners' pursuit of careers in broad fields of study, namely the Humanities, Science and Technology and Commerce. The Humanities have for a long time enjoyed the monopoly of attracting most learners in the sector. While the assumed low level of complexity could be a contributing factor for having more learners in the Humanities than in the other two major fields of study, the policies and practices of the old regime could also have aggravated the situation. The National Department of Education's vision for higher education in the new dispensation is to reach a state of equilibrium in the distribution of students in all broad fields of study.

- **Expansion of student enrolments in Science, Engineering and Technology**

Related to the issue of the proportional distribution of learners in different fields of study, is the need to expand student participation in Science, Engineering and Technology. As highlighted in earlier sections, a larger chunk of the student population (generally and as per designated group) in South African universities have over the years been concentrated in the Humanities. It is the DoE's plan to reverse the *status quo* and channel more learners into Science, Engineering and Technology programmes. Apart from the fact that South Africa needs personpower in these fields of study, the rapid pace by which technological advancements are emerging world-wide, coupled with the equally accelerated pace of globalisation, dictates that more learners be registered in Science, Engineering and Technology if South Africa has to compete successfully in the global market. This training need is a priority in developed countries as well. In motivating the idea in the United States of America, Patton (1999:1) emphasises that increased "technology and global competition demand that we develop our students' skills and

mental capacity so they can share in the tremendous prosperity of our nation".

◦ **Proportions of distance and contact education student enrolments**

Although traditionally university education was mainly offered through contact tuition, the face of higher education today is such that not all deserving applicants can obtain admission into contact universities. In such circumstances, distance education programmes may serve as an alternative. Distance education can yield benefits for both universities and learners alike. For universities it can, if properly planned and executed, lead to substantial reductions in running costs. To deliver education on the Internet, for instance, could be cheaper than delivering in a contact session. For learners, the problem of geographic access resulting from the legacy of locating universities in hard to reach, secluded areas may become a thing of the past when they enrol in distance education programmes.

The current undergraduate university programmes stretch over a significant span of time, usually from one to four years. This has taken its toll on the student retention rate. Because of the extended period of study, learners, particularly those coming from disadvantaged communities, drop out of university due to either financial and/or social circumstances. The introduction and/or expansion of short-cycle teaching programmes will probably increase the retention rates of learners at South African universities.

Another trend that the idea of expanding short-cycle teaching programmes is likely to curb, is the exodus of learners from public universities to private universities and colleges. The fragile economic state, giving rise to the scramble for employment opportunities in South Africa today, spawns the necessity for individuals and groups of learners to opt for programmes that

promise to open the quickest route into the labour market – a function which short-cycle teaching programmes can fulfil.

3.10.2 Equity in South African higher education

Equity is an inextricable part of South Africa's transformation goals. In the Higher Education Band, the importance of achieving equity is in the foreground in the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997). The Department of Education strives to ensure that the number of students enrolling in and graduating from South African universities reflects the national population statistics of South Africa. When discoursing on issues of equity, issues like the enrolment and completion of women, learners from deprived communities and learners with disabilities come into the picture. Equity in the South African university staff profile is also envisaged but will not be discussed in detail, as it falls outside the focal point of the current study.

3.10.3 Efficiency in South African higher education

The issue of efficiency deserves special attention when engaging in the access debate. Broadly captured, the concept "efficiency" can be assigned to quality assurance. In the higher education planning guidelines of 1998, efficiency is considered to embrace the reduction of unit costs, overlap and replication of study fields, the inclusion of more recently acknowledged means of education delivery and the enhancement of student success (RSA DoE 1998). Student success and throughput take centre stage as the lifeblood of access to higher education in South Africa. No matter how high enrolment figures may rise, if students do not succeed in their programmes, their admission into higher education have little value.

3.10.4 Interinstitutional co-operation in South African higher education

Although it has not been directly linked to the discourse of student access in the White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997), the phenomenon of interinstitutional co-operation is a live issue in student access. The fact that government has earmarked funds for the promotion of joint provision of academic programmes within a region for example, is indicative of the fact that interinstitutional co-operation is receiving its rightful place as one of the country's urgent concerns.

The interinstitutional offering of academic programmes can facilitate learner mobility within the sector. A learner who had registered at one university but took some jointly offered courses, may easily transfer to another university within the consortium should circumstances dictate such a move. The sharing of personpower and infrastructure opens up opportunities for learners to access lecturers and physical facilities which they may lack in universities where they are registered. This, according to the researcher, is a cost-effective way of enhancing student participation in higher education.

It is customary for higher education institutions to strive to overshadow one another in an attempt to woo more learners to their respective institutions. The element of competition between institutions has proved detrimental, since it often influences learners to rank universities and ultimately vote with their feet for the institution that holds hopes for better service and products. This practice exacerbates the impediments of access to higher education, compounding the prevalent atrocious disparities in student enrolment in South African universities across the board. Furthermore, lack of co-operation between institutions will inevitably have a destabilising effect on the very higher education system that is being reconfigured.

The foregoing national policy priorities are designed to direct the operations of the entire South African higher education. From the national planning framework flows the more institution specific type of planning which is extrapolated in the following section.

3.11 INSTITUTIONAL PLANS

As pointed out in the preceding parts of this chapter, "higher education institutions are no longer without guidelines on the effective implementation of equal opportunities for both staff and students" (Thanki & Osborn 2000:89). At the institutional level, universities are expected to construct strategic plans which must, as part of their components, include three-year rolling plans according to the stipulations of the White Paper 3. In both the first and the second phase of the planning guidelines, access remains the focal point.

Aligned with institutions' mission statements, the institutional three-year rolling plans should clearly detail strategies they plan to employ in order to respond to national policy priorities. The institutions must also forecast on student enrolments for three subsequent years. While they serve to propagate the objectives of the national planning framework, the three-year rolling plans must put strong emphasis on the institutional context. All aspects of the plan must reconcile the national policy imperatives but build in a strong institutional flavour, taking into account the geographic location of an institution. Part of the institutional ethos that cannot be ignored in developing the three-year rolling plans is a thorough scrutiny of the university's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

3.11.1 Institutional context

Based on the internal influences like vision and mission, values and goals, academic direction envisaged and external factors like the social, economic,

political, intellectual and cultural context, a university must link its access management and provision to the "supply-side factors such as institutional capacity in terms of staff, infrastructure, financial resources, etc., and demand-led factors such as the (regional/national) flow of students with the requisite matriculation qualifications, access to student financial aid, labour market needs and conditions, etc." (RSA DoE 1999:4).

3.11.2 Institutional diversity

Diversity is a distinct aspect of the South African higher education system. Within the parameters of a single co-ordinated higher education system is a vision to stratify institutions according to "shape viz. type and fields and levels of study" (RSA DoE 1999:4). Homogeneity and uniformity are discouraged by the principle of diversity. From a student access point of view, institutional diversity allows for a more focused and clear-cut, but wider provision of higher education. From the process of choosing an institution to the actual enrolment stage, it is assumed that learners can position their career paths and aspirations with more ease than was the case prior to the development of the national higher education planning framework.

3.11.3 Institutional size and shape

As set out in the national planning framework, the size and shape of universities revolve around student participation. Taking stock of enrolment patterns with regard to the undergraduate and postgraduate studies, major fields of study, the percentage of contact as opposed to distance education enrolments as well as registration in the specific area of Science, Engineering and Technology are all elements of the size and shape dilemma in higher education. The expansion of "short-cycle" teaching programmes also forms part of the size and shape issue. What is expected of universities is for them to indicate how they plan to contribute to the national targets for increased participation.

3.11.4 Institutional equity

In addition to enrolment patterns, the reality of student equity underpins an array of other desirable principles. To start with, "the composition of broader society across all programmes and, in particular, in those which generate the highest levels of private benefits for their graduates" (RSA DoE 1999:10) is considered by the White Paper 3 as an ideal situation for South Africa.

The principles of equity of access and equity of process claim an integral part of the student equity concern. Equity of access relates to the intake of learners and their proportions in various fields of study. In the new dispensation, equity of access marks just the beginning of the opening up of participation into higher education.

To consummate the quality of equity of access, there needs to be equity of outcomes. In other words, it is the universities' responsibility to guarantee the success of all learners registered with them. How this can be realised, depends on the innovativeness of individual institutions.

Equity of process, on the other hand, can be defined as "the ways in which institutions conduct their teaching/learning activities in relation to the different backgrounds and levels of preparedness of students to pursue academic study" (RSA DoE 1999:11). In the researcher's opinion, equity of process is a channel by which equity of outcomes can be linked to the equity of access. It specifically heralds continued support for learners who, due to the political order of the pre-1994 era, were poorly prepared for participation in post-secondary education. The academic support that is advocated is meant to inject true meaning to access and redress while at the same time fulfilling the national socio-economic and political aspirations.

3.11.5 Institutional efficiency

The notion of institutional efficiency engulfs the need to accomplish set educational goals at minimal costs. However, emphasis on cost-effectiveness should not override the pressing need to improve the teaching and learning situation. Strategies to enhance efficiency should bear "quality" undertones and must specifically focus on:

- "Lowering student drop-out rates.
- Enhancing student success.
- Lowering the input costs of teaching students and the output costs of producing successful students and graduates in particular in relation to staff:student ratios" (RSA DoE 1999:12).

The synopsis above provides a checklist by which universities can measure whether their operations are consistent with the national efficiency priority.

3.11.6 Interinstitutional co-operation

Collaboration between and among institutions in a region is one of the ways in which the quality of access can be promoted. The benefits that can be derived from co-operation have already been expanded in the sections above. At the intra-institutional level, the obligation is for prospective collaborators to navigate, individually and/or as a group, the implications of such an initiative on existing academic programmes and the possibility of designing programmes that are primarily responsive to learner needs at both the regional and national levels.

3.11.7 Monitoring of the institutional planning framework

To reiterate the importance of the planning framework, strict timeframes have been set for submission of institutional plans to the DoE. The setting of the deadlines was introduced in the first phase and has been carried over into the second phase.

Indirect sanctions may also be imposed on institutions that fail to comply with both the idea of planning or which do not adhere to the timeframes. Despite the DoE's proclamation that the construction and handing in of institutional plans may not influence government subsidy, universities will not receive their budget allocation prior to the submission of the institutional plan. According to the researcher, allocating funds to a university but not releasing them unless a stipulated condition has been met, is tantamount to denying funding to those institutions that cannot conform. The exact meaning and underpinning of this policy framework need to be unpacked further.

3.12 THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION 2001

Some of the challenges mentioned in Section 3.12 are receiving attention in the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA MoE 2001). In order to steer the transformation process forward, the Minister of National Education in South Africa developed a higher education plan. The goals and objectives of the National Plan are focused, among other things, on student access. Academic, financial and related forms of access are given specific attention. Also, the reconfiguration of programmes towards a more responsive character is encouraged in the plan. The major goals of the national plan are stipulated as, among others, the following:

- "To provide increased access to higher education to all irrespective of race, gender, age, creed, class or disability and to produce graduates with skills

and competencies necessary to meet the human resource needs of the country.

- To promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that the staff and student profiles in higher education progressively reflect the demographic realities of South African society.
- To ensure diversity in the organisational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system through mission and programme differentiation, thus enabling the addressing of regional and national needs in social and economic development" (RSA MoE 2001:15).

The desired outcomes originating from the major goals of the National Plan (RSA MoE 2001) relate to the priorities of the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997) which include the achievement of higher participation rates, increased graduation rates, a broadened pool of students from different social backgrounds and a shift from theoretical and obsolete to marketable study fields like the Economic and Management Sciences and Science and Technology. The outcome that is related to the responsiveness of educational programmes emphasises on the enhancement of cognitive skills for graduates of the South African higher education system.

- **Strategies for the promotion of efficiency of outcomes**

The apparent value which the National Higher Education Plan adds to the access policy framework is that unlike the other policies, it is emphatic in publicising exactly what ought to be done to meet stipulated imperatives.

In order to meet the goals and outcomes outlined above, the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA MoE 2001) spells out specific strategies to be used:

- In the light of the plan, subsidy to universities will depend on the number of graduates produced.
- Academic development programmes will receive government funding.
- Institutional three-year rolling plans should be developed as a matter of priority.
- The universities will be required to encourage students to enrol in large numbers in career-oriented programmes like Science and Technology.
- Barriers to student success will be done away with. For example, financial access will be given to students by the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA) through the office of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) which has been in operation since 1996.

- **Student equity**

The National Plan points to milestones which have been achieved in student racial profiles. An increase in enrolments of black students was witnessed between 1993 and 1999. The numbers grew from 249 000 to 414 000 (RSA MoE 2001:30). Marked success has also been recorded with regard to gender equity in the same period where enrolment of female students increased by 44%. Equity in terms of disability is still a grey area in the South African higher education system. According to the plan, little data pertaining to participation of learners with disabilities are obtainable.

Despite the successes as portrayed above, the National Department of Higher Education insists that equity remains an issue of central concern. It becomes particularly so as transformation efforts intensify. Proactive steps should be followed to promote sensitivity to the issue of access for disabled students.

3.13 RECURRING IMPERATIVES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK

The detailed discussion of various policies in earlier sections of this chapter, highlighted the fact that certain access issues in South African higher education are regarded as the ultimate in the achievement of academic access for students. Below are examples of conclusions that can be drawn from an analysis of all access policies in South Africa.

- The need for increased academic access to higher education cannot be overemphasised.
- The quality of academic access can be improved if access initiatives are in harmony with the notions of equity and redress.
- Increased participation should ultimately contribute to the social interests, the economic needs, the technological developments and the overall advancement of the Republic of South Africa.
- The issue of student admission and selection is still complicated by the lack of clarity surrounding the criteria used to admit students in a way that would recognise prior learning and acknowledge other further education certificates besides matriculation exemption.
- Language is earmarked as one of the priorities in the academic access debate.
- Student financial aid can help advance the cause of increased participation.
- For access to be successfully implemented.

- Academic access for historically disadvantaged learners should not culminate in a revolving door syndrome, but should be structured to achieve the desired throughput rates at standard completion times.

3.14 POLICY CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The discussion of the National Plan for Higher Education communicates the fact that while some of the access issues have been addressed in the plan, other access matters remain challenges for the South African higher education systems.

According to Mafisa and Parsad (1999:167) "a coherent strategy needs to be developed with a view to bring policy initiatives into fruition". Such a strategy should aim to address the following burning issues in higher education:

- Identification of strategies for increasing participation (especially of designated groups) in higher education.
- A well-orchestrated and conscious endeavour for the distribution of learners in professional fields.
- An urgent need for a higher education language policy which provides for a reasonable choice of medium of instruction within the confines of institutional capacity.
- The need for a policy guiding the provision of financial aid to historically disadvantaged learners.
- Guidelines for the establishment of academic support programmes to bring students from the underserved communities on par with their counterparts

from advantaged backgrounds. The other role that the academic support programmes should fulfil is to assist with the development of previously disadvantaged students to improve throughput rates.

In addition to the above, the NCHE proposes that, to speed up the implementation of access processes, policy-makers should:

- identify the type of data which can most usefully provide information about the educational histories of applicants to higher education and to develop mechanisms for including these data as part of the FET examination results available to higher education institutions;
- examine the feasibility of developing selection test(s) at a national level to inform the selection of students into higher education programmes;
- examine and clarify the place of recognition of prior learning in the admission process (NCHE 1996:70).


3.15 CONCLUSION

The access policy initiatives, the realities of our situation and the inherent challenges discussed above signify a milestone towards the betterment of higher education accessibility and provision in South Africa. Griesel (2000b:91) asserts that "higher education policy has created an enabling framework for access innovation". There is little doubt therefore that, when this framework finally comes into maximum operation, one hopes to see an improved quality of academic access to higher education, achieving not only equity and redress but benefiting the Republic of South Africa in its entirety. However, university leaders should be mindful of the fact that conformity to legislative stipulations is not sufficient; "the challenge is to shape the future, not simply to let it happen" (Green & Hayward 1997:25).

ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION: PROBLEMATIC ISSUES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

"...achieving equality of educational opportunity for all ...is the single greatest priority of our times" (Reimers 1999:483).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

ithout appropriate means to translate them into practice, the policy prerogatives discussed in Chapter 3 would be of little benefit to South African higher education (SAHE). Attempts to implement these policies have - in some instances - been successful, whereas little success has been achieved in other cases as will be revealed in later sections of this chapter. The failure or slow progress should not lead to despondence though, because it is not unique to SAHE (McInnis 1996:99).

Policy implementation is problematic in any system or organisation. Policy never quite turns out as intended - if indeed it turns out at all. One of the similarities across national systems of higher education is surely the distinctive difficulty experienced in effectively implementing policy, especially where the initiative comes from the government. Because higher education institutions commonly display unusual levels of autonomy for both organisational units and individuals, they present a special challenge to policy analysts. The sheer

complexity of the institutional structures and processes in higher education well and truly tests any notion of implementation as an orderly and sequential series of steps (McInnis 1996:99).

McInnis's observation is true for the South African higher education system. Currently, the implementation of access policy by higher education institutions takes place in a piecemeal manner. There are various reasons for this. According to Ferreira (1992:28) "South Africa has one of the most complex education systems in the world". In some instances, institutions pledged commitment to translating access policy into practice and are doing their best to make it happen. The extent to which they are succeeding is yet to be unveiled. Whatever degree of notable success may be attributed to either some understanding of policy directives and/or the availability of resources and skills to effect the necessary access policies. In other cases, the implementation of access policy is barred by the institutions' reluctance to support the government's access initiatives. Causes for this attitudinal impediment may be viewed as two-sided. The one reason may be territorial protection – maintaining institutional autonomy - while the other reason may be blatant resistance to change.

Another interesting dimension to the implementation of the access policy is the role of learners and their parents/guardians. With increasing freedom to mobility within the higher education band, students now vote with their feet in favour of universities which, in their opinion, are more likely to satisfy their educational and career aspirations. This situation is problematic for the deserted institutions in that, despite their willingness to broaden participation, there may not be learners to benefit from the universities' efforts. The complexity of the access dilemma, coupled with other variables, may culminate in the CHE recommendation that South Africa's 21 universities and 15 technikons and colleges be either realigned, transformed or rationalised (*Business Day*, 15 March 2000). In the researcher's opinion, this higher

education structural adjustment may (depending on a number of factors) alleviate or exacerbate the dilemma of access provision.

4.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

As indicated in earlier sections of this chapter, a corpus of factors plays a role in either assisting or inhibiting the implementation of access policy and goals. These factors may be categorised as *internal* (to the institution) and *external* (to the institution). However, overlaps may be noticed with some of the factors, making it difficult to classify them simply as either internal or external.

4.2.1 A differentiated higher education system

Bloom and Rosovsky (2000:16) reiterate that, internationally "expansion has produced a variety of consequences. In many instances, existing institutions have grown in size, transforming themselves into mega-universities; in other cases, traditional institutions have been replicated by public or private means. An even more creative response has been seen in *differentiation*, a process whereby new types of institutions are born and new providers enter the sector". This trend is applicable to the South African situation as well.

The accumulated heritage of a stratified higher education system is continuing to take its toll on access issues in South Africa. Earlier restrictions of universities to racial groups may now be replaced by the classification of such universities according to the types of qualifications and levels of provision. The envisaged institutional types "seek a meaningful realisation of higher education goals in relation to equity, quality and cost-effectiveness. This is achieved by, amongst others, increased institutional differentiation, increased and widened access to higher education, improved through-put and

success rates and establishing a single co-ordinated higher education system with effective measures countering institutional drift" (CHE 2000:4).

While this move might be a panacea for the current duplication of services and unfruitful competition between universities, it may also help the South African higher education system to expand "beyond the traditional notions of an academic and professional elite" (Kehm 1999:35) and to bring diversity back on the agenda.

"Diversity in higher education is critically important not only because it more effectively meets institutional and societal needs but also because, through the differentiation of component units, it leads to the stability that protects the system itself" (Brown 1999a:3). The link between diversity and access is very strong, since diversity is necessary for increased and widened participation, while - on the other hand - access principles of "variation, selection and retention", among others, play a significant role in the creation of a diverse and evolutionary system of higher education.

Failure to acknowledge the inevitable nature of a diverse society in South Africa in the new dispensation has made it difficult for most universities to institutionalise and contextualise diversity imperatives. With a few notable exceptions, most institutions have not implemented systematic campus-wide programmes designed to promote diversity-tolerance and community building. This is due either to change-overload, diversity fatigue or to the firm belief which exists on a number of campuses that any programme which systematically promotes social integration is a form of undesirable social engineering. Whatever the reason, diversification should continue to happen, because as Chang (2000:30) asserts "failure to conceptualise and apply campus diversity efforts more broadly not only is inexcusable, but it may even be irresponsible".

The current and ever-increasing tension in particularly HWUs is proof of the fact that so far, the issue of diversity has not been given due attention. Statements by students in some HWUs suggests that diversity in these institutions is perceived as just an add-on initiative, not as an integral part of the universities' operations. According to Morakile and Chipeta (1999:4) "it appears that a tone has already been cast that for the sake of 'unity' at the hostels, separation by race is remedial". What sense does it make to collect students from different race groups if they continue with the ideology of disengagement - living side by side and hanging on to own "folk"? How relevant is that kind of education which prepares future generations to become academic achievers and leaves them to become social misfits after completion? Are the diverse student populations so strikingly apparent in South African universities not just window-dressing? Or is it that universities are striving to survive (financially) by paying lip service to the diversity concerns? To depict how unfortunate the act of neglecting diversity concerns at South African universities is, a student expressed regret for being "part of a university that deceives itself by thinking that racial molestation will vanish like a puff of smoke, practising eulogic masturbation and ostracizing their attention from the imminent permanence of racial disharmony" (Makhele 1999:4).

Added to the above limitations is the tendency for most universities in South Africa to confine the interpretation of diversity to other facets, apart from the core business of universities, which is teaching and learning. According to Cloete and Bunting (2000:60), "the notion that bringing diversity into curriculum can strengthen scholarship, and that it is not just to improve political correctness, is not widespread". In the education era where the quest for increased efficiency is high on the priority list, the perennial challenge for universities is to unshackle themselves from the current barriers and walk their talk with regard to access and diversity. "In most cases a diversification of the nature and duration of studies and degrees is required"

(Matos 1999:5). One way of achieving this is by structuring curricula that not only respond to the needs of the labour market but which also advance the transformation principles of the new South Africa.

4.2.2 Participation rates in South African universities

The call for increased and broadened participation of learners from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds manifested itself as not only an aspiration for growth, but as one of the performance indicators on the basis of which the success of the post-1994 open access policy would be measured. Owing to the assumption that previously deprived learners would add to the influx of learners into higher education institutions (including the historically inaccessible ones) and their programmes, the government itself and the higher education community based their plans on immensely optimistic expectations of "guaranteed" growth.

The NCHE Report (1996) and higher education institutions themselves came up with projections of a 4 per cent sector growth rate during the triennium 1997-1999. These projections (directly or indirectly) influenced the high expectations for growth embedded in the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997). The projected growth in overall participation rates unfortunately never materialised.

Despite the noticeable 15 per cent increase in head count enrolments at South African universities between 1993 and 1996, Cloete and Bunting (2000:10) observe that "head count as well as full-time equivalent student enrolments in effect leveled off between 1996 and 1998, and then fell in 1999 compared to 1998. Total head count enrolments grew by only 15 000 (or 3%) between 1996 and 1998, and dropped by 41 000 (or 7%) in 1999 compared to 1998. Head count enrolments in 1999 are in fact 5 000 below the base total of 569 000 for 1995 on which the NCHE based its projections".

A number of contributory factors can be identified but these will be highlighted in section 4.6 of the chapter, namely barriers to access to South African higher education.

The picture painted by the foregoing statistics is a bleak one - more so when taking into account the stiff competition that technikons and private post-secondary institutions are subjecting universities to. Furthermore the situation threatens to get worse, at least in the foreseeable future. Having portrayed the bigger picture, it is of essence to now narrow the discussions to more specific/focused deliberations. This will centre on issues of enrolment as per race, gender, 18—24 age cohort and into broad fields of study, namely the Humanities, Commerce and Science and Technology.

a. Student enrolments by race

With the increasing pressure to transform the higher education landscape, "it has become evident that tertiary education opportunities need to be rapidly diversified and expanded" (Ekhaguere 1999:2). Ekhaguere's observation was voiced within a larger African context. It should be noted, however, that South Africa is well on its way to the diversification and expansion of higher education opportunities because since 1994 the student composition of most higher education institutions changed from monocultural to multicultural. Equal education opportunities make it possible for black students to have access to the higher education institution of their choice (Moroka & Heystek 1999:11).

In addressing the representation of previously disadvantaged groups, Griesel (2000:91) observes that, "there is ample evidence of increased access, particularly of black (African) students". While "African student enrolments grew from 191 000 in 1993 to 332 000 in 1999 ... White student enrolments in universities and technikons fell by 60 000 (or 27%) in 1999 compared to

1993" (Cloete & Bunting 2000:18). Studies reveal, however, that historically disadvantaged learners "choose university studies leading on to lower professional status" (Gourley 1999:96). These students would have trained mainly in the Faculty of the Humanities. If this pattern was to continue, the SAHE system would be failing to provide access which strives for parity in educational and later work opportunities.

b. Student enrolments by gender

Traditionally, men have been better positioned to gain access to university education and so issues of access have not been profound for them until recently when the establishment of other higher education institutions like technikons demanded a share of the student population pie. This revolution gave way to a decline in the enrolments of men in universities, which could herald an emergence of a new problem in access debates. Women, on the contrary, have suffered dual, if not multiple, disadvantages excluding them from full participation in university education.

The participation of women in higher education world-wide has for decades depended on the societal stereotypes regarding either the biological make-up or the economic role of women as perceived by different societies. To this day, "women still encounter conservative social norms which constrain their lives and limit their job prospects" (Habu 2000:43).

Due to their alleged fragility women have been discouraged to enrol in masculine-oriented professions like engineering in favour of the "feminine" ones mainly in primary care and teaching. In communities where women are regarded as secondary providers, the admission of women into higher education programmes was largely in the low-paying professions which men would normally be unwilling to pursue. Some systems of education are

"designed to limit the numbers of female students in certain professions in case maternity breaks created staff shortages" (Woodrow & Crosier 1996:12).

With universities diversifying their offerings, women have increasingly enrolled, among other programmes, in business studies and law. In SAHE, statistics show that subsequent to the leveling off in 1995, the enrolment graph for male students is currently on a sharp descent. The numbers of women who registered between 1993 and 1999, on the other hand, grew by 44 per cent. While this has had a positive effect on the participation statistics of women in SAHE in general, the next milestone would be to establish whether the increase in participation could be mirrored in broader fields of study. Habu (2000:55) postulates that two major factors account for the reason why women decide to enrol in higher education studies: firstly, "as a way of pursuing academic goals and new career opportunities; [secondly] as a way of disengaging from the constraints and difficulties of life in...society. Most women's motivations are somewhere between the two". If higher education strives to respond to the needs of its clientele, the above aspirations (especially the career-oriented one) have to be held in high regard and strategies to fulfil them be put in place. The burning issue is how to make Science and Technology and Commerce accessible to women in order to enable them to advance into better career opportunities.

c. Student participation by field of study

Obtaining access to universities is of prime importance, but the quality of access is the key to the success of such access. As one way of assuring the success of access, proactive strategies must be designed. These include, among other things, rethinking the curriculum to match the changing demands of the new political, social, economic and technological order (Hay 2000). This view is shared by Preece (1999:89) who argues that "curriculum relevance and the notion of core skills in higher education are at the forefront

of current discussions around the need to develop an appropriate higher education for a fast changing and multi-faceted world". A bleak reality about the South African higher education is that the majority of learners seem to be out of step with South Africa's economic realities since many still graduate in the Humanities rather than in Science and Technology (*The Star*, 20 July 2000). In response to these changing times, the university sector should "not only [be] expanding its classroom offerings but improving the quality, timeliness, and relevance of its instruction for its...learners" (Fox 1997:5).

Coupled with the need for relevant programmes is the imperative of "combating educational alienation amongst some student groups and its transitional relevance" (Preece 1999:89). In addition to the above, the challenge facing the SAHE today is to open up access, especially for historically impoverished communities, into various fields of study, particularly Science, Technology, Business and Commerce which were previously "white preserve". The enrolment graph into niche areas of study continues to be skewed in favour of white learners. Literature reports that the 1996 full-time equivalent (FTE) statistics for historically Afrikaans universities portrayed a picture whereby "for African undergraduates, 5 per cent of FTEs were in S & T [science and technology] and 6 per cent in BC [Business and Commerce], compared to 28 per cent and 16 per cent respectively for white undergraduates" (Cooper 2000:13). Cooper further attributes low enrolments of African students in Science and Technology and in Business and Commerce to a lack of role models in these fields.

d. Student enrolments by disabilities

Defining who exactly can be referred to as disabled is a prerequisite for determining the needs and implications for providing access to them. Often discussions concerning people with disabilities assume a homogeneous group. Yet, in actual fact, the types and severity of impairments differ a great deal.

"Institutions should be aware that disability covers a wide range of impairments... . Some of these impairments may have few, if any, implications for a student's life or study. Others may have little impact on day to day life but may have a major impact on a student's study, or vice versa. Some students may already be disabled when they apply to an institution, others may become disabled or become aware of an existing disability only after their programme has started. Others may have fluctuating conditions. Some students may be disabled temporarily by accident or illness" (QAA 2000:2).

The South African Constitution and other statutory documents are clearly opposed to any form of discrimination against any citizen in any sector of life. Theoretically, people with handicaps have been declared rightful beneficiaries of university education, but the accomplishment of policies in this regard has not been actualised. Previously, disabled people have had a rough time trying to access higher education. From a personal point of view, one can actually say that more reasons have surfaced why disabled people cannot be admitted to university education than why they can be. Reasons range from lack of physical facilities to absence of either appropriately qualified teaching staff or limitations in the programmes they can handle. The issue of lack of finance has also been on the foreground in discoursing access opportunities for the disabled.

That people with disabilities often require more support and specialised resources cannot be refuted, but the realities of life demand that disabled people be given a chance to make their mark socially, educationally, and economically. Some universities in South Africa are making good progress (as perceived by the visible number of disabled students) in accommodating learners with disability in accordance with the demands of the new legislation. Statistics are unavailable, however, since research on this terrain is still minimal. A policy gap is thus observable and as such needs to be filled as a

matter of priority. In order to be able to provide people with disabilities with access to higher education, the following strategies have to be implemented:

- "refinement of the definition of the group;
- development of an agreed framework for identifying and responding to the support needs of students;
- drafting access and support mechanisms to improve success and retention; and
- programs to address the employment prospects of such students" (NBEET 1996:xviii).

4.2.3 Access routes into South African university education

"The growing diversity of student populations has led to more flexible forms of delivery...and multiple entrance and exit points in higher education" (Keitel 2000:2). In accordance with national policy framework, universities have integrated access discourse into institutional planning and operational systems. From an audit of what is happening in different South African universities, Griesel (2000:16) suggests that four main assumptions propel the implementation of student access which, in the researcher's opinion, also bring to the fore the instrumental nature of access initiatives bearing fruits firstly for universities. These are:

- access as gatekeeping through entrance testing and placement;
- access as redress through alternative routes of preparation;
- access as institutional survival through flexible modes of delivery; and
- access as quality assurance through a reconfiguration of curricula.

It is in this context that the access routes discussed below should be conceptualised.

a. Matriculation examination results

For many decades in practically all corners of the globe, admission into university was solely reliant on school-leaving examinations results. These results have, however, come under scrutiny over the past few years. The consensus is that, on their own, examination results are not a true reflection of the learners' actual capabilities and potential - particularly for African learners who have been subjected to an inferior high school education. Regarding the South African context, Chisholm (2000:3) observes that "our national senior certificate examination, the matric, has for several decades served as the benchmark by which we annually assess students, system and society. Rickety and unreliable, it has come under pressure from communities, educationists and government... . As matric exemptions¹ have stagnated along with the overall national average, so potential recruits for universities have dwindled, their quality diminished by a sector ravaged by insecurity and declining morale."

Despite these problems, education must go on, and learners must be admitted into universities. A critical question to pose is whether ours is "a fair system in a country where for centuries the school system has been highly unequal, favouring the privileged white minority?" (Herman 1995:265). The answer is definitely not. The repercussions resulting from admissions and the selection of learners based only on matric results can be far-reaching. As Van der Merwe (2000:1) points out: "If school results were as unreliable as suspected, admission based on these may result in diminished throughput rates, financial losses and wasted time of those students who had been wrongly accepted or rejected".

¹ To obtain a matric exemption a student must have a metric score (M-score) of 28. This qualifies a student for direct entry into university.

These notable limitations, coupled with the changing face of the higher system in South Africa, have increasingly necessitated the introduction and utilisation of alternative entrance routes into universities.

b. Pre-entry tests

In addition to the school-leaving examination results, some universities use pre-entry tests to admit learners either into the institution and/or into specific "reserved" programmes like Medical Sciences. These range from interviews with learners to criterion-referenced tests like standardised aptitude tests and extend to some form of psychological testing. The objectives of these well-intended tests are mainly to "broaden access..., provide better counselling to these prospective students with reference to their fields of study, subject choices and the availability of academic development programmes; [and] to continually refine the university's standards" (Botha & Cilliers 1999:144-145).

While these stringent mechanisms serve the interests of universities very well, once again the legitimacy of generalising their application to all applicants of universities is highly questionable, more so when they are (as is often the case) applied to the previously disadvantaged students whose scores normally fall below the desired parameters. Sometimes pre-entry tests give a chance to learners who did not fare well in matric to prove their worth, but the danger is that administering these tests to students "with lower test score performance penalizes already disadvantaged students twice over: having given them inadequate schools to begin with, society will now punish them again for failing to perform as well as other students attending schools with greater resources and more capable teachers" (Darling-Hammond 1996:257).

c. Access programmes

Another revolution in the access discourse has been the introduction of access programmes. Generally speaking, the purpose and primary aims of access programmes are to award opportunities to learners who have been disadvantaged in some way in order to gain entry to higher education and to progress towards completion of the intended course of study. "Without intervention from the higher education sector, [these learners] are unlikely to gain equitable access to study opportunities and to the world of work" (UWC Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:18).

A diverse range of models are in place in different universities within the South African higher education system. Examples of models of access programmes include the Career Preparation Programme of the Free State Further and Higher Education and Training Trust, Telematics Learning System of the University of Potchefstroom, the Alternative Admissions Research Project of the University of Cape Town and University Foundation Year in Math and Science of the University of the North (Griesel 2000). Currently, the situation is such that access programmes in South African universities are intended mainly for black students who present a host of limitations emanating from the legacy of apartheid education.

Mackay and Motala (2001:2) identify an evolution in the nature and purpose of access programmes in South Africa "where programmes moved from simply giving support to students on demand, to slow stream courses, where the material was simply presented at a slower pace... These can generally be divided into three categories:

- The foundation type programme, where pre-university work was covered.

- The augmented type model where students registered for first-year courses and received a curriculum to augment their studies”.
- A mixed approach that provided foundation type courses in the first-year and then led the students on to a structured supported first-year programme of studies.

Depending on the national or/and institutional priorities, access programmes can vary in terms of the duration of the course (ranging from two weeks to one year), the mode of tuition (contact or distance learning), levels of provision (credit accumulating and non-credit accumulating course providing a basis for generic skills), and specific objective(s) for the study. While access programmes may generally aim to prepare students to succeed in higher education, “some programmes lead to a specific named route within higher education (Access to Law, Access to Nursing and some are more generic). However, even within a programme which is named ‘Access to Higher Education’, specific named pathways may be available, designed as preparation for particular higher education course” (QAA for Higher Education 2000:1). Although this observation refers to the British higher education systems, it is the case in the South African higher education system as well.

d. Programme and curriculum innovation

Students in universities (including the underprepared) increasingly seek study programmes that will increase their competitiveness and marketability. This seems to be an uncompromising demand to which South African universities like other universities elsewhere, have to respond to or slowly make their way towards extinction. Fortunately some universities have taken heed of the situation and are beginning to respond accordingly.

Another access initiative that is battling to find its footing in South African higher education is the recrafting of curricula to accommodate the learning

needs of a diverse student profile. One of the critical priorities of the South African higher education currently is the redesigning of the curricula with a view to lay the foundations for a critical civil society. The importance of critical thinking "has for a long time been associated with an alternative curriculum... which prepares people for total human liberation; one which helps people to be creative, to develop a critical mind, to help people analyse; one that prepares people for full participation in all social, political, or cultural spheres" (Higgs & Higgs 2001:2). Efforts in this area include broadening access to the previously élite courses of study, like Science and Technology as well as introducing lower levels of study like diplomas in preparation for higher levels of study, i.e. degrees. In some cases, the duration of the course of study has been extended to give learners the opportunity to progress through the course at a pace conducive to them (an opportunity to pursue a three-year degree in four years for instance).

Curricula changes do, however, concentrate largely on subject content and modes of delivery. The need to create a culture of tolerance within higher education institutions is up to this date suffering tremendous neglect. "With a few notable exceptions, most institutions have not implemented systematic campus-wide programmes designed to promote diversity tolerance and community building... only a few institutions appear to take into account student development needs related to gender, race and broad diversity awareness and democratic citizenship in their curriculum reform activities" (CHE 1999a:25).

e. Recognition of prior learning and experience (RPLE)

Increasing applications from adult learners (for admission into universities) necessitated the emergence of consideration of prior learning and experience in student admissions and selection as a concept. "The basic premise underlying RPL is that people, especially mature adults, learn many things

candidates to benefit from it since the majority of first-time entering students present little or no prior learning (uncertificated) or experiences RPL is thus more relevant for mature learners.

4.2.4 Academic support systems

Academic support programmes enhance the quality of education offered to learners who manage to secure a place in higher education. While access programmes focus on preparing learners to get into and adapt in an institution of higher learning, academic support systems form the second leg of the development relay. They address the learners' academic needs during the term of study. The academic development structures serve to assist learners to achieve progression in their studies. Lategan (1999:106) views the role of academic development programmes as "assisting students in becoming critical, independent, exploratory, creative and effective in processing, organising and communicating facts and ideas. At the same time, these programmes are directed at maintaining the delicate balance between equity and quality".

Counselling services are the most commonly used in South African universities. There are, however, other forms of support systems like the proactive tutorial system and the peer-support system; all of which prove to be effective in encouraging increased throughflow of learners in universities. This ties in with Harrison's (1996:193) observation that academic support services should be regarded as "the purposeful creation of situations from which motivated learners should not be able to escape without significantly learning or developing as a result of our efforts". Remedial interventions like vacation schools constitute support for learners who encounter problems in specific subjects.

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Regardless of what model they are based on, academic support programmes and access programmes are geared towards similar goals. "The first is that they compensate in some way for poor schooling that the student received prior to coming to university and the second is that they rely on one extra year of tuition to make good this compensation" (Mackay & Motala 2001:2). The contribution made by academic support services to student learning and success in that they bridge the gap between students who because of the previous binary education system in South Africa, experienced "differing educational systems and backgrounds and therefore exhibit a wide range of university readiness" (Webb & Erwee 1990:87).

4.3 BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Lengthy deliberation on the availability of alternative pathways into higher education and unequivocal policy demanding access for all did not uproot all barriers to access to South African higher education. However, the problem is a universal one because according to Babalola (1994:10) "In Nigeria certain constraints are prevalent and working against further provision of access to higher education. The following are identified barriers:

4.3.1 Diminishing number of matriculation exemptions

As pointed out in earlier sections of the chapter, matriculation results remain the predominant selection tool for university education. Even so, just a pass is not adequate; a pass with an exemption is criterion number one. The problem with the insistence on matriculation exemption is that, for the past few years, the number of students obtaining the desired pass has been on the decline. In actual fact, "only 50 percent of the country's matriculants passed last year, with a smaller number obtaining exemptions, and meeting university entrance requirements" (*Pretoria News*, 11 April 2000). A host of reasons can be advanced for the low performance, but whatever reasons they

may be, they are hampering admission of thousands of learners (particularly from impoverished communities) into South African universities.

4.3.2 Faculty-based/departmental pre-entry tests

Apart from the broad university's admissions' requirements, some faculties and/or departments administer their field-specific pre-entry tests. Field-specific tests are often designed to ascertain the applicants' chances of success in a specific programme. The results of the tests can be used to either deny an applicant entry into the faculty or subject him/her to a lower-level course within the faculty that would form the basis for further study in the field or may restrict participation to that lower level forever.

4.3.3 Limitations in pre-entry guidance

Although many universities in South Africa have set up structures for pre-entry guidance, there are a number of concerns regarding its efficiency and accessibility.

- Whilst information about access opportunities is extensive, guidance information does not filter down to the appropriate levels, particularly among non-traditional students.
- Pupils and students often receive information from schools and further education and training (FET) colleges that leads them into inappropriate courses. Career pathways information for students is particularly poor.
- Community-level pre-entry guidance about different routes to higher education is largely lacking. Such guidance does not take account of the fact that non-traditional students may need more support and information than traditional students (Watt & Paterson 2000:109).

4.3.4 Financial and other resources constraints

"It is widely acknowledged that South Africa's tertiary education system is facing enormous pressures, worsened by the decreasing government subsidies and dwindling student numbers" (*The Star*, 11 April 2000).

The problem of finances hits learners, their parents and universities extremely hard. Unlike in the past, governments all over the world are expecting universities to make do with what they have (do more with less resources). South Africa is no exception to this dilemma. "As national, state and local policy agenda evolve under changing political leadership...competition is rising for government funds from multiple sectors of society... . One trend is the loss of predictable resources to support higher education, especially in the traditional ways it goes about its business" (Nedwek 1999:172).

In order to function well in the new dispensation, universities are under pressure to accept more learners, including those who, due to the inequalities of the past, need tremendous support to succeed at university education. Government's demand for increased access is not, however, accompanied by financial support to help institutions to comply. On the contrary, government is becoming more and more reluctant to dig deeper into the public purse in aid of higher education institutions. The result of this is that universities are left with no option but to stretch available human and physical resources or turn some applicants down - thus barring entrance of learners who could have benefited from higher education.

Student bursaries and study loans from the government are also a thing of the past. With more opportunities for admissions comes a rising demand for financial support, since a large percentage of university students in South Africa are from the African communities - most of whom cluster at the lowest

level on the economic ladder. It would therefore appear that a matriculation exemption and commitment from universities to open doors for all deserving students are not all it takes to access higher education in South Africa. Financial limitations have had multiple negative effects on the university sector. Some universities have experienced huge declines in the enrolment statistics of first-time entering students, while others have had to struggle with immense student debts which led to debtors either being expelled from universities or dropping out themselves.

The plight of the financial stringency under which millions of South Africans survive and the direct effects of such are highlighted in the following observation:

"For thousands of black South Africans, access to tertiary education has become the difference between having a roof over your head and being homeless, between being fed half of the year or starving, between owning some clothing and being decked out in rags, and between meeting social commitments by sending home small amounts of cash to your family, or joining the ranks of those who are fully unemployed" (Van Onselen 1997:14).

The foregoing observation shares a perspective that, for many learners from historically impoverished communities, the process of acquiring university education is also a way of escaping from the poverty-related realities of their lives into places where they have accommodation, food and some extra money to spare for family at home. It must be noted, however, that this situation only applies to learners who manage to get scholarships or student loans.

Disabled students are some of the most disadvantaged by the current financial instability of universities because, while the traditional "able-bodied" students can be squeezed in somewhere within existing structures, learners with disabilities often require specialised physical resources and personnel with specialised training are required to make the best of the disabled learners' learning experiences. Having not had this group in the main stream, the majority of universities never had appropriate facilities and are therefore bound to erect new structures for this purpose. Even for these unique circumstances no funding is available from government to assist universities' efforts to provide quality access to learners with disabilities.

4.3.5 Geographic location

The importance of proximity to an institution of higher learning received attention in Section 2.4.1d. A brief discussion of the subject will thus suffice. The history of the initial establishment of universities places them in isolated locations away from the disturbances of the cities and their inhabitants. Traditionally this was acceptable, since most universities offered learners accommodation on campus. However, this concept of an isolated university has created a distance barrier to learners in the world of today, giving rise to the notion of disadvantaged locality. Changes in the social and economic order have necessitated a shift towards commuting to and from the university. In other countries, students gain free access to the cities'/states' transport system. To illustrate the intensity of the geographical access issue, in Moldovan riots started when students demanded "concessions on long-distance transport" (Rich 2000:11). In South Africa the issue has not received much attention. What is happening, is that learners incur transport expenses in order to attend lessons and access libraries and other support structures. For learners who already battle to pay for tuition transport fares are an additional burden.

Assuming some learners can somehow manage to cover both tuition and transport costs, the fact that they rely on public transport makes it difficult for them to attend lessons in the evenings lest they come out of class to find no transport home. In order to deal with these problems, learners in South Africa have had to go to institutions closest to their homes even if they would have preferred a different university. In extreme cases this could mean a change in career aspirations/plans if an intended course is not offered at the "second choice university". A similar trend was unveiled in Scotland where "the most important factor in determining whether a young person enters higher education was geodemographic group" (Johnson, Raab & Abdalla 1999:373).

4.3.6 Gender and race stereotypes

To date, "access to the benefits of an education incorporating a coherent gender dimension is, for the time being, limited" (Grunberg 1999:395).

Although new trends are beginning to surface, access to fields of study was for a long time dependent on, among other things, societal, cultural and racial stereotypes. In South Africa today, as is the case in some countries, the Humanities and other helping professions are still female-dominated, since traditionally women are supposed to be physically and intellectually and emotionally considerate caregivers. Commercial and more scientific professions on the other hand, have for an equally long time been male-dominated in accordance with the societal and cultural belief that men are intellectually and physically more able than women. A revolution "aimed at improving the percentage of female students; [opening] access to a larger spectrum of specialities; [and promoting] access to the labour market" (Grunberg 1999:397) is spreading fast in many higher education systems. These changing times have brought about a freer world where women may now pursue careers in Engineering and Information Technology, while men

may register for courses in the Hospitality Management and Beauty Technology without being snubbed.

Racial stereotypes whereby black South Africans were deemed unfit for high level intellectual engagement are slowly vanishing. The opening up of previously white high schools has provided black learners with opportunities to enjoy quality education that stimulates their brains and enables them to prove their ability in the education field. To some degree the level of preparedness that some members of this group of learners presented before the admissions authorities at universities opened doors to the allegedly "difficult" subjects which, as the saying went, could only be tackled by their naturally white counterparts.

4.4 STUDENT RETENTION AND THROUGHPUT

One of the transformation goals outlined in the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997) is the improvement of **throughput** rates of all students in the university sector and those of historically disadvantaged learners in particular. The National Plan for Higher Education (RSA MoE 2001:16) strives as one of its strategic objectives to "link improvements in efficiency to improvements in quality and access". Statistics reveal that although there have been improvements in some areas, that goal may not be declared accomplished. In spite of attempts to offer them admission into universities, at the end of the day, "black students still get [a] raw deal" (*The Star*, 17 April 2000). The reality of the situation transpires through statistics indicating that "for all graduates over [the] period (1991-1998) 21 per cent were African and 68 per cent white" (Cloete & Bunting 2000:31). Apparently, a detailed analysis of throughput rates by major fields of study exhibits even more serious inequities the costs of which are "shared between the individuals concerned and the institution" (Brunsden, Davies, Shelvin & Bracken 2000:301). The

question is whether the South African Higher Education and the public can afford the expense.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted some important perspectives with regard to the hurdles that SAHE must still conquer. It first appeared as if the overall admission struggle had been won when an increased number of students entered universities. However, findings by Cloete and Bunting signal an adverse turn of events with overall enrolments taking a plunge since 1998. Another conclusion to be drawn is that, although identified as one of the priorities, parity has neither been achieved in the distribution of learners in niche areas of study nor in the graduation rates of black and white students.

The next chapter is an analysis of access implementation processes at the institutional level. The analysis will be based on the universities' vision, mission and goals, the enrolment patterns and the ensuing projections for the period 2000-2002.

ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION IN THREE CASE STUDY UNIVERSITIES

"Not only should the educational mission of higher education receive a higher priority, it should be redefined" (Boggs 1998:5).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Initially, the primary overarching aim of this study was to analyse institutional academic access policies as guiding principles in determining the extent to which South African universities have been and are still responsive to national higher education policy and from that make deductions on the effectiveness of students' academic access at these universities. However, the researcher was confronted by a policy vacuum: Natal University (NU) and the University of the Free State (UFS) were redrafting their policies, whereas the University of Durban-Westville's (UDW) Registrar stated that they never had any. The reigning status necessitated a shift from "strict" policy analysis to the scrutinising of the case study universities' three-year rolling plans and other institutional documents. The purpose of analysing these institutional documents is to investigate whether, in the light of outmoded academic access policies (in the case of NU and UFS) and the absence of any such policy (in the case of UDW), there is some

document in each university which guides role-players in the implementation of academic access. Three-year rolling plans were regarded the most suitable (though not sufficient) documents for this purpose since they echo the policies reiterated nationally on the principles of equity, size and shape, and efficiency. Discrepancies were identified by the researcher in the statistics provided by case study universities but the researcher feels that the gaps are not of the magnitude that could mask the intent of the chapter. Explanatory notes will be written in sections where problems surface.

5.2 BACKGROUND TO THE INSTITUTIONAL THREE-YEAR ROLLING PLANS

In an attempt to introduce stability to the currently transforming higher education system and to achieve parity through unity of purpose within the university sector, the National Department of Education spelled out a set of planning guidelines which were to be followed by every university in the country. The first phase (1999-2001) has already lapsed and the institutions are grappling to actualise their plans for the second phase, i.e. the 2000-2002 three-year rolling plans. Discussions in this chapter will be based on these recent plans. A detailed explanation of the planning framework was provided in 3.10.

The broad aim of three-year rolling plans is to indicate how individual universities have planned to respond to and aid achievement of national policy priorities for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002. Through the planning framework, the DoE expects universities to outline strategies which will be employed to address matters pertaining to size and shape, equity, efficiency and inter-institutional co-operation within the broader context of the South African higher education. The study will focus on the first three priorities, because, firstly, they are the ones that are directly intertwined with student academic access and secondly, all three of them have been a national

concern from the past decade as it has been illustrated in Chapter 3 of this study. It would be interesting to see whether progress has been achieved from the time NEPI made recommendations in this regard.

5.3 NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS POLICY PRIORITIES, 2000-2002

5.3.1 Vision/mission statements, goals and values

Institutions were required to include their vision and/or mission statements in their three-year rolling plans as these provide the framing principles for the operationalisation of the policy priorities of size and shape, equity and efficiency. Scrutiny of the three universities' vision and/or mission statements, goals and values concentrated on academic access and was carried out in the light of broader principles regarding the nature and usefulness of a mission statement illuminated in the following discussion.

The value of paying greater attention to the mission of universities is much discussed in recent years. "The mission statement of an organisation outlines the broad directions that an organisation should and will follow and briefly summarises the reasoning and values that lie behind them" (Lynch 1997:427). Practitioners in the field of corporate strategy and management share the above definition (Peeke 1994; Jones & Kahaner 1995; MacKay, Scott & Smith 1995; Davies & Glaister 1996; Stearns & Borna 1998) and view the development of the mission statement as a point of departure for steering the organisation to new horizons. They concur with Lynch (1997:427) that included in the pool of advantages for formulating a mission statement is that the mission statement:

"...can be circulated and discussed among those involved in the organisation.

...provides a sense of direction and focus.

...draws the organisation together”.

A supportive perspective on the value of operating from a mission statement is that in addition to capturing the broad purpose and function of the organisation, the “mission statement defines a common intent to which everyone in the organisation can point” (People Dynamics 2000:41). The researcher would like to highlight “common intent” in the above notion as the key word.

Guided by this notion, the researcher observes that incorporating academic access within the university’s mission statement provides evidence of the priority accorded to it by the university community. If it is built into the mission statement, it becomes binding for all concerned to abide by in their professional duties.

5.3.2 Size and shape

In keeping with the prescriptions of the White Paper on Higher Education (1997) the National Department of Education encourages movement towards a targeted single co-ordinated higher education system in South Africa while at the same time cautiously discouraging homogeneity and uniformity in the sector. In fact, the government’s efforts are aimed at “ensuring diversity in the organisational form and in the institutional landscape” of higher education (RSA DoE 1997:26).

The notion of size and shape is interpreted in the 2000-2001 planning guidelines as referring to how big or small a university is in terms of the student enrolments it commands and the projected growth in enrolments for a period of at least three years (size). The shape of a university on the other hand spans type (whether teaching and learning or a research university),

fields (this refers to the spread of courses on offer) and levels of study (whether both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are being offered at a given university). The following section investigates the situation at the three case study universities with regard to size and shape.

5.3.3 Equity

According to the National Planning Guidelines 2000-2002 (RSA DoE 1999) equity denotes a proportional distribution of learners within the South African higher education system. It also implies a correlation between learner enrolments and completion. Section 3.11.4 provides a detailed discussion of equity.

5.3.4 Efficiency

Efficiency is one of the indicators of success of access. In institutions of higher learning efficiency is assessed by the numbers of students who complete their studies in the minimum time frames. An extrapolation of this aspect (efficiency) was done in section 3.11.4.

The case study universities' vision and mission statements vary not only in intent and scope, but in the way they are formulated too – ranging from a comprehensive and detailed statement to a broad statement with an accompanying list of detailed explanations in the form of values, goals and strategies that will be employed in order to achieve the universities' vision.

5.4 NATAL UNIVERSITY

5.4.1 Vision, mission, goals and strategies

(a) Vision

NU is guided by a strong and clearly pronounced vision, the statement of which is encapsulated below:

"The University of Natal has a strategy of Quality with Equity. It dedicates its excellence in teaching, research and development to progress through reconstruction. It serves South Africa, and the KwaZulu-Natal region in particular, by delivering quality teaching that enables students from all backgrounds to realise their academic potential and to obtain degrees of a continuing international standard" (NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:3).

At this point the researcher wishes to highlight phrases like "Quality with Equity", "progress through reconstruction", "quality teaching", "enables students" and "obtain degree". An analysis of the highlighted phrases illuminates intensity of intent and richness of commitment.

First of all, it is worth noting the theme of excellence running through the vision statement. What makes this commendable is that as it has been demonstrated in the literature review section of this study (see Chapter 2), some schools of thought regard quality and equity as conflicting principles, but for NU they are instead seen as supplementary and almost inseparable. To achieve quality in equity, NU pledges support for learners which leads to another desirable eventuality – "obtain degrees". Progression, nurturing of individual potential and the ultimate completion of studies are important components of the academic access continuum and NU seems to hold them in high regard – with the result that efficiency as expressed in equity of results is achieved.

NU's vision statement can also be commended for exhibiting the university's awareness of its existence and role within the bigger picture and has set itself to respond accordingly – by addressing regional (KwaZulu-Natal), national (South Africa) and global (international) challenges which promises to yield a quality product – well rounded graduates who, like their alma mater, are

assets to their communities and the world at large. Inherent in this quality of graduates, is the principle of employability which is increasingly receiving attention in higher education literature today.

The ideology of "redress", which is also recommended by the National Department of Education has also been addressed in NU's vision statement. This is deduced from the vision that among other things, NU subscribes to progressing "through reconstruction". The word "progress" itself suggests a picture of an adaptive university (which would stand the test of time) while "reconstruction" blends well into the notion of reconstruction and development which is one of the South African government's strategies to correct imbalances within societies.

(b) Mission

The NU proclaims its mission as to "serve **all** sections of its community through excellence in scholarship, teaching, learning, research and development" (author's emphasis) (NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:3). Through this mission statement NU asserts commitment to the principles of academic access. The "all" embraces connotations of equitable access, which means services of NU will be delivered to students irrespective of race, gender, disability, socio-economic, cultural and other background, thus aligning itself to the principle of equity in student profiles which is emphasised in the White Paper of 1997 (RSA DoE 1997) and the Institutional Planning Guidelines 1999-2001 and 2000-2002 (RSA DoE 1999).

Offering academic access forms as much the core of NU's aspirations as it is of the current study. Among other services, teaching and learning are part of the package which the university offers to students. The commitment to teaching and learning is glorified by the inherent striving for "excellence". For the researcher, the word "excellence" denotes the university's striving for

quality academic access without which the provision of access becomes a mockery.

(c) Goals

The theme that recurs in NU's institutional goals is that of relevance of education to societal needs. One of the objectives NU set out to achieve is to foster a "keen appreciation of the values and concerns of the different communities in which [learners] will be living and working" (NU Institutional Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002). What this means is that NU realises that as societal problems intensify, communities are more and more looking up to universities to intervene in their long held status as major dispensers of knowledge. Related to the above goal is that through its academic offerings, NU seeks to infuse the spirit of entrepreneurship in the learners. NU recognises the need to produce productive, self employable and employment creating graduates equipped with enterprise skills.

(d) Strategies for operationalising Natal University's mission and achieving its vision and goals

In order to achieve its goals, NU is poised to explore environmental opportunities, combat threats and correct shortcomings that could erode effective provisioning of academic access. Proactive strategies of enhancing student academic access include delivering courses which seek to cultivate core skills like problem-solving among learners, continuous refabrication of courses in keeping with changing societal, political and economic demands, positioning "service learning" as an important part of university studies, integrating information technology into programmes in the natural sciences and commerce, adopting mixed-mode approaches to teaching and learning and offering multidisciplinary studies (Natal University Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002).

5.4.2 Size and shape of Natal University

Natal University has two campuses, Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The research was conducted at the Durban campus, but some statistics will include both campuses since they are recorded as such in the three-year rolling plan.

On the whole Natal University boasts significant growth in the past decade with the overall student population increasing twofold. The enrolments, as reflected in the NU's three-year rolling plan: 2000-2002, claimed a 6,5 percent annual increase from 1994 to 1999 and this, according to the researcher, could be attributed to changes in the political order from apartheid to a democratic rule in South Africa. Table 5.1 provides an indication of the rate of growth at NU from 1995-2000.

Table 5.1: Natal University-Total student registrations, 1995-2000*

Year	Total
1995	16 263
1996	17 015
1997	18 187
1998	20 844
1999	20 860

* Statistics also include learners from the Pietermaritzburg campus

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:13

The figures in Table 5.1 include both undergraduate and postgraduate students at NU. Even though the focus of this study is on undergraduate

studies, statistics on postgraduate enrolments have been provided to paint a broader picture within which the undergraduate level operates.

It becomes clear that the years 1998 and 1999 could be indicative of a different trend in NU's total enrolments. Table 5.1 shows that there was growth in student registrations between 1995 and 1997. Between 1998 and 1999 there was an almost insignificant increase registrations from 20844-20860. While it may be both difficult and unfair to explain the levelling of the graph in 1998 and 1999, one may infer that, nationally in those years, student enrolments declined in some universities while other universities maintained the same numbers. Some of the reasons advanced for the decline at the national level, which could be applicable to the individual universities, were the decreasing number of students who obtained a matriculation exemption, lack of finance for some qualifying students, and the strengthening of both the technikon and private higher education sectors.

(a) Distribution by field of study (Durban)

Analysis in this section and subsequent ones would ideally be continued in the three major fields of study – Humanities, Natural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences. Unfortunately NU's three-year rolling plan contains no statistics for the Faculty of Humanities, but only a narrative description of trends in student registrations. Statistics can therefore only be provided for Natural Sciences and Management Sciences. The general trends in this category point to more registrations in Natural Sciences and Management Sciences where growth between 1995 and 1999 has registered between 50 percent and 100 percent respectively. This observation is substantiated in Figure 5.2.

Table 5.2: Natal University-Distribution of undergraduate student registrations by field of study, 1995 and 1999

Year	Natural Sciences	Management Sciences	Humanities
1995	804	1 945	Statistics not available
1999	1 135	3 933	

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

Table 5.3: Undergraduate student registrations: distribution by category of study

Year	Access ¹	Undergraduate
1995	224	11 934
1996	369	12 390
1997	446	12 462
1998	503	14 143
1999	520	13 355

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

¹Access refers to student registrations in the following academic development programmes only: UNITE, Science Foundation, B.Sc.4 and the Commerce Foundation Programme. Academic development programmes have increasingly been recognised as an effective alternative route into undergraduate studies, hence the researcher saw it fit to include figures on them.

The figures in Table 5.3 portray steady growth in access student registration, although the graph is beginning to head to a level between 1998 and 1999. Undergraduate student registrations also rose between 1995 and 1998 until a major decline in 1999 where figures dropped from 14 143 in 1998 to 13 355 in 1999. Table 5.3 could be useful in shedding light on the insignificant growth in the overall student population between 1998 and 1999. It appears the numbers stood where they were due to the sharp decline in

undergraduate enrolments. Although not reported in the Three-year Rolling Plan, the researcher wishes to risk assessing that, similar to the situation in other institutions, the major decline was a consequence of fewer first-time university entrants nationally.

(b) NU Enrolment projections, 2000-2002

The enrolment projections for the years 2000-2002 do not promise a bright future for NU, and one assumes for all universities in South Africa. However, a ray of light shines in some disciplines (Natural Sciences and Management Sciences), because although there is an overall decline in undergraduate first-time entrants in the higher education sector as a whole these two faculties benefit from accepting students who, driven by economic factors, divert from the Humanities. In a way, NU projects no potential for growth in the Humanities; numbers threaten to go down on a continual basis.

To combat the situation, NU is considering a "shift towards mixed-mode models" (NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:21) of delivery as an overarching strategy. Examples of these would be offering subjects on a part-time basis and adopting flexible delivery modes, especially for B.Com degrees. Rescuing the Humanities might be a more complex task. Certainty has not been attained on how the decline in enrolments will be harnessed in this Faculty, but there is a possibility of widening access rates for non-traditional entrants like mature students through the strengthening of the core foundation course which is already in operation in the Faculty of the Humanities.

5.4.3 Equity at Natal University

The strategic initiatives for the University of Natal (1999:8) stress the issue of equity in the student profile as a matter of priority. The university undertakes to widen "access to its educational programmes, especially for students from

communities which have historically not had access to tertiary education". Such groups would include blacks, women and the disabled. Statistics portraying the status of access equity in a broader institutional context are provided in this section. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 provides student enrolments from 1995-1999 according to race and gender respectively, whereas Table 5.6 represents student registrations for the same years broken down in terms of race and gender.

**Table 5.4: Natal University-Undergraduate student registrations
by race, 1995-1999**

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
1995	3 875	343	3 623	4 405	12 156
1996	4 566	304	4 016	3 874	12 760
1997	4 787	313	4 368	3 442	12 910
1998	6 342	342	4 821	3 141	14 646
1999	5 799	331	4 934	2 777	13841

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

Note: Numbers have been worked out from total student enrolments which include numbers of students who were not identified by either race or gender. This is why the totals in Table 5.4 differ from those in Table 5.3.

It becomes apparent that, on the whole, NU has covered much ground in the registrations of students by race, especially if this is perceived against the national and regional demographics. There has been a steady and sometimes rapid rise in enrolments of African and Indian students. The enrolments for Coloureds fluctuated between 1995 and 1999. It would be difficult to account for the shift, but one may comment that it might be worth the university's effort to investigate the cause. An area that calls for serious attention is the constant drop decline in white students' registrations. Given the history of historically white English universities, it is not out of line to assume that attitudinal and political factors on the part of white parents played a major

role in the drop. An important part of the access debates has been the tension between academic access and quality. As portrayed in Section 2.8.1, there is a school of thought that increasing student numbers, especially with the inclusion of those from historically disadvantaged communities, affect the quality of education adversely. Although it is not possible to substantiate this scientifically, this could have been the case at NU.

Gender debates both in higher education and other sectors of South African society place emphasis on the empowerment of women. The universities are combining efforts to meet this aspiration. Table 5.5 portrays the status of gender equity at NU.

**Table 5.5: Natal University-Undergraduate student registrations
by gender, 1995-1999**

Year	Male	Female	Total
1995	6 419	5 737	12 156
1996	6 673	6 087	12 760
1997	6 642	6 268	12 910
1998	6 938	7 708	14 646
1999	6 439	7 402	13 841

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

Note: Numbers have been worked out from total student enrolments which include numbers of students who were not identified by either race or gender. This is why the totals in Table 5.5 differ from those in Table 5.3.

Gender enrolments reveal some interesting patterns at NU. According to the record in Table 5.5, from 1995 to 1997, the undergraduate student population was male-dominated, but the situation was reversed in 1998 when more female than male students registered at NU. The trend intensified in 1999.

Africans, Coloureds and Indians are population groups that were identified as designated groups in terms of being underserved. Women, both Black and White, also fall under designated groups. Table 5.6 untangles the enrolments of these groups and compares them to the historically advantaged white male population.

Table 5.6: Natal University-Total student registrations by race and gender, 1995-1999

Year	African		Coloured		Indian		White		Black		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1995	2 880	2 104	174	256	2 116	2 349	3 431	2 951	8 601	7 660	16 263
1996	3 375	2 589	198	213	2 277	2 675	3 005	2 683	8 855	8 160	17 015
1997	3 691	3 045	224	243	2 556	2 967	2 943	2 518	9 414	8 773	18 187
1998	4 178	4 671	247	274	2 850	3 396	2 820	2 408	10 094	10 749	20 844
1999	4 076	5 184	224	274	2 936	3 444	2 473	2 169	9 709	11 071	20 860

Source: NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

Note: Students of unknown race or gender are included in the totals, but not in the detail.

According to Table 5.6 there were more white male students in 1995 than any other population group, but the picture changed from 1996 when African males increased in numbers. The number of Coloured and Indian males kept rising steadily over the years until 1999, when there was a decrease in the registrations of Coloured men from 247 in 1998 to 224 in 1999, mirroring the trend in white male registrations. At this point in time, the researcher will not try to explain the causative factors, but may only observe that the current picture in NU's enrolments is a reflection of trends in the national higher education system.

Interesting trends are noticeable with regard to female student enrolments at NU as depicted in Table 5.6. In 1995 the number of white female students

was higher than that of any other population group, but the trend did not last, since there was a decline in these numbers from 1996 where this group of females was 2 683 in total, but diminished to 2 169 in 1999. In 1995 the margin between white female and African female students was narrow in 1995 (African 2 880, white 2 951). The decline in white female students from 1996 gave way to African female domination which continued comfortably from 3 375 in 1996 to 4 076 in 1999. The registrations for Indian females indicated a steady rise throughout the five years (from 2 349 in 1995 - 3 444 in 1999). This pattern is not surprising, because the Durban region itself attracts a large population of Indians. So demographically speaking, it is acceptable. Registrations for Coloured female students have been somewhat unpredictable, with numbers dropping in 1996 (213 and picking up again in 1997 and 1998 (243 and 274 respectively) but levelling off again in 1999 where numbers stood at 274.

5.4.4 Efficiency at Natal University

Efficiency in the academic sector of a university's operations refers to the achievement of educational objectives. In its Three-year Rolling Plan (2000-2002), NU outlines several indicators of efficiency of outcomes as they have been and are aspired for by the university. One of the bold steps taken by NU was the restructuring of faculties into schools of cognate disciplines. The academic restructuring was aimed at reducing duplication and unnecessary overlaps previously identified in departments and faculties. One of the strengths of this new system is that programme directors have been appointed and given the responsibility "for assuring the academic quality and coherence of the programmes on offer" (NU Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:35). The monitoring of academic access implementation is easier with the schools of cognate disciplines system because each school is obliged to develop a vision, mission and goals against which it can be evaluated. The

monitoring of output and retention rates is done by way of self-evaluation within the schools.

Other restructuring processes occurred in the areas of student feedback where the QPU computerised the student feedback systems in order to efficiently assess all modules offered by the university. A survey of graduates is conducted annually to ensure that NU's graduates are of the type and calibre that the labour-market wants. Information from these surveys is used to feed into the curriculum re-designing processes. Apart from students' evaluation of courses, a separate survey is conducted annually in which students evaluate other academic access-related services like financial aid schemes and the overall university environment.

Specific strategies have been implemented at NU to improve students' success rates. The Science Foundation Programme and the Science Augmented Programme are examples of strategies that are in place which, on the one hand, widen access to fields of study but, on the other hand, improve pass rates. Efforts to lower drop-out rates culminated in the establishment of an Educational Development Project which concentrates on the improvement of teaching and learning at all levels in the mainstream. This is coupled with other academic staff development programmes which include the utilisation of information technology to monitor student progress.

It appears as if NU has gone a long way in promoting efficiency of academic access initiatives and the university has even more plans to improve the efficiency agenda. The introduction of a fully-fledged academic mentoring system in the residences and the student learning centres for all students are propositions whose review is nearing finality.

5.5 UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE (UFS)

5.5.1 Vision, mission and values

(a) Vision

The vision held for the University of the Free State is derived from the university's insistence on two main guiding principles: "quality" and "relevance".

"To be a top quality university in the new South Africa" is the aspiration of the UFS. In addition to excellence, creativity and reflective skills promotion, the UFS emphasises the principles of redress ("the inequalities of the past must receive attention") and equity ("equal opportunities and accessibility for everybody"). According to the researcher, the paramount underlying factor to these two principles is student support, which, much to its credit, the UFS also believes in it as illustrated in the mission statement.

Inclusivity, diversity and multiculturalism are identified by the UFS as critical ingredients in enhancing the quality of students' academic access. To achieve these, the UFS is committed to creating a conducive environment on campus where every member of the university community, including students, possesses a sense of belonging while recognising the need to accommodate other members of the university community. A clear demonstration of this commitment is the bold step which the UFS took by introducing a parallel-medium policy which provides for all programmes to be offered in both English and Afrikaans.

In spite of this having been a courageous move on the part of the UFS, the researcher can still see a gap, particularly in the light of the principles of equal opportunity. The student profile at the UFS is now approaching a 50/50 mark in terms of racial composition, which means that more or less half of the

student population (White students) are instructed in their mother-tongue (Afrikaans or English). The other half of the student population (Black students) come from different cultures and speak different languages like Sesotho, Setswana and Xhosa, and have to do their studies through the medium of a second or even third language (English). Support for learners who do not receive instruction in their mother tongue seems to be inadequate thereby limiting chances of this group of learners to succeed in their studies. This raises questions of the extent to which the parallel-medium system is successful. This raises questions of the extent to which the parallel-medium system is successful.

(b) Mission statement

The University of the Free State portrays its mission as "the pursuit of scholarship as embodied in the creation, integration, application and transmission of knowledge by:

- promoting an academic culture within the university community;
- developing an environment for critical scientific thinking and reflection;
- providing relevant scientific education;
- expanding the body of scholarly knowledge by both pure and applied research;
- performing community service through its core functions of education and research, and through special development programmes and projects;
- development of the total student as part of its academic culture" (UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:6).

Through its mission statement, the UFS projects itself as an academic institution and asserts that all other functions will depart from this status – "pursuit of scholarship". "Academic culture" and "critical scientific thinking" are some of the phrases in the mission statement which emphasises the

academic nature of the UFS core functions which it could be argued, signifies the university's striving for providing academic access of high standard (quality access).

One of the indicators of quality in students' academic access is the extent to which the education which learners receive, responds to the needs of people around universities. The UFS has taken cognisance of this fact and to this end, provides "relevant scientific education" and "community service" not only through education and research, but also through community-based and out-reach projects.

(c) Values

The values of the University of the Free State construe similar principles that are entailed in the vision and mission of the university. Excellence, scholarship and the holistic approach to student development remain matters of great concern. The list of priorities has been augmented in the expression of values to project "inclusivity and democratic decision-making", "client orientation" and "entrepreneurship" as claiming a sizeable share in the strategic priority list.

Experts (Lynch 1997; El-Khawas 2000) spell out that a good strategic plan should outline the organisational goals and intended strategies for achieving them. Goals display less generality than the mission statement and thus "provide a framework for more detailed levels of planning" (People Dynamics 2000:41), guiding the institution's conduct over an expanded spread of time. Apparently the UFS' three-year rolling plan falls short in this regard. The expression of vision, mission and values is not supported by a statement of goals and an ensuing postulate of possible strategies for the realisation of such. While the brief of this section is not to conduct an evaluation of strategic plans as such, the failure to set goals is bound to negatively affect

the provisioning of academic access to students. Access is a relatively complex strategic area whose implementation must be guided by clear intentions of where the university is heading and the route it plans to take in achieving the goals. The absence of such a route could result in a chaotic situation of otherwise willing practitioners who engage in malpractice due to lack of channelling strategies - reducing access initiatives to "technocratic" endeavours comprising of piles of policies with no possibility for proper implementation in sight.

Some strengths are noticeable in the vision, mission and value statements of the UFS. Relevance and responsiveness to societal demands also take centre stage as an access priority in the vision, mission and value statements of the UFS and this is again perceived by the researcher as worthy of recognition, since it becomes the necessary building-block on which efficiency and effectiveness rest.

5.5.2 Size and shape of the University of the Free State (UFS)

Some growth in total student enrolments was experienced by the UFS between 1995 and 1998. A small decline was, however, noticed in 1999. Table 5.7 summarises patterns in total student enrolments at the UFS.

Table 5.7: University of the Free State-Total student registrations, 1995-2000

Year	Total
1995	9 893
1996	10 087
1997	10 197
1998	10 386
1999	10 374

Source: UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

(a) Distribution by field of study

Patterns of growth at the UFS are relatively in line with national trends. A general exodus from Humanities and an inflow of students into Economic and Management Sciences are apparent in Table 5.8. A slight decline in the area of Natural Sciences was experienced by the UFS between 1995 and 1999. Possible reasons could be aligned with what is happening in the higher education sector. [This issue receives thorough attention in Cloete and Bunting 2000 and Cooper and Subotzky (2001).]

Table 5.8: University of the Free State—Undergraduate student registrations by field of study, 1995 and 1999

YEAR	NATURAL SCIENCES	MANAGEMENT SCIENCES	HUMANITIES
1995	1244	1182	1841
1999	1238	1582	1611

Source: UFS Information Management 01/03/2001

(b) Undergraduate student registrations: distribution by level of study

Comments on the enrolment of undergraduate students will include those in the academic access programmes. Statistics for some years may not be available, since such academic access programmes were established after 1995. Undergraduate enrolments for the period 1995 to 1999 are illustrated in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9: University of the Free State-Undergraduate student registrations: distribution by category of study, 1995-1999

Year	Access ²	Undergraduate
1995	691	7 072
1996	655	7 376
1997	842	7 423
1998	718	6 968
1999	574	6 824

Source: UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

² Access refers to student registrations in the following academic development programmes: Programme for Academic and Social Success of Students, Supplementary Education programme, Language Proficiency Course, and the Career Preparation Programme.

(c) Enrolment projections, 2000-2002

An analysis of enrolment growth depicts a bleak picture for the UFS. While there has been a growth rate of 2,79% between 1993 and 1998, a decline was experienced in 1998. There could be many reasons for this, but the most obvious one is the decrease in the registrations of first-time entering undergraduate students in 1998 and the successive year.

"These projections show that the total number of students at the UFS will gradually decline from 10373 in 1999 to a projected number of 10133 in 2002" (UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:7-8).

Being fully aware of the situation, the UFS has embarked on strategies to counteract negative enrolment trends. Recurriculation, innovation in instructional techniques and financial aid schemes are some of the ways by

which the UFS hopes to reduce drop-out rates and improve success rates of enrolled students.

5.5.3 Equity at the University of the Free State

History placed the UFS (like other HWUs in South Africa) in a position where it has to go an extra mile to convince stakeholders that it is ready and well on the way to transformation. The most apparent way of demonstrating commitment to the transformation agenda would be achieving diversity in the student population. Table 5.10 reports on the progress that the UFS has made in achieving equity in racial representation of undergraduate students.

Table 5.10: University of the Free State-Undergraduate student registrations by race, 1995-1999

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
1995	1 282	403	17	5 370	7 072
1996	2 066	368	36	4 906	7 376
1997	2 631	347	34	4 411	7 423
1998	2 681	307	41	3 939	6 968
1999	2 708	290	73	3 763	6 834

Source: UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

Table 5.10 reveals differing patterns of growth between racial groups. Recurring growth in the number of Indian students was experienced during the period 1995-1999. This growth, however, occurred parallel to a persistent decline in the number of learners from the white and the Coloured communities. Accelerated growth happened in the registrations of African students between 1995 and 1999. White students are, however, in the majority. Table 5.11 unearths the situation with regard to gender equity among undergraduate students at the UFS.

Table 5.11: University of the Free State-Undergraduate student registrations by gender, 1995-1999

Year	Male	Female	Total
1995	3313	3759	7072
1996	3405	3971	7376
1997	3314	4109	7423
1998	3006	3962	6968
1999	2933	3901	6834

Source: UFS Three-year Rolling Plan 2002-2002

Female learners are in the majority at the undergraduate level at the UFS. From 1995-1999 there were more females than men (3313 males in 1995 and 3755 females in 1995). Although there has been a descending pattern in the numbers of both male and female students, the latter are still represented to a large extent.

The significance of scrutinising enrolments by race and gender is that some racial groups – Africans, Coloureds and Indians – have been earmarked as having been underserved by the apartheid regime and thus deserve more focus when empowerment and redress mechanisms are put in place. Women also belong to the previously underserved group. Table 5.12 is an illustration of the *status quo* at the UFS with regard to equity of race and gender.

Table 5.12: University of the Free State-Total undergraduate student registrations by race and gender, 1995-1999

Year	African		Coloured		Asian		White		Sub-total		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1995	537	745	198	205	9	8	2569	2801	3313	3759	7072
1996	871	1195	188	180	20	16	2326	2580	3405	3971	7376
1997	1167	1637	157	202	18	16	2075	2358	3417	4213	7630*
1998	1019	1662	142	165	20	21	1825	2114	3006	3962	6968
1999	1057	1651	132	158	36	37	1708	2055	2933	3901	6834

Source: UFS Information Management 31/05/2001

* Statistics for 1997 in Table 5.12 do not correspond to those in Tables 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 for the same year. The UFS Management explained that numbers for 1997 in Figure 5.12 include learners who, due to inability to settle their tuition fees debts, had to dropout of university.

From Table 5.12 it transpires that the UFS registered more female than male students between 1995 and 1999 – with white female students being in the majority within the female group. There was, however, a decline in the registrations of white female learners between 1997 and 1999 where figures dropped from 2358 to 2055 respectively. The number of African and Asian students increased steadily over the five years. The number of Coloured females also fluctuated continuously within the five years with an overall decrease in registrations from 1995 to 1997.

There was an increase in the registrations of African male students at the UFS between 1995 and 1999. The number of Coloured male students, however decreased over the five year period. A continued decline in numbers was noticeable from 198 in 1995 to 132 in 1999. Trends in registrations of Asian male students mirror those in the Asian female group where numbers in both categories increased between 1995 and 1996, fell in 1997, but picked up

again in 1998 and 1999. Registrations of white male learners declined chronically from 2569 in 1995 to 1708 in 1999.

Table 5.12 clarifies the fact that the UFS achieved notable success by enrolling more female than male students from 1995 to 1997. This is considered a success because it tallies well with national demographic patterns which record more females than males within the broader South African population. A contrasting pattern is evident with regard to registrations by race because contrary to African domination in the broader South African population, there seems to be more white students than there are from African and other racial groups.

5.5.4 Efficiency at the University of the Free State

The UFS takes the issue of efficiency and equity of outcomes as a serious measure of the quality of academic access. This observation is based on the initiatives that the UFS has taken, first of all, to investigate throughput and drop-out rates of learners. The emphasis is on improving success rates of particularly black students who, according to the Three-year Rolling Plan of the UFS are outperformed by their white counterparts. The approach of the UFS to efficiency seems to be to associate itself with the notion of access as parity and that of access as equal opportunities as discussed in Sections 2.3.4 and 3.4.2 respectively.

Structures like the counselling and placement programme form the heart of pre-entry guidance that is offered to first-time entering students. Academic development programmes have been established as a way of providing support to learners. Many of these programmes are discipline-based, except for the Career Preparation Programme which is closer to the foundation programme model. The language proficiency course (English and Afrikaans) is aimed at defying the language barrier to success in the Humanities. It is

worth noting that no reference is made in the Three-year Rolling Plan of the existence of academic development programmes in the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences respectively.

5.6 UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE (UDW)

5.6.1 Vision and mission

Even though it is absent from the three-year rolling plan, the UDW realises that lack of vision on any university's part would be a clear recipe for failure, or worse still, extinction. To emphasise this point, the UDW Working Group (2000:7) poses the following question: "How can we plan, or indeed survive, if we lack a vision of the type of student we hope to graduate? ...We must deliberately interrogate our situation to determine the extent to which we are producing the type of student the country and continent needs and indeed whether we have such a vision at all".

In its official mission statement, the University of Durban-Westville sets out to "make university education accessible to all, especially to students who are financially and educationally disadvantaged, thereby opening up opportunities for their personal growth and empowerment" (UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:1).

The foregoing exposition of UDW's mission statement illuminates the seriousness with which this university regards the issue of student access. It has been built in to form an integral part of UDW's mission statement. Phrases like "accessible to all", "financially and educationally disadvantaged", "opportunities", growth and empowerment" harbour strong messages of commitment to providing quality access which does not only attract students for the benefit of the university but which promises a host of benefits for learners too.

The university's proclamation of the intention to open access to "all" fulfils the advocacy of equal access to all deserving students (equitable access) regardless of what racial or gender categories they belong to. The mission statement further declares its determination to break down the barriers of éliticism in the provision of student access, thereby subscribing to the principles of massification of higher education which encourages, among other things, the setting up of strategies to increase participation of as diverse a student population as possible, irrespective of their financial status.

Allegiance to "redress" through reconstruction and development is an additional ingredient in the UDW's mission statement which focuses attention specifically to one of the most important forms of access – academic access. UDW is poised to admit students who are educationally underserved, give them chance to experience personal growth and empower them to seize opportunities as they present later in life. For a deeper understanding of the value of increasing chances in securing opportunities, Powney, Hamilton and Weiner (1997:3) argue that "by ensuring equality of opportunity in education... higher education institutions are demonstrating that they provide good quality services for all students". From the mission statement, it becomes apparent that UDW subscribes to this supposition. The researcher's personal assumption is that provision of academic support for such students underlies the principle of student development leading to equal opportunities for all.

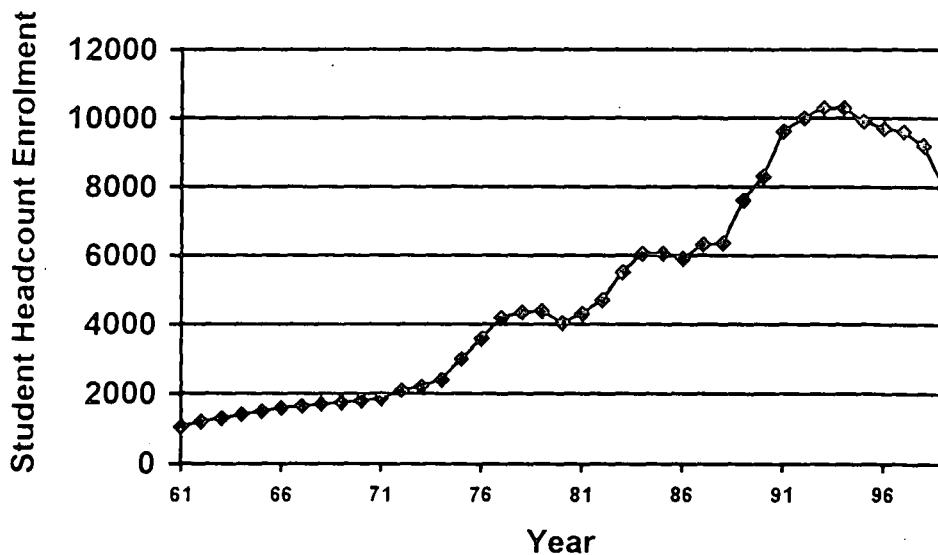
All in all, the researcher perceives UDW's mission statement as a powerful institutional voice which openly recognises the need to offer academic access to students from all backgrounds without reservations. Although the university's vision is not printed in the three-year rolling plan, one obtains from the mission statement an impression that as far as student access is concerned, UDW knows what it is doing and where it intends to go. The only

reservation that one may raise is that it is not openly stated as to how UDW will achieve its access aspirations. One may have to extract the strategic devices for enhancing the offering of student academic access in subsequent sections of the three-year rolling planning document, but ideally, a proper strategic plan should reveal its goals and the means through which they would be achieved.

5.6.2 Size and shape of the University of Durban-Westville

The period from 1995 to 1999 was characterised by a marked decrease in total student enrolments at the UDW. Figure 5.1 summarises the trends.

Figure 5.1: University of Durban-Westville-Total student registrations, 1995 – 1999



Source: UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

(a) Distribution by field of study, 1995 and 1999

The majority of the UDW students were concentrated in the Faculty of the Humanities between 1995 and 1999. There are relatively more students in the Management Sciences than there are in the Natural Sciences. This pattern is discouraged in the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997) and the Higher Education Plan (RSA MoE 2001) among other documents, both of which emphasise the need to have more learners studying in the fields of Management Sciences and Science and Technology. Table 5.13 is a tabular presentation of the distribution of students by field of study.

Table 5.13: University of Durban-Westville-Total* student registrations by field of study, 1995 and 1999

Year	Natural Sciences	Management Sciences	Humanities
1995	1837	3196	4557
1999	1386	2814	2991

Source: esATI 27/05/2001

Note: Humanities includes former faculties of Arts, Education & Theology Management Sciences includes the former faculties of Law & Commerce

* The researcher's intention was to use statistics for undergraduate enrolments as it was done in Tables 5.2 and 5.8, but the information received was not broken down by category of study.

(b) Undergraduate student registrations: distribution by category of study, 1995-1999

Table 5.14 points to a constant decline in the enrolment figures of undergraduate students where numbers dropped from 2364 in 1995 to 1432

in 1999. An increase was, however, experienced in 1997. As Cloete and Bunting (2001) and Cooper and Subotsky (2001) illustrate, the trends at the UDW are a reflection of what is happening in other HDUs.

Table 5.14: University of Durban-Westville-Undergraduate student registrations by category of study, 1995-1999

Year	Undergraduate
1995	2364
1996	2253
1997	2352
1998	1753
1999	1432

Source: esATI 27/05/2001-06-14

Note: Statistics for learners in access programmes for the period from 1995-1999 were not available

(c) Enrolment projections, 2000-2002

The UDW projects a further "downward trend, but at a reduced rate with some growth in Science and Engineering" (UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000:5). The projected growth in Science and Engineering is based on the hope that the newly-established foundation and bridging programmes in this field will boost enrolments. Stability is envisaged in the Faculties of Law and Economics and Management, but the Humanities are expected to suffer more decline in student numbers. Ways of intervention have already been explored to rescue the Humanities. They include the introduction of innovative programmes like cultural and heritage tourism which was recently kick-started in the Faculty of the Humanities.

5.6.3 Equity at the University of Durban-Westville

A discussion of the UDW's mission statement in Section 5.6.1 indicated UDW's commitment to achieving equity within the student body to reflect the regional and national demographic composition of the broader society. Table 5.15 is a portrayal of the student racial composition at the UDW.

Table 5.15: University of Durban-Westville - Undergraduate student registrations by race, 1995-1999

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
1995	1387	40	895	42	2 364
1996	1454	32	742	27	2 253
1997	1767	16	552	17	2 352
1998	1169	16	555	13	1 753
1999	904	20	487	21	1 432

Source: esATI 07/06/2001

Table 5.15 exhibits a persistent drop in enrolments of students from all population groups. The table also shows that UDW's enrolments are in line with national demographic profiles where Africans are in the majority and groups like Coloureds and Indians are the minority. It is noteworthy to realise that the regional picture is reflected in the relatively high numbers of Indian students. (Durban is inhabited by many Indian people.) This trend was also observed at NU. Another contributory factor to the high number of Indian students could be that the university was specifically founded for this group of people. Africans are, however, now in the majority.

Gender equity is not only an educational but a constitutional prerogative in South Africa. Universities in South Africa are required to pay attention to this

imperative by increasing the intake of woman. Table 5.16 presents gender statistics at UDW.

Table 5.16: University of Durban-Westville-Undergraduate student registrations by gender,1995-1999

Year	Male	Female	Total
1995	1117	1247	2 364
1996	1006	1247	2 353
1997	979	1373	2 352
1998	728	1025	1 753
1999	590	842	1 432

Source: esATI 07/06/2001

The figures in Table 5.16 depict a female prominence in UDW student population from 1995 to 1999. While male enrolments continued to decline within that five-year period, the number of female students increased in 1997. A decrease in female registrations was experienced in 1998 and 1999, but the numbers remained higher than male registrations. Overall, one may conclude that UDW has over the years registered success in providing access to women and girls.

As indicated in Section 5.4.3 of this chapter, Africans, Coloureds, Indians and women (from all population groups) were regarded targets of redress activities both in higher education and in broader societal settings. Table 5.17 illustrates how far UDW has opened access to these groups.

Table 5.17: University of Durban-Westville-Undergraduate student registrations by race and gender, 1995-1999

Year	African		Coloured		Indian		White		Sub-total		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1995	713	674	21	19	359	536	24	18	1117	1247	2364
1996	675	779	16	16	300	440	15	12	1006	1247	2253
1997	758	1009	7	9	206	346	8	9	979	1373	2352
1998	501	668	7	9	218	337	2	11	728	1025	1753
1999	397	507	4	16	177	310	12	9	590	842	1432

Source: esATI 07/06/2001

According to Table 5.17, African male students were more than the male registrations in the Coloured, Indian and white categories for the period 1995-1999. A similar pattern is noticeable regarding female enrolments as well, i.e. Africans are still in the majority, followed by Indians, Coloureds and Whites respectively.

This trend is a reflection of the overall institutional demographics at UDW. Enrolments for all racial and gender categories decreased continuously over the five-year period. Following an in-depth analysis of statistical data, Section 5.6.4 presents a description of efficiency indicators which could, in some instances, account for trends in 5.6.2 and 5.6.3 respectively.

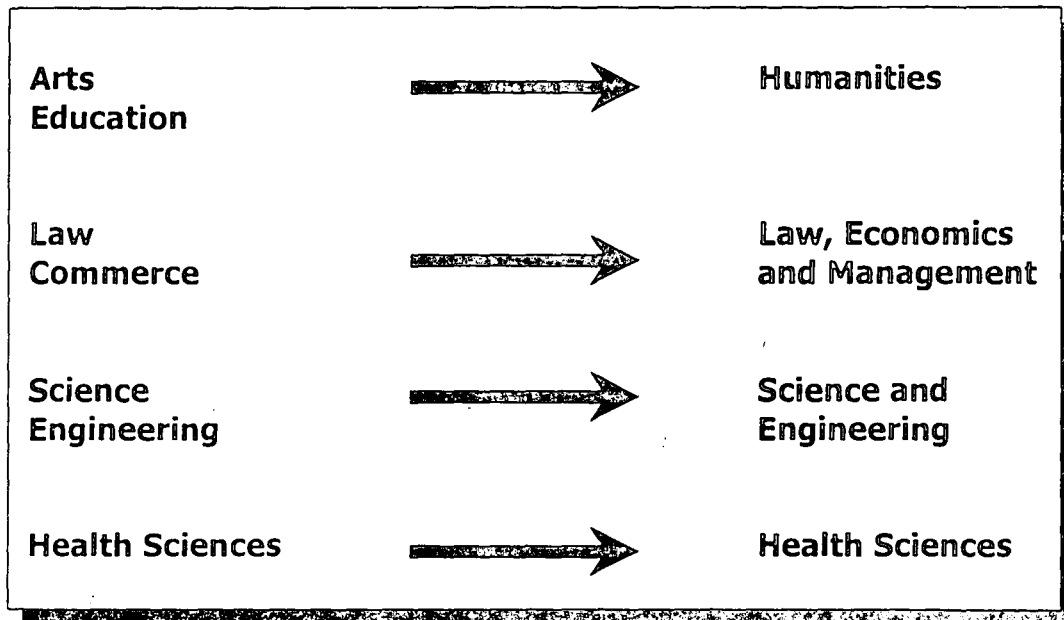
5.6.4 Efficiency at the University of Durban-Westville

In an attempt to achieve the set educational goals, UDW embarked on restructuring processes which have in some instances been completed, while in other cases, they are still in progress. These include the re-organisation of

faculties, rationalisation of some devalued programmes, rearticulation and the enhancement of teaching.

Following a comprehensive internal academic audit, the UDW Council accepted a recommendation to regroup disciplines and faculties as illustrated in Figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2: University of Durban-Westville-Old vs. new faculty structure



Source: UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002

The faculty restructuring process was followed by decentralisation of academic administration to school directors, discipline chairs and programme co-ordinators. The restructuring of faculties was done in consultation with academic staff and this, according to the researcher, is laudable in that staff might be fully conversant with reasons for the restructuring and claim a stake in the ownership of the final product.

Programmes in Drama, Fine Arts, Music and a number of languages were identified as financially and academically non-viable. They were thus discontinued. The Faculty of Engineering was revitalised to include industry-based programmes which would hopefully improve the sustainability of the faculty.

The reconfiguration of curricula was aimed at reducing duplication of courses and encouraging interdisciplinary co-operation. Specific criteria for the approval of proposed programmes included:

- Programme relevance *vis-à-vis* the development needs of the country.
- Improved learner-centred ways of articulating the objectives of programmes.
- Opportunities for graduate employability.
- Improved ways of dealing with issues of diversity in the learner population.
- Mechanisms to support student learning in the programme.
- Improved student recruitment and marketing strategies (UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:22).

Student achievement and throughput rates were seen to be low, particularly in the field of Science and Engineering. The following intervention strategies were put into place:

- (a) Consolidation of Academic Development Programme.
- (b) Expansion of the Engineering Bridging Programme.
- (c) Establishment of a Science Foundation Programme.
- (d) Development of University-Wide Foundation Modules.
- (e) Placement of first-entry students in a compulsory Language Development Module on the basis of testing.
- (f) Development of the Mentorship Programme.

- (g) Establishment of the first phase of the Upward Bound Intervention through the Academic Enrichment and Social Life Skills Development Programme (UDW Three-year Rolling Plan 2000-2002:24).

Although the chronic decline of student numbers discussed in Section 5.6.2(b) may place UDW among beleaguered universities, it is encouraging to realise that the strategies instituted to salvage the situation are not typical of the beleaguered approach. With the outlined strategies, it is hoped that the stability and some expected growth discussed in 5.6.2(c) will be attained.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 is indicative of an unstable higher education sector in which student numbers fluctuated significantly within a five-year period (cf. Tables 5.3 and 5.9). The situation is apparently worse in historically disadvantaged universities (as represented by UDW) where there is not really fluctuation but, in fact a persistent downward movement (cf. Table 5.14).

Responsiveness to national and regional demands seem to be the order of the day, since all three case study universities have made efforts to curb inequities (either gender or racially-based) in access to higher education (cf. Tables 5.6, 5.12 and 5.15). Relevance of curricula has also been taken seriously by the universities, as was demonstrated by the redesigning of curricula to meet employer, national and learner needs (cf. 5.4.4, 5.5.4 and 5.6.4). This redesigning of curricula went a long way in meeting efficiency needs, but only time will tell how successful these efforts will be. In all three institutions, there is evidence of support programmes and strategies. Even though they differ in content and structure, they all contribute to the achievement of access. Having analysed documented data on the implementation of student access at universities, results from a further probe into student access policy and practice will be described in Chapter 6.

EXPOSITION AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

Empirical research describes what has already happened. In a rapidly changing world, the validity of conventional research findings can quickly fade. On the other hand, systematic understanding cannot proceed without objective information (McGinn 2001:24).

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Data presented in this chapter were collected by means of two types of qualitative designs, namely individual interviews and structured focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted with university Registrars and Deans of the three case study universities, as outlined in Chapter 1. The faculties are Human Sciences/Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences. Structured focus group discussions were utilised to gather data from students at the three universities. In addition to the advantages of focus group interviews as discussed in 1.6.3(b), the research benefited from employing this method in that students were afforded an opportunity to freely express their views on their academic experiences and to make constructive suggestions for improvement purposes. The validity of information elicited from students' group discussions was increased by the fact that the researcher was an "outsider" whose status was not intimidating to students at any of the universities. In support of this view it can be asserted that it is **good practice** for a group interview to be facilitated by a researcher who is not

involved in the delivery of the educational phenomenon that is being investigated, particularly in the same department (QSC 1997:9).

6.2 ACADEMIC ACCESS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

6.2.1 Results from the Registrars' interviews

6.2.1(a)

Table 6.1: Profile of Registrars

Respondent	University	Period of service as Registrar
Mr P. Malgas	Natal University (Durban)	10 months
Prof. A. Brimer	University of Durban- Westville	6½ years
Mr V.F. Collett	University of the Free State	1 year

The interview sessions departed from an inquiry into the length of time participants had been serving as Registrars in their respective universities and whether their previous appointments were related to student access issues or higher education policy. This information was vital for the researcher because, among other things, it would enable the researcher to contextualise responses and attach them to specific timeframes – the researcher would know how deep to dig for information, so to speak. This information was also meant to enable the researcher to be more appreciative of the potential wealth of background knowledge and experience which the Registrars brought into the interviews.

Registrars disclosed varying periods of office in their current positions. At the time of interview the Registrar of the Natal University (NU) had served ten months, the Registrar of the University of the Free State (UFS) had served for one year and the Registrar of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) had commanded the longest service as Registrar he had held the position for six and a half years. He had previously served as Dean of a faculty, placing him right in the forefront of the implementation of academic access policies and aspirations of his university. The other two Registrars had also had been involved in student academic access matters. Mr Malgas (NU) had been a Registrar for two years at the University of the North, while Mr Collett (UFS) had had long experience of being a Director of Student Affairs.

It can be deduced from the afore-mentioned *status quo* that universities strive to allocate the responsibility of ensuring quality of service to professionals who command some kind of experience in similar or related matters. Could this signal the universities' commitment to the enhancement of students' learning experience? One may answer in the affirmative, but that is the initial step only. What the wide experiences can offer access initiatives at the three universities remains to be detected in responses to the interview guidelines as discussed in subsequent sections.

The content of the interview protocol can be categorised according to different aspects of academic access implementation. These include access routes into university, pre-entry guidance, academic support, relevance of the curriculum, support for lecturers, student success rates, availability of resources and access policy monitoring. These aspects cover both the actual and the epistemological types of access. The following responses were obtained:

6.2.1(b) Access routes into the universities

The specific question which Registrars had to respond to was:

What criteria are used to admit learners into this university?

Uniformity of practice in admission procedures transpired from the Registrars' responses with a few variations here and there. Matriculation exemption is regarded nationally as the main admission requirement to university education, so the three universities also implement it as the number one requirement for admission into the university. Additional admission requirements are stipulated by certain faculties within the universities – as will be disclosed later in section 6.3.3a(i) which deals with Deans' interview responses. The Registrars concurred that outside of matriculation exemption *selection criteria vary from programme to programme* (Registrar, UDW).

However, all admission processes are guided by either the universities' mission/vision or institutional values. For instance, the UDW is, according to the Registrar, highly considerate when it deals with the selection of historically disadvantaged learners. In his own words: *We are a socially-oriented university and as such we try our best to accommodate historically disadvantaged students.* While this statement bears testimony to UDW's commitment to the principles of redress and access to educational opportunities, the statement on the other hand opens itself to various interpretations.

UDW was specifically founded to serve Indian South Africans (who happen to be historically disadvantaged) and the current student population still reflects that legacy. In a way, one observes that UDW is continuing to match its access initiatives to the very reasons that necessitated its existence; it

therefore deserves credit for this. On the other hand, one may interpret the Registrar's statement as suggesting that the university has a choice between historically disadvantaged students and their "advantaged" counterparts, in which case the university would have gone the extra mile to facilitate the admission of historically disadvantaged learners (the former). But seemingly that is not the case; the university (UDW) is "stuck" with black students and the situation is not likely to change in the near future due to two main factors. In the first instance, the geographical location of UDW – within a 20 kilometre radius of Natal University – presents itself as a major disadvantage for UDW. Natal University has been a white English-medium university with an outstanding history of accommodative liberalism. It has attracted thousands of learners with good matric pass rates from all over South Africa and from other countries.

These historical and geographical facts have "overshadowed" UDW and left it with not many options but to explore different strategies of fighting the access battle. One of the strategies envisaged for the foreseeable future is the implementation of the Senates' Discretionary Conditional Exemption which entitles the former Committee of University Principals [the South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA)] to issue a certificate of conditional exemption to a person who, in the opinion of the Senate of a university, has demonstrated, in the selection process approved by that Senate, that he/she is suitable for admission to bachelors degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only.

While this is another obviously well-meant attempt at opening up academic access to learners who need it most, the researcher identified a huge gap which manifests into a paradox situation - particularly when thought of within the likely consequences for the learners. The cited Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption regulation (Amoore 2000) categorically emphasises that the bachelor degree certificates issued under these conditions will be

valid for admission to that university only. The implications for these terms are far-reaching and could be detrimental to the students' future. First of all, the very access route may become a stumbling-block to access in different settings in that it works against the principle of learner mobility which is highly encouraged in the new higher education dispensation. The student who gained access to a degree programme through the Senate's discretion is in a sense tied to that university, since there is no guarantee that his/her qualifications will be accepted at other universities if he/she should decide to enrol for further studies elsewhere. The question that arises from this situation is: Who stands to benefit from this access policy? Clearly students gain access to programmes which they may otherwise not have gained, but in the long run, the very access may turn out to be a barrier that prevents learners from exploring other avenues of obtaining a more credible type of academic access.

Universities, on the other hand, gain two-fold, firstly because they receive subsidy for students, and secondly because they have secured learners who may not be admitted at any other university for postgraduate studies – their only option would be to pursue all their studies at this one university only. Universities are warned, therefore, to exercise the utmost care when planning and finally implementing not only the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption, but other academic access initiatives as well. Such access initiatives should be to the benefit of learners and should bear longer-lasting fruits than is currently the case.

The UFS Registrar: Student Academic Affairs admits that while several criteria are employed by his university in order to accommodate as many deserving students as possible, the student admission systems at the UFS must be overhauled. *We must revisit the whole selection process at the university*, Collett said. According to the Registrar, some loopholes emanate from the fact that faculties are given the responsibility to admit their own prospective

students. This was done to allow some degree of academic freedom since even as they select their students, faculties do so within the boundaries of the broader institutional academic access policies. However, the Registrar observed that the university needs to tighten and improve on the current devices through which the executive management ascertains proper implementation of admission policies as recommended by the UFS.

Aptitude or other pre-entry tests are sometimes used for placement purposes. For students who are on the border of meeting the standard minimum admission requirements, the UFS Counselling Services are set to administer tests that normally determine whether an applicant gains admission into the main stream or is redirected to the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) at the university. This according to the Registrar, is the first step in the direction of *developing a proactive approach to career counselling* which the UFS is planning to follow in the coming years.

Natal University seems to also employ the "normal" common admission criteria of matriculation exemption overall and pre-entry tests, aptitude tests and pre-entry interviews in differing contexts. Although the Registrar decided to leave sharing disclosure of specific information to the relevant faculty Deans, he was able to mention that faculties, on the whole, handle their own admission processes, but he stressed that they were bound to operate within the larger institutional guidelines regarding the implementation of academic access policy and aspirations.

Academic development programmes are in place in all three universities, though they vary in size and shape. They range from the general Resource-based Learning Career Preparation Programme (RBLCPP) of the UFS, a foundation programme in Science at the UDW and several Alternative Access Programmes specific to different faculties at the NU. Different as they may seem, these academic development programmes share one principal goal,

namely to support learners who, for different reasons, need some "time-up" before they can participate fully and succeed in their desired or proposed fields of study. It is remarkable that universities have established these structures because not only do they enhance the quality of academic access, but they are in accordance with the stipulations of the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997). They are a means towards bridging the gap between the well-prepared and the underprepared school-leavers and an attempt at restoring the dignity and self-confidence of the latter.

The faculty-specific academic development programmes benefit learners a great deal in that the programmes orientate learners and prepare them accordingly to be able to confront and overcome challenges awaiting them in the remainder of their course of study. Such faculties are also likely to reap the benefits of the programme in that, according to the relevant Deans, students who undergo these programmes usually perform very well in their studies and this increases the faculties' output and thus the output of the universities at large. The CPP at the UFS also has benefits extending beyond opening up access to historically disadvantaged learners. It furthermore positions learners at the level of academic competence where they, following exposure to several fields of study, can easily place themselves into courses that best suit their personal learning abilities. So students gain access through a path that has led to personal self-discovery as well for each one of them. The academic development programmes advance the equity and redress agenda of the three universities as outlined in their three-year rolling plans and further assist the realisation of the national higher education aspirations for equitable access for all deserving citizens of South Africa.

Despite their efforts to put in place as many entry paths as possible, universities still have not been able to execute recognition of prior learning (RPL) and experience as a criterion for admitting learners into university education. Universities are aware that the South African Qualifications

Authority (SAQA) officially recommends the utilisation of this alternative entry route, but the three Registrars revealed some difficulty in the implementation of such. The main problem seems to be that the majority of "new" applicants for the bachelor's degree fall within the typical age cohort of 19-24 years. Most of them are Matriculation Certificate holders and do not have any prior learning or experience related to their desired fields of study. All the Registrars pledged their support for this alternative route, however, and believe it is a viable means of affording equal opportunities to university education. Another handicap to the principle of recognising prior learning and experience is that all over the world, academic institutions are still battling to formulate appropriate instruments for measuring experience, especially if acquired in non-formal settings.

Generally there seems to be a state of harmony between the three universities' admission policies and their operationalisation. There is also an identifiable commonality between the three universities' degree of commitment to exploring as many ways of availing university education to multitudes of South African students who seek admission at these universities. It would be interesting to note whether these commonalities can be identified even in other aspects of the access endeavours.

6.2.1(c) Pre-entry guidance

Related to the above question is the issue of pre-entry guidance for first-time entrants. In this regard, Registrars had to respond to the following question:

How are learners assisted in selecting courses of study?

The predominant way of assisting learners to select courses of study remains the use of the prospectus, or the year-book as it is sometimes referred to, that is available for all students at the beginning of the academic year. Mr

Collett, however, made an interesting observation that the prospectus/year-book had in the past decade proved an inadequate tool for aiding students' course choices – especially at his university. Collett stated that previously the year-book had been used by all universities as a marketing tool which is never easy to understand because it is actually a compilation of regulations aimed at people who are supposed to administer the regulations of the universities. In the past, universities relied on high school career counselling to introduce learners to the university curriculum, but after the phasing out of Career Counselling at secondary school level, the situation changed. In recognition of this fact, the UFS is preparing a prospectus in a summarised version offering broad information that will enable students to make career decisions. This user-friendly version of the prospectus is aimed at facilitating the inclusion of historically disadvantaged learners, most of whom are first generation university entrants. Collett accepted that the UFS year-book was structured for clients seeking specialised information, but in the new dispensation, the university has to deal with clients seeking general information about the university curriculum. This is a welcome move, because it will reduce the number of students who end up in courses that have little value or that do not satisfy learners' career aspirations at all. The researcher is of the view that career decision-making is an important process which should not be left to chance. It must be backed up by relevant information regarding careers and the courses that will lead to them.

The yearbooks are not the only means through which students are helped to choose courses of study. The UFS employs the services of Programme Directors to guide students. These are heads of programmes who are stationed at faculties to attend to all matters pertaining to the programmes, including providing information and interpreting courses to learners. While this is a good system, the researcher is under the impression that it becomes helpful mainly after the student has made a choice to enroll in a particular programme.

The loophole remains at the very beginning where students have to choose the study programme. As pointed out earlier in this section, many first-year students come to the university with very little information on what is on offer. Those who have some information are probably hanging on to old traditional programmes whose value have depreciated much in current times. This is why it is critical to have a facility through which students are made conversant with newly-introduced and niche areas of study right at the beginning of their university education. Well-implemented pre-entry guidance can curb the problem of students changing courses of study in the second or even third year of study when they gain more information about other attractive courses, thereby saving them time and money.

Guidance counsellors have been entrusted with the duty to assist learners to make meaningful course choices at NU and UDW. This is another effort by universities to provide quality access to learners. It would seem, however, that these services are more reactive than proactive. They mainly assist learners who encounter problems in choosing a career, leaving the ones without initiative to battle all by themselves. These counselling services are also used for placement purposes. If a learner fails to meet the minimum admission requirement by a small margin, he/she is normally referred to the counselling services for tests that would either recommend for admission in a certain field of study or a bridging programme of some sort.

Different other strategies are employed to assist learners in selecting courses of study. For some years NU has been engaged in vigorous media campaigns. Throughout the year, advertisements are broadcast on Radio YFM, giving information to listeners about the institution and the different programmes available. The campaigns attempt to enlighten prospective learners about the different study programmes which one may pursue in order to realise one's career aspirations. Asked about the effectiveness of this

strategy, the Registrar of NU could not comment since he said that he was not aware of any formal investigation to assess the degree to which the media campaign had been successful. From the researcher's point of view, this is quite an appealing method of pre-entry guidance which - together with other variables - is likely to yield favourable results.

In preparing for the visits to NU, the researcher picked up another interesting pre-entry guidance device – telephone communication. While hanging on, instead of the usual music that is often played on the phone, the caller is subjected to waiting time filled with valuable information regarding upcoming events like the career day and other information about the university and specific niche courses for which one may register. The researcher regards this as an innovative idea that can go a long way towards promoting and enhancing academic access of students to NU.

The UFS has also explored the use of the radio to offer pre-entry guidance to potential learners. Faculty representatives are continually speaking on Lesedi Stereo, for instance, telling listeners about various programmes that respective faculties have to offer. Listeners are free to phone in while the faculty representative is on the air and ask whatever questions they would like to ask or seek clarification where necessary. In this way, the university is combating ignorance regarding the university curriculum (as highlighted by the Registrar) and providing information that is general enough to enable prospective learners to make at least the first consideration regarding a probable course of study. A twenty-four hour help-line has also been installed by the UFS for prospective learners to access information regarding their envisaged courses of study at any time of the day. This is also another valuable means because it advances prospective learners to a level that leaves them seeking more specific information when they finally come to the university.

The UDW benefits from its participation in the regional consortium of tertiary institutions in the KwaZulu Natal area, which set up the Central Applications Office to the benefit of all its members. In addition to pre-entry guidance strategies already outlined, prospective students receive frontline guidance. The Eastern Seaboard Association for Tertiary Institutions' (eSATI) publication is made available to all learners seeking information about universities and other tertiary institutions in the above-mentioned area. The UDW's participation in eSATI does not only benefit access initiatives, but it also realises its institutional three-year rolling plan which in turn conforms to nationally higher education policy which calls for co-operation between tertiary institutions in order to permit and encourage learner mobility within the higher education sector.

Outreach programmes are the order of the day for the three universities. Instead of waiting for learners to knock at the admissions officers' doors, NU, UFS and UDW, through different faculties, have established programmes by which secondary school learners are exposed to information on what is on offer in a particular university and even more focused to specific study programmes. In this way, universities are not only opening up doors with regard to academic access, but are also making it easier for students to choose courses from an informed point of view.

On the whole, one is pleased to see that universities are doing their best to make student access to universities meaningful so that students may be assisted to register in careers they aspire for. This commitment to enhancing students' course choices benefits the universities and the students alike in that if students are satisfied that they are receiving the quality of academic access they had hoped for, they are likely to pass the word around and attract more learners to the universities. Financial gains are also inevitable for both parties in that the current funding formula are based mainly on the number of students a university has. Students' financial benefits result from

the savings they make by enrolling into the "right" programme and not shifting from one programme to the other during the course of their studies. Directing learners into niche areas of study increases graduates' employment chances, and that in itself can turn out to be a marketing strategy for the institutions.

6.2.1(d) Academic support for learners

The NU Registrar, Malgas, rightly pointed out: *You cannot give students access and let them fail in the first year or other.* Malgas was responding to a question that all three the Registrars were expected to respond to, namely:

What kind of academic support is available at the university to assist students to succeed in their studies?

Although approached from different angles, ongoing career counselling tops the list of mechanisms set up to provide academic support for learners. The UFS and NU seem to rely more on the faculty staff's goodwill in advising students accordingly on a continuous basis. The Registrars from both these universities are convinced that lecturers are willing to assist learners with relevant information, but in the researcher's opinion, the effectiveness of such an approach is highly doubtful, particularly so when there is no conscious initiative by the authorities to encourage and monitor its implementation.

The UDW has what, according to the Registrar and the students as well, can be termed a working approach to academic support. A peer mentorship programme has been established by which senior students mentor or supervise junior students in their respective study programmes. Each mentor is allocated a number of students (approximately four) to assist in any way possible in order to succeed in their studies. The success and effectiveness of this programme lie in the fact that mentors are trained prior to and during the

course of their mentorship status. They are also appraised from time to time in order to encourage them to execute their duties effectively.

The student mentors are given some financial incentives and this minimises the burden of financial stringency which most students have had to live with for a period of their study – in a way, the mentors do their utmost to maintain the status so as to continue receiving the remuneration for the tasks. This has also aided the success of the mentorship programme, especially because the majority of the learners at UDW come from impoverished backgrounds. As of January 2001, Senate has given the green light to the introduction of the staff-student mentorship programme to supplement the current tutorial system.

NU and UFS academically support learners by way of tutorials – offered both by senior students and lecturers. The tutorial system seems to be functional at both universities, but the efficiency issues still leave much to be desired. First of all large numbers of students in a class make it difficult for tutors to provide individual attention, so - in a way - the tutorials are only a little more effective than the lecturers. In principle, the student tutors are subjected to training with a view to assisting them to realise the programmes' objective. The gap, however, is illuminated at the monitoring level. The researcher probed in vain to establish whether a system was in place to monitor the success of the tutorial system. So the universities are concerned about student support and students' success in their studies, but whether the students are getting the required support in the way it was envisaged, is still a vague achievement as far as the two universities are concerned.

Psychological counselling is also available to students at NU and the UFS. Regrettably, the services are still more in the remedial than the preventive mode. What this means, is that learners access these services mainly when they experience problems with their studies. Little effort is evident that

psychological counselling services proactively support learners to succeed in their studies. To illuminate deficiencies in the current psychological counselling services, the Registrar (UFS) cited an old cliché that *best counsellors at the university are second-year students and yet they themselves are not well informed* (Collett 2000).

Pockets of enrichment courses are found sparingly at case study universities. They include from UDW's 1005 language development and life skills course to the Foundation Course on Lifelong Learning offered in the Career Preparation Programme at the University of the Free State. The Registrar of NU could not comment on whether there were such courses on campus or not.

At all three the universities students are encouraged to voice their opinions on the content and delivery model of their programmes. The Quality Promotion Units (QPUs) at NU and UDW played an instrumental role in advancing this course in the past. Students were required to fill in evaluation forms concerning their programmes and how they were taught. The results were then processed by the QPUs at respective universities. The seriousness of the student feedback mechanism is confirmed by the fact that results from the evaluations were disseminated to and discussed by the QPU and relevant departments. Relevant intervention procedures were then implemented accordingly. The Registrars confided that, at first, the QPUs met with a lot of resistance from the academic staff, but when positive results were observed, staff began to buy into the programme.

Obtaining feedback from students goes a long way towards enhancing the teaching/learning situation in that lecturers are able to adjust their instruction to suit learners' needs, knowing exactly what works and what does not work - thereby achieving student satisfaction. Encouraging learners to provide feedback shows that the university recognises them as valuable partners whose contribution to the improvement of the learning situation cannot be

ignored. This has a ripple effect in that learners will supposedly strive to do their best in the quest for success in their studies.

The UFS, on the other hand does not have a Quality Promotion Unit (as it is the case with NU and UDW) and as such does not have a formal structure through which learners can provide feedback to lecturers. A more informal approach system is utilised whereby learners are occasionally requested to fill in questionnaires regarding either the content of the programmes or learning facilitation. The faculties seem to do it more for purposes of curriculum redesign than anything else. The evaluation of the individual lecturers' didactical techniques has thus far been left in the hands of enthusiastic lecturers who may want to better their teaching.

The gist of the academic access debates lies in the ability of universities to support all students to make it through their studies. According to Morrow (1993) this is "true access", not access for the sake of increasing numbers for the universities. By providing academic support to learners, universities eliminate or reduce the occurrence of the endemic "revolving door syndrome" which plagued many South African universities in the past. The importance of academic support is emphasised in the Education White Paper 3 (1997) and other government legislative stipulations and as such should form an integral part of any student access initiative.

6.2.1(e) Relevance of the curriculum

Advocacy for the provision of academic support presupposes enrolment in relevant study programmes. To establish whether relevance of the curriculum is awarded its rightful status of importance, a number of questions were posed for Registrars to answer. The first question was:

Please state if and how your programmes have been re-designed/adapted to meet the requirements of the SAQA/NQF.

Unanimity was achieved in responses to these questions because pressure from the National Department of Education had forced all universities to re-write existing programmes and develop new programmes in a special SAQA/NQF format and submit them to SAQA for accreditation by June 2000. Data was collected in September 2000 and so all three universities had re-designed their programmes accordingly. Compliance with SAQA demands has far-reaching advantages in that universities are sure they are doing the right thing and that their students can fit in at any university in South Africa thereby realising the aspirations of the National Higher Education Planning Guidelines as promulgated by the National Department of Education.

The next question (still on the issue of relevance) required the Registrars to state ***the extent to which their respective universities were successful in offering aspects of the curriculum that enhanced students' experiences at their universities.*** Examples of such aspects included practice-oriented study programmes, the variety of choice of fields of study, opportunities to link prospective employers and learners' chances of getting a job after graduation. These will subsequently be discussed individually.

In essence, the three Registrars agreed that all the above-mentioned aspects fell within the spirit of the vision held by their universities. Individual institutional dynamics, however, necessitated variations in the realisation of these highly regarded principles. To emphasise the importance of the set aspects, the Registrar of the NU revealed that the *University of Natal wants to be a learning organisation and it stands to reason that these aspects are fundamental to the students' learning process in order for them to engage with the world outside when they complete their degrees.* By the above

statement Malgas affirmed that all the aspects were at the core of academic access initiatives at the NU and as such discussing them one by one would be belabouring the point.

The UFS, through its faculties, has been able to expose learners to practice-oriented study programmes as much as the nature of the programme and the capacity of the faculties concerned permit. In the researcher's opinion, these seemed like successful procedures. A variety of study fields are also satisfactorily spread out – enabling students to enroll in niche areas of study. This, in turn, increases learners' chances of getting a job after graduation. The university falls short in initiating opportunities for learners to link with prospective employers. According to the UFS Registrar: Academic Affairs, *Universities don't take graduate employability seriously*. The Registrar further pointed out that often universities assume that students are already informed and can therefore successfully secure jobs without help from relevant departments.

While the UDW subscribes to the values of practice-oriented study programmes and assist learners in their efforts to secure jobs after graduation, there is currently not much that has been accomplished in that direction due to the university's preoccupation with the transformation process which has sapped staff's energy levels. The Registrar reiterated that *the exhaustion suffered by academic staff makes it difficult for them to take up additional work like finding jobs for students*. However, he mentioned that new programmes to be launched would focus on a cluster of job opportunities. The UDW's Registrar also disclosed that, although programmes were tailored to meet their employment needs, learners from the UDW were not quite employable due to the negative perceptions of employers regarding HDIs. The situation is further exacerbated by the UDW's proximity to NU, which overshadows the former.

Notably, universities the world over are currently entangled within the controversies aimed at defining the relationship between university education and employability of university graduates. In asking this question, the researcher had no intentions of arguing for or against the notion. Rather, the intention was to sensitise universities to the fact that, like it or not, students bring with them certain expectations, overt or covert, which they would like to be fulfilled at the end of their study programmes. Being able to either self-employ or be employed is one such expectation. Numerous expects and literature support this observation by mooted that education, for that matter higher education, has to be planned in such a way as to develop this human resource potential in order to respond to the needs of the social and economic development of the country, while considering the expectations and attitudes of the people. An analysis of human resource development therefore becomes imperative in the overall analysis of the relationship between education and employment. This assertion is particularly relevant in South Africa where newspaper headlines like "Making tertiary education more appropriate for working" (*Star*, 2 March 1999), "Education is the only way out of unemployment" (*Sowetan*, 22 June 2000) and "Training for the needs of the economy" (*Black Leader*, September 1994: 15) are a familiar sight.

Universities have been criticised for a long time for neglecting students' demands and expectations in their curriculum development and other activities relating to provision of education at higher levels. An element of this neglect can still be detected from Registrars' responses implying that *universities don't take the issue of graduate employment seriously* and that exhaustion of academic staff makes it difficult for them to take up additional work. The issue at stake here is for universities to clarify for themselves as to whose interests come first – the universities' or the students' (the provider or the client). If universities insist on catering for their own interests first, would that not deter learners from enrolling at them, and if learners did not enroll

would universities continue to exist? These questions should lead us to the next consideration, namely the importance of student satisfaction.

6.2.1e(i) Learner satisfaction

If teaching and learning are core functions of universities, then learners are to be regarded as major clients of the same institutions. Borrowing from corporate principles, one notes that no company would exist without clients. Regardless of how much providers like their product, if potential clients are not satisfied with it, such a company does not have a place in the future. Universities are warned therefore to take learner satisfaction seriously in order to ensure their continued existence in the future. Whether this is already happening or not will transpire from the Registrars' responses to the question: *At the institutional level, how do you measure/assess the extent of learner satisfaction with programmes?*

To guide their responses, Registrars were given three examples of instruments to gauge learner satisfaction to comment on. Those were continuous evaluation of programmes, pass rates, and feedback from students. In all three institutions, it transpired that programmes were only evaluated at the departmental level. Although Registrars concurred that programme evaluation is an important exercise, it would appear that, at the institutional level, very little is being done to ensure that it is happening. The same can be said of student feedback. Registrars undoubtedly value feedback from students, but so far this has been left in the hands of individual faculties or even departments within faculties. What this might mean is that departments have the leeway to either collect feedback from students or not. The irregular manner in which this exercise is carried out, culminates in an enormous gap in the implementation of student access. It goes back to the question of how universities know they are doing the right thing and on what basis decisions would be taken regarding whether to

improve or discard certain programmes if perspectives from the primary consumers of university education are unknown.

At the moment the universal way of assessing the extent of learner satisfaction seems to be an analysis of pass rates. From students' pass rates in the university as a whole, at the faculty level, and at the study programme level, the executive management of universities derive a picture of whether they are succeeding to aid student progression from the time of enrolment up till completion. This method has proved effective so far, but the Registrar of the UDW highlighted a myriad of variables that might influence the interpretation of pass rates as factors depicting the extent of learner satisfaction.

According to the Registrar of the UDW, an overall average pass rate of approximately 62% was attainable at the university. However, the Registrar seemed dissatisfied with this pass rate. In his views, if students could show more commitment in their work, pass rates would be higher. He said the UDW constituted a student population from "the Coca-Cola society" whose values towards work are not entrenched, with the consequence that there is no culture of learning among students.

Historical factors also make it difficult to recognise student pass rates as a reliable indicator of learner satisfaction. Being a historically disadvantaged institution, more than 90% of learners at the UDW are from disadvantaged backgrounds with all their inherent difficulties. Apart from the fact that learners who went through the Bantu Education system come to university underprepared, they also have a problem in that they come from uneducated families who lack insight into the courses the university can offer, as well as further insight into which courses are more in demand and which their children can pursue successfully.

6.2.1(f) Support for lecturers

Dealing with a new type of student would, among other things, dictate that lecturers be capacitated to confidently address this new challenge. Registrars were asked to elaborate on strategies that their individual universities had employed in order to support lecturers to be able to implement institutional access policy.

An implementation gap surfaced from Registrars' responses. The researcher might rightly conclude that teaching staff at all three universities are expected to implement access policies without any support from the institutions themselves. Informally lecturers are encouraged by the executive management of universities to implement access policy, but how they must do that and whether they have the capacity to do it is normally left to them. According to the Registrar of the UFS, there was *no support*; they just had to deal with it. Some people can adapt, while others cannot (Collett 2000). The Registrar asserted that there was surely a need for training in this regard.

The Registrar of the UDW observed that in their capacity as members of the Senate some members of staff received an opportunity to participate in the drafting and development of academic access policy. In-service training was envisaged with regard to management of diversity and related access issues, but at the time of the interview that had not realised. Other than this, the situation as far as this matter is concerned, is not very different from the one at the UFS. In fact, comments by the Registrar of the UDW echoed those from the Registrar of the UFS. He said they were expected to do it themselves. The Registrar was convinced that staff deserved support, because they were otherwise specialists in the various fields which did not coincide with policy studies. They were trained as one thing, but were expected to be another (Brimer 2000).

Natal University management also seems to be aloof as far as providing support for staff in the implementation of academic access policies is concerned. The university relies on staff's attendance at national workshops on access policy and hopes that they will be able to translate that into the execution of institutional policies. This is a weakness in the system, because - although institutional access policies are modelled on national ones - they are often so institutional-specific that further training is required to be able to maintain the links between the two. According to the Registrar, staff's involvement in the drafting and development of academic access policies depends on their positions, but it sometimes happens in staff's personal capacity. The attitude of passing the buck becomes clear from the Registrar's utterance that *policy framework is in place to guide the process, but champions are needed to drive it through* (Malgas 2000). The Registrar also asserted that *it would be difficult for the university management to drive that in case the management impinges on the academic freedom of faculties*.

The casual attitude by which universities seem to treat the issues of academic support results in an unwelcome access policy implementation gap and - to a large extent - makes the genuineness of other access policy initiatives questionable. This situation becomes particularly sad for a university like the UFS whose lecturing staff have to this day, been dominantly white. Most of them have taught white and well-prepared students and yet they are currently faced with an equal number of black students, most of whose level of preparedness from secondary schools is insufficient. It becomes a futile exercise to develop policies on academic access and not assist proper implementation of such. Universities therefore should treat the issue of support with urgent attention in order to make some progress in this regard.

Lack of support for lecturers is a disadvantage for both students and lecturers alike. It might negatively affect lecturers' performance in that genuine limitations on their part could be interpreted by learners as deliberate efforts

to deny them epistemological access, leading to perpetual misunderstandings and lack of trust on the part of the students. Lack of support from the executive management may demotivate staff and force them to concentrate their efforts only on subject-related issues, leaving aside academic access policy matters. When that happens, the universities would be hard hit as all their access policy aspirations would be reduced to nothing without implementation.

6.2.1(g) Support of students by lecturers

The issue of support extends to students as well. In order to enhance students' academic experiences, lecturers are expected to provide assistance to learners through their teaching methods, availing themselves for consultation outside teaching lessons, supplying adequate and accessible teaching material and using the language that is understood by all in sessions. Not much information could be extracted from the Registrars on this matter. Their hope was that faculty Deans and department heads were enforcing it at the operational level. English is the sole medium of instruction at NU and UDW, but the UFS presents an interesting case in that both English and Afrikaans are recognised as official modes of instruction.

Asked about the status of each language at the UFS (especially in a classroom situation) the Registrar commented that the parallel-medium system had so far worked well for the university. Despite the fact that, for most subjects, there is an "Afrikaans" and an "English" group, the Registrar alleged that lessons are *mainly [in] English and it is a uniting factor so far*. Critics have doubted the concept of a parallel medium of instruction because they point out that in most cases one language dominates the other. The Registrar's assertion that lessons are conducted mainly in English could imply that English presides over Afrikaans, thereby violating the principles of a parallel relationship. Why English presumably enjoys wider usage in the classroom

compared to Afrikaans is another acknowledged access dimension which warrants further investigation.

6.2.1(h) Students' success rates

Student success rates is one of the more important indicators of the quality of academic access. Commenting on the student success rates at their institutions - particularly based on output statistics, graduate employment levels and the retention and success of graduates - not one of the Registrars was in a position to provide accurate information. Structurally, statistics on student profiles, including pass rates, are handled by a different department and this management practice, contrary to the researcher's expectation, distances Registrars from the success/non-success realities. Ideally, input should be followed by output - in this case students completing their degrees and preferably within the stipulated period of time. My understanding would be that this should top the Registrars' monitoring priority list, not only as a self-evaluation mechanism, but also as a move in the planning and improvement directions. Recognition and execution of this fact could be equated to subscription to the ethos of access with success; neglect of such could work against the ethos.

Registrars did not have information regarding graduate employment patterns. None of the three universities has a formal graduate tracer system and none of them had plans to institute one in the foreseeable future. Reasons advanced for the absence ranged from a lack of finance for such activities to limited expertise available to do the job. While these are valid and comprehensible reasons, the big question still remains, namely how do universities know they are supplying the market with the "right" product? Could this mean universities care less about what happens to their graduates on completion and, if so, are there more efficient mechanisms of ensuring that public funds are utilised for the good of the country?

Issues pertaining to students' success can be broken down to overall learner success at the institution, but it also involves keeping track of the success of learners in specific priority programmes like Science and Technology and Commerce and Business Studies. Failure by institutions to ascertain that deviates not only from institutional but from national policy which strongly recommends the production of personpower in those specific programmes. The success of designated groups like blacks and women is also a priority in the national policy stipulations. It would be to the universities' advantage therefore, to align the practices to ensure the success of such and to keep the necessary records as a frame of reference for improved human development services. Failure in this regard also translates into deviation from national aspirations and thus defeats the whole academic access agenda.

6.2.1(i) Strategies to enhance students' academic experience

Despite uncertainty with regard to students' success rates, Registrars said that strategies were needed in order to enhance academic access and improve the throughflow of students. High-powered technical training; regular review of universities' missions, visions and values; providing personal contact with students; offering programmes in modular formats; and combining contact and distance learning principles were advanced as some of the strategies that had been successfully implemented to encourage the success of learners in a variety of study programmes. Realising that students are not passive recipients of education, Registrars stated that still with a view to consummating their learning experience, learners are encouraged to work in teams and assist one another towards the realisation of their professional goals.

6.2.1(j) Barriers to academic access

The operationalisation of student academic access is a problematic process because inevitably there are usually factors which frustrate universities' efforts. Such factors have systemic, institutional or personal origins. At the national level, a remark was passed that *the whole higher education system has been a dysfunctional one due to political ideologies that prevailed in South Africa for decades* (Malgas 2000). By this statement the Registrar was referring to the instability of the higher education system resulting from the transformation initiatives within the sector. Though the student access policy framework has been formulated, the implementation of it is still at an experimental level since universities only received guidelines not so long ago. Frequent and continuous promulgation of papers and acts relating to higher education in general occupies university administrators' schedules and leaves them limited time to focus on academic access issues. Universities are optimistic though, because - as the Registrar of Natal University pointed out - *NU is doing their best to intervene in history*. One aspect which bears testimony to this fact is the increasing representivity of the student profile at the NU and the other two case study universities.

However, the historic classification of people in terms of their skin colour has left scars on the higher education system like it has done in broader societal circles. Lack of trust between black students and white lecturers (particularly at the UFS) surfaces as a hindrance towards the attainment of meaningful academic access for learners. Where there is no trust, there is tension and where tension reigns, chances are that there is very little learning taking place, thereby jeopardising the very policy that allows for the opening of academic doors to learners who would previously not have been accepted at this university.

The effects of an inefficient secondary school system are felt by the higher education band. The three Registrars concur that universities are registering learners who are academically not prepared for highly demanding university studies. Coupled with the apparent lack of work ethics from the students, learning at university becomes a mammoth task for some. The consequences are that such learners either take longer to complete their bachelor's degrees or eventually drop out completely.

Financial instability is another factor which prohibits students from benefiting maximally from the academic experiences at universities. With the exception of a few, most learners finance their studies from the parents' purses. This has caused universities a lot of difficulties because needy learners spend much time shuttling between the university and the home; in extreme cases, sorting out financial matters may last up to a month at the beginning of a semester, by which time the students have suffered a great deal in terms of the subject-matter. The three universities have taken strong measures to try and curb the situation in varying degrees. Academic merit bursaries are offered to students who excel in their studies. For the average performer, universities have been able to organise student loans offered at very enabling conditions (Malgas 2000).

As far as the finance issues are concerned, the three universities deserve some credit for acting in accordance with their access policies, especially when dealing with financing students' education. This good practice is well captured in the Registrar of Natal University's observation that *financial access is increasingly becoming a right, not even finances should preclude learners from academic access.*

6.2.1(k) Access priorities as perceived by registrars

The fact that academic access is intertwined with other forms of access and is made possible by them cannot be negated, but the reality is that, for a number of reasons, universities often find themselves having to choose which access form will be most likely to back up the provision of academic access at a given time and attend to it first. In view of this observation, the Registrars were given the task to rate the importance of financial, physical and cultural forms of access (in aiding academic access) as prioritised by each of their institutions.

It was not surprising that the Registrars reached agreement in their list of priorities. South African universities (irrespective of category) are currently subjected to more or less similar challenges and this forces them to want to (without knowing it) respond to the same challenges at the same time.

Financial access claims the first position on the list of priorities. The diminishing government subsidy to universities, the difficulty of securing bursaries and loans for students, the increasing student debt to universities and the inclusion of students from impoverished communities are some of the realities that raised an awareness in the Registrars that *money is what makes the world go round* (Registrar, NU) and as such has to, at this point in time, be given immediate attention.

Access to infrastructure (physical access) was reported to be the second most important phenomenon in supplementing student academic access. After admitting students to the university and specifically to certain programmes of study, Registrars recognised the need to avail physical resources to enable them to succeed in their studies. The size of the classroom, for instance, can play a very crucial role in enhancing the learners' academic experience, as it

has a great deal to do with the instructional methods that can possibly be employed within the space available. The rise in the demand for higher education at the beginning of the past decade and the introduction of new courses which sometimes require specialised infrastructure, put universities under pressure to expand their physical resources.

Important as it is, cultural access was labelled as the last - not in importance, but in terms of when universities could be able to give it focused attention. In actual fact, the Registrars acknowledged that changes in the broader South African context call for the diversification and transformation of universities. Each of the three universities is challenged differently to address cultural issues in their institutions. The UFS and NU, being historically white universities, must approach the issue with caution to ensure multiculturalism and not assimilation of minority groups. The likelihood of ethno-stress should also be minimised as far as possible. The UDW, on the other hand, does not face issues of black and white cultures, but more of ethnicity within the black student population. However, like the other two case study universities, the staff profile does not reflect students' demographic composition. Whether or not they are able to instill acceptable cultural values, remains much in doubt. Disturbances at the UFS student residences that resulted from culturally motivated misunderstandings could be a sign that more still needs to be done to address this problem, as it could influence the mood in the classroom situation as well.

Disregarding cultural access jeopardises what the Registrars mentioned as one way of enhancing student academic access, namely developing a person holistically. It also negatively impacts on issues of relevance of the curriculum, since that kind of education is likely to produce graduates that are a misfit in their own societal backgrounds. The NU is committed to promoting cultural access first not only because of the political context in South Africa, but also because of the geographical location of the university. In the

Registrar's words: *This region is cosmopolitan and as such needs tolerance for whoever can identify with our people* (Registrar, NU).

6.2.1(I) Resources

Resourcing is one way in which student academic access can be enhanced. The premise here is that no matter how good the academic access policies are that an institution has in place, if they are not backed up by resources to ensure proper implementation, they are likely to serve only a part of the purposes for which they were developed, thereby creating a gap between policy and implementation. Resources, however, have for a long time been in short supply. To this effect, Sheehan (2000:2) observes that "competition for resources has always been a feature of university life."

In response to the question: ***How appropriate and adequate are the resources of this university to enhance academic access policy implementation?***, Registrars mentioned that - as far as physical resources like libraries, workshops and laboratories are concerned - universities, on the whole do not seem to experience very serious problems, but there are definitely some shortages in certain sections. It is the resourcing of these facilities that is problematic. The equipment in the libraries, laboratories and workshops is generally said to be sufficient for use by students, but the problem is that high technology equipment like computers quickly become outdated, requiring immediate replacement in order to continue offering the curriculum that is responsive to what the rest of the world requires.

Financial resources are a rare commodity for the three universities. As the Registrar of the UDW pointed out, universities *are just broke, financial resources are just not existent* (Brimer 2000). As pointed out in an earlier section, substantial cuts in government subsidy, large amounts of student debt and the pressure to keep up to date with resources are some of the

factors that account for the financial stringency under which universities operate. Borrowing from the Registrars' assertion that "money is what makes the world go round", the researcher moots that lack of financial stability can and is hampering the execution of academic access policy in a very big way.

One of the difficult situations arising from lack of financial muscle is the rationalisation of staff (including lecturers) that was said to be taking place at some faculties at the UFS and NU. A reduction of personnel without a proportional decrease in student numbers stretches the human resources to the limit as student:staff ratios become disproportionate, thereby impacting negatively on staff's energy levels and demotivating them to exhaustion. In a situation like that, there can be little hope for efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of academic access to learners. Policy left in the hands of burnt-out and demotivated staff might be as good as policy that is non-existent.

The issue of resources is directly linked to student academic access, as resources are vehicles by means of which access policy aspirations can be realised. Shortages in any type of resource may hinder the realisation of such policy. Registrars shared in this view and declared that their universities were involved in fund-raising projects in order to counteract the situation of diminishing resources. In this way universities are becoming masters of their own future and development. "Nevertheless universities must also pay due attention to their students if they are to maintain financial viability" (Coaldrake 2000:3).

6.2.1(m) Access policy and monitoring

The monitoring of academic access policy implementation at the level of institutions within the South African higher education landscape matters a great deal. The three case study universities aligned themselves to this school of thought and injected mechanisms and procedures through which

the operationalisation of academic access would be monitored. Their assertion is captured by the viewpoint that *although it's a faculty concern to select students into programmes the university must make sure that the processes used comply with the universities concerns* (Collett 2000).

6.2.1.m(i) Monitoring devices

An array of monitoring devices have been instituted at the three case study universities. The offices of the Academic Registrars and, in the case of one university, the academic management portfolio committee, are charged with the overall monitoring responsibility. Feedback from Deans and school directors, as well as analysis of examination results and clearing access programmes with the Matriculation Board are mechanisms and procedures which combine to form some sort of system for ensuring that academic access policy is institutionalised without failure or at least with minimal deviation. On completing student registrations at one specific university a process commences at the faculty level to ensure that all enrolled students qualify to be at the university and particularly at the concerned faculty.

6.2.1m(ii) Gaps between academic access policy and implementation

Nevertheless, gaps which make it difficult for academic access policy to be implemented and monitored were identified by the Registrars. Deficiencies in the management information systems at universities pose a problem in that the task of assessing whether their access initiatives are succeeding or not becomes almost insurmountable. As a result decisions relating to academic access are based on "myths" not facts and as such may not be appropriate.

A mismatch in practice between institutional admissions policy and its execution at the faculty level was reported by the Registrar: UFS. The

phenomenon of academic freedom and sectoral autonomy has not been clearly defined to draw the limits to which they should expand. University management consciously left space for faculties to attend to academic access matters in good faith but seemingly some faculties took advantage of the situation – particularly in conducting student admissions. Lack of transparency has been said to plague certain “protected” faculties. The Registrar at the UFS mooted that a change of focus must happen for the university management to penetrate the concerned faculties and *to make sure that selection processes are transparent enough for all stakeholders to know the criteria at this university* (Collett 2000).

Although it did not come directly from the Registrars, the researcher gathered that there was little monitoring of the Deans to persuade them to apply academic access policies correctly in the teaching and learning component; the management waits for the end of the semester or end of year results to get a picture of what could be happening at different faculties. According to the researcher, the indifference of the management towards day-to-day practices of faculties shields irregularities and in universities that have a history of exclusion could perpetuate the values of discrimination under the pretext of academic freedom and knowledge of specific needs for their faculties. Institutions are therefore advised to stand on firm ground in their efforts to guarantee proper implementation of academic access policy, but they invest time in formulating policies which, due to lack of monitoring on the management’s part, easily fall into disarray.

One of the biggest challenges confronting the implementation of academic access at the UFS is the *lack of integrated admissions policy to enable [universities] to achieve the mission statement* (Collett 2000), particularly with regard to being a leading university in serving the communities within which it is located with specific reference to communities which were formerly

marginalised. This problem can actually be interpreted as a cause for the disparities in admission practices discussed in an earlier section.

As is happening all over the world, universities in South Africa operate as fragmented but very powerful units on their own. Each unit functions chiefly according to a set of regulations which should ideally be modelled on the broader institutional vision, mission, and values, but oftentimes deviate enormously – firstly because there is little monitoring and secondly because there is no “master” policy which guides the favourable implementation of academic access policy in all sectors of the university. Case study universities professed to be reviewing their access policies and as such could not provide the researcher with any documentation in this regard. One university did not have an access policy and was not in the process of developing one. Strategies to change these circumstances are obligatory in order for universities and faculties to achieve a common platform in realising the provision of quality access to deserving learners.

The geographical location of universities, especially that of the UDW, is incoherent to institutional aspirations of opening access gates wider to accommodate more learners. The campuses are separated from the communities because they are isolated and relatively inaccessible, particularly to learners who cannot afford to pay for lodging on campus and who commute daily from their township homes to universities. Besides putting the physical strain on the student bodies, commuting places an even bigger stress on the often meagre financial resources of many students. Irregularities in class attendance and punctuality may result from these circumstances, thereby exacerbating problems of failure and slow progression and a “revolving door syndrome” that is visible in the South African higher education.

6.2.1m(iii) Closing the policy implementation gap

Universities have taken cognisance of the structural and procedural limitations discussed above and for two of them plans are under way to rectify identified gaps. The UFS established two committees to tackle issues of academic access. The Access Portfolio Committee looks at broader access initiatives, whereas the Throughflow Task Group (as the name indicates) advises the Rector about strategies that can be employed to improve progression and the ultimate throughput of learners. Both committees were newly founded and the success or otherwise of them has not been measured, but whatever the results may be, the researcher deems the move as an important change of circumstances that demonstrates the university's commitment to enhancing student academic access.

UDW intends strengthening the capacity-building path in creating enabling conditions for students to benefit maximally from their academic experiences. Stronger links are envisaged with communities to educate them and encourage them to enrol their children and support the university in every way possible. This strategy, it is believed, will give parents (both current and prospective) insight into the academic offering and enable them to support their children accordingly with the result that learners might progress better and obtain degrees in stipulated periods. If it should take off, the UDW would have achieved a lot with this access initiative because one of the factors prohibiting smooth progression of learners is the fact that they come from families with little education and often no capacity for supporting students. The success would also fulfil the university's values of being *a socially-oriented university* (Brimer 2000).

In keeping with views that success in studies hinges heavily on the choice of course of study, the UDW plans to reinforce career guidance activities. One of the contributory factors to student failure is lack of capacity in choosing

programmes of study. Students with little or no guidance enter into courses of study which they sometimes can hardly cope with either due to the complexity of the content, the demands in terms of the workload or even because the courses fail to satisfy their inner professional/career aspirations. Offering extensive career guidance prior to entry and during a course of study is always a welcome initiative.

Another critical area in achieving "access with success" is by developing academic staff. Although the Registrars buy into this view, plans to establish a formalised in-service training for lecturers (especially with regard to access and policy issues) are still far-fetched. Going by the Registrars' submission that *academic access is a university concern, but a faculty input*, it would seem inappropriate to postpone staff training to a later, unspecified time. Regardless of how hard the university and the faculty Deans may strive for quality in student access, if the people who do spade work are incapacitated to carry out the tasks, all other efforts boil down to nothing.

Of all the recommended access routes, recognition of prior learning and experience is the one that is highly underutilised. Flowing from higher education policy at the national level, the Registrars located the rationale for recommending this channel as a means of entry to university education. According to them *RPL is a moral objective to intervene in the gaps that resulted from history* and as such should be implemented by all universities in South Africa. What has hampered its use so far, is the fact that the majority of learners seeking admission into university are freshly graduated from secondary education with required pass marks. Those who fall out of the typical age cohort of university entrants (19-24) often have no prior learning or experience, so opportunities to employ RPL hardly present themselves at undergraduate level.

The foregoing deliberations reveal an inseparable relationship between academic access policy and its implementation. Irrespective of what good policies are in place, if they are not followed by proper implementation, the objective of enhancing academic access may not be realised. In the same way, the implementation process should firstly be backed up by close monitoring to first of all ensure that the manner in which it is carried out is in accordance with broader institutional access concerns, and secondly to identify whatever gaps may arise with a view to bridge them as quickly as they are spotted. The fact that the monitoring of academic access policy implementation has not taken a firm grip within the university systems may be detrimental to the future existence of these universities, especially in this era when students and parents have developed zero tolerance for non-delivery and deviation from institutional promises.

6.3 ACADEMIC ACCESS AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL: RESULTS FROM THE DEANS' INTERVIEWS

6.3.1 Introduction

As indicated in the methodology section, not all faculties in the case study universities were included in the study. The Faculties of Economic and Management Sciences, Humanities and Natural Sciences were selected for the study. The section below will be an extrapolation of interview responses from Deans in the concerned faculties. The same information was sought from Deans as was sought from Registrars. The only difference was that the Deans had to speak for their faculties, not for the universities as a whole. An interesting point of clarification at this point is that the Registrars function at the policy development level, whereas Deans of faculties function at the level of policy implementation (operational level). The expectation flowing from the different positions is that there would be some kind of co-ordination between the two levels to ensure that academic access policy is implemented

as conceptualised at the national level. Whether this is the case or not will be illuminated in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

6.3.2 About the faculties

The autonomous status enjoyed by the university sector makes these institutions complex entities which need to be approached with great caution, particularly in carrying out scholarly studies like the current one. The freedom to group disciplines together in a faculty according to criteria that each university sets for itself, results in a diverse range of offerings within faculties which makes each faculty in a given discipline a unique entity. Attempting a comparative study would assume homogeneity of faculties, whereas the reality is that there is variation in the structural arrangements which, directly or indirectly, may influence the way in which faculties are run and the manner in which academic access policies are interpreted and implemented. For purposes of this research, the disciplines under scrutiny will be referred to as the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Natural Sciences respectively. This will disregard specific names by which these faculties are known in their institutions.

6.3.3 Particulars of respondents

Faculty perspectives were obtained from the Deans themselves. In instances where the Deans could not avail themselves, faculty representatives (either faculty managers or programme directors) were given the responsibility. The following table summarises the profile of participants from all three universities:

Table 6.2: Profile of Deans and faculty representatives

Respondent's name	University	Faculty	Position in faculty	Period in current position	Previous position
Ms A. Bevis	NU	Humanities	Faculty Manager	1½ years	Lecturer
Prof. A.B. Lumby	NU	Economic and Management Sciences	Dean	5 years	Lecturing professor
Prof. J.J. van den Berg	NU	Natural Sciences	Dean	6 months	Senior lecturer
Mr A.G. O'Shea	UDW	Economic & Management Sciences	Programme Co-ordinator	1 year	Lecturer
Prof. D.P. Mc-Cracken	UDW	Arts & Humanities	Dean	6½ years	Lecturing professor
Prof. R.G. Ori	UDW	Natural Sciences	Dean	6 years	Head of Department
Prof. T. Crous	UFS	Economic & Management Sciences	Dean	1 year	Head of Department
Ms C.H. Havemann	UFS	Natural Sciences	Senior Faculty Secretary	15 years	Teacher
Prof. D.F.M. Strauss	UFS	Arts & Humanities	Dean	2 years	Lecturing professor

In addition to the period of service in current positions, it is valuable background to note that all the respondents have an expanse of experience at the universities and in the same faculties as well. It is the researcher's conviction that the many years of experience within the faculties injected the insight that will inform this study tremendously.

6.3.3(a) The responses analysed per aspect of academic access

6.3.3a(i) Access routes into the faculties

Over and above the broader university admissions' criteria, information was sought to establish whether learners had to satisfy additional admission

requirements to study in various faculties or not. The following are some of the criteria used to admit learners into South African universities:

- **Matriculation exemption**

From the information that the Deans and faculty representatives furnished, matriculation exemption remains the paramount "calling card" for access to most disciplines. In the field of Humanities, matriculation would be all that is required from students except for a few departments like Geography which insist on a pass in Mathematics over and above the exemption. Expectations are relatively high for learners who wish to register in the Faculties of Natural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences where a pass in Mathematics is a definite prerequisite. Furthermore, even within various departments, admission requirements hike even higher for learners who intend pursuing studies in niche areas of study like Micro-Economics, Accountancy, Financial Management, Information Technology, Physics and Chemistry where a D symbol on higher grade or an A symbol on standard grade for Mathematics is a cut-off point.

According to the Deans and faculty representatives, the above-mentioned fields of study are abstract and call for high analytical skills and a good grade in Mathematics is considered one of the indications that learners possess these skills. Field-specific professional bodies also are a force that lays the rules for admitting learners into the faculties of Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences respectively. They are statutory bodies with powers to either credit or discredit a programme in a specified terrain if, in their view, it does or does not comply with stipulated regulations. Thus faculties are often left with too few options but to comply.

With the decline in matric passes over the past years for numerous school-leavers, obtaining a minimum of a D symbol on higher grade or an A symbol

on standard grade is a "pie in the sky" – particularly for learners from historically disadvantaged communities. While the researcher understands that these are necessary quality control mechanisms, one would advise that implementers rethink the practicality and appropriacy of the mechanisms in the context of a higher education experiencing a period of transition. A paradox situation emerges from this practice in which insistence on "quality and standards" may culminate in the exclusion of the majority of matriculants in these fields of study which strategically happen to be among the national development priorities in the new dispensation.

If, at least in principle, it is believed that education and training open avenues for employment, the exclusion of the bulk of learners (especially from historically underserved communities) perpetuates the status of inferiority which this group of people have been relegated to for years in the labour market. Faculties should therefore embark on a regular self-evaluation to reposition themselves to serve the interests of the new era through their programmes and processes and not to, intentionally or unintentionally, be seen to cling to old paradigms. Besides denying learners a lifetime opportunity, these high admission requirements contravene national policy (RSA 1997; RSA DoE 1997; RSA DoE 1998) which encourages an increase in the number of students who receive university education, especially in selected fields of study like the Economic and Management Sciences and the Natural Sciences respectively.

- **Deans' discretion admission policy**

Deviations, however, are occasionally noted where - in special cases - an E symbol on higher grade or points lower than 36 may earn a student access into these "protected" fields of study as per the Deans' discretionary admission policy which makes some considerations regarding the students'

ability to succeed in the desired programme after serious scrutiny of the learners' profiles.

- **Academic development programmes**

The respondents commented that faculties had identified a gap in the academic access policy implementation and were taking steps to rectify the situation. Several options are presented to learners (mainly from historically impoverished backgrounds) who do not qualify for admission into the mainstream, particularly in the Faculties of Natural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences. Learners who fall short on the required matric points may take a one-year Foundation Course in the relevant departments which would later make them eligible for access into higher qualifications. By so doing, universities, through the faculties, recognise their obligation of re-directing students to help them gain access to one form of programme if they cannot get admitted to the other. The Resource-based Learning Career Preparation Programme at the UFS and a one-year Foundation Course in Business Studies are some programmes which equip learners for admission into the main stream.

- **Extended degree programmes**

Another recent development in the universities' efforts to broaden access to programmes was the introduction of extended degree programmes in specific fields of study. In these programmes, the faculties identify students whose matriculation results (± 30 points) suggest a potential of succeeding in a degree programme. Instead of the normal three or four years of study, such learners are subjected to a longer (about five years) period of study than learners in the "normal" degrees. This is achieved by spreading subjects within a course over the years, thereby allowing learners an opportunity to tackle subjects in smaller, manageable chunks. Instead of doing five subjects

per semester, learners in the extended degree programmes would do three for instance. The reduced load is usually in the first year. Van den Berg called this an *easying in process* which aims at letting students find their footing before they are confronted with mounds of university work. Examples of such programmes include an extended Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) degree of the Management Sciences at the University of Natal, an augmented curriculum Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree of the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Natal, UDW and the UFS. A reduced load programme of the Faculty of the Humanities at Natal University is running smoothly. At the UDW there is no academic development programme for the Humanities but the Dean realises it is crucial to have one. *There is none, but I badly need it* (McCracken 2000).

- **Tests**

Aptitude and/or pre-entry tests are other ways through which learners may gain access to desired fields of study. These methods are, however, losing popularity due to the criticisms that have been directed at them with regard to their efficiency, appropriacy and cultural implications for their usage, so their usage has diminished over the recent years.

- **Recognition of prior learning and experience**

Recognition of prior learning is another one of the pathways which have been officialised by the national policy documents. Like the Registrars, Deans have in theory bought into the concept, but as McCracken pointed out, *it is still coming*. Almost all respondents denied having used this method of admitting students into their faculties, either because they had not come across situations which heralded its usage or they had not established mechanisms by which prior learning could be assessed in their own fields of expertise. The primary reason for recommending the use of RPL as an access route was

to redress the imbalances of the past with regard to access to higher education, but what transpired is that more needs to be done at the national level to guide universities as to how this access route can best be followed.

It is encouraging for one to realise that, as far as admissions are concerned, universities, through faculties (which are the operational level) have taken heed of the recommendations from the National Department of Education to increase participation of learners in various fields of study. Previously, some universities, specifically in the historically white category, adopted an élitist attitude to the issue of access. The emergence of the new dispensation cast a myriad of challenges to higher education institutions (including finding ways of broadening participation) and, much to their credit as illustrated by the opening up of various entry paths, universities are poised to win the admissions battle. There are more challenges relating to the phenomenon of academic access and the results in subsequent sections will show how universities fare in addressing them. One such challenge is the offering of pre-entry guidance to learners.

6.3.3a(ii) Pre-entry guidance

Previously, universities enjoyed time in their comfort zones because learners would persistently knock at the universities' doors in the quest for higher education. During that era, the universities had the luxury to pick and choose students from a large pool of applicants. Faculties (within universities) also had their own share of comfort. The tendency was for them to await either a stream of students flowing from the institutions' central admissions offices, or a mound of application forms from prospective learners seeking registration in the faculties.

Apparently things have changed in recent years. Growth in the provision of private higher education and the strengthening of the technikon sector left

faculties wondering what happened to those multitudes of learners who went to lengths scrabbling for limited places in faculties of their choices. Various disciplines have been threatened, each in its own way. The Humanities have been challenged by allegations of overflowing the labour markets and offering outmoded curricula, whereas despite their seemingly stable position as a niche area of study, the Economic and Management Sciences are confronted with fierce competition from Business Colleges which offer, among others, short courses in commercial subjects. The Natural Sciences, at least for now, still have the privilege of a discipline in high demand.

6.3.3a(iii) Outreach programmes in schools

A proactive approach to academic access has as a result been adopted by universities (through faculties). Instead of "sitting and waiting" for learners, faculty teams go out to schools in (and sometimes even outside) their vicinity to recruit potential students into different disciplines. The strategies take up different forms, ranging from pure marketing of departments to outreach programmes which are designed to enhance learner success in related subjects with a view to attract students into relevant faculties later when they join the university.

After obtaining admission into the universities, learners have to confront another challenge – choosing a specific course of study first within the universities and then within faculties. This matter is receiving serious attention at all universities because the Deans concurred that that was a critical period in students' lives which should be treated with utmost care. This view was captured in Havemann's observation that *we feel it is an expensive hobby to come to university these days; this is why permanent structures have been set up to assist learners in making one of the most critical decisions in their lives – choosing a career path.*

6.3.3a(iv) Pamphlets and brochures

Asked about how learners were assisted in making course choices at the operational level (faculty level), Deans and faculty representatives responded unanimously about the use of pamphlets and brochures. At the beginning of the academic year, all learners are supplied with faculty-specific booklets and pamphlets to familiarise them with the different options that one may pursue.

6.3.3a(v) Faculty personnel

Provision has been made within the structures of the faculty to appoint personnel who will guide learners towards an understanding of faculty brochures and put their programmes together for them. Faculty managers give students general information about the faculty, while programme directors handle queries pertaining to specific programmes on offer. In response to the researcher's concerns regarding the availability of the faculty managers, the response was that various avenues are open for communication with faculty managers and programme directors. An open-door policy whereby learners may walk into the office to seek help, is the commonly used approach to access. Post and e-mail facilities can also be utilised.

So far, faculties are happy with the success they have achieved in their efforts to guide students towards informed course choices. How long the current strategies will remain successful, cannot be predicted. What one may suggest is for universities and/or faculties to keep exploring more ways of broadening and aiding access of students into their programmes.

6.3.4 Academic support for students

Achieving the equity of results that is emphasised in the White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997) should be the paramount objective of all access initiatives. One way in which this can be achieved, is by providing academic support to enable students to succeed in their studies at a stipulated time for the relevant study field.

Robust activities are in place at the three sample universities to facilitate progression of students towards graduation. These include offering tutorials and mentorship programmes for "low" performers, providing individual guidance for students on occasion, opening up channels for students to give feedback to lecturers regarding the course content and/or the methods of instruction, extending programmes for learners who show signs that they may not be able to complete within the minimum timeframe, and establishing discipline-specific academic development programmes. All these mechanisms of support form a web of a holistic approach to increased efficiency. The adoption of each method varies in depth and breadth from one university and/or faculty to another. These will be looked at in more detail now.

6.3.4(a) The tutorial system

The predominant means of ongoing support at NU and the UFS seems to be the tutorial system whereby senior (mostly postgraduate) students are appointed and allocated a number of periods a week in which they meet a group of students to discuss problematic aspects of the curriculum. A limitation of the tutorial system in both universities is that students have an option to either attend or not attend the tutorial sessions. The assumption here is that students who need help will participate, but the truth is that often students never realise or admit that they need additional help. Those who do

realise this, may not realise that tutorials may help them. The challenge which faculties are faced with is to pre-figure whether the tutorials will benefit learners in their current shape or if maybe a revamp is necessary to incorporate some measure of compulsiveness.

6.3.4(b) The mentorship system

Peer assistance takes the form of mentorships at the UDW. As is the case with the tutorial system, senior students take on the responsibility of supporting junior ones. The demarcation line is that with the mentorship programme, one senior student "looks after" a given number throughout the year. It does not happen in a big group. What promised to maximise the efficiency of this method of academic support was the fact that mentors were supposed to avail their services to their mentees at all times and to discuss primarily subject content but also to lend a listening ear to other concerns outside of the curriculum which could in any way hamper the academic success of mentees. Reading about it, this may sound like a lot of work for mentors, but the training they receive and regular assessment of their performance help them gain control over circumstances.

The Deans' responses to the issue of student support fit in with what the Registrars advanced as expectations of the institutions' management at the operational level. Harmony between these two levels of universities' functioning holds promises of efficiency and the ultimate realisation of academic access policies. Still convinced that universities are operating in accordance with national policy aspirations for academic access, one may argue that academic support carries more weight if it is offered to students who are enrolled in disciplines that are considered to be of value not only for their professional lives, but for the country as well.

6.4 RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

6.4.1 Conformity to SAQA/NQF

Besides the normal faculty routine of continuously redesigning programmes, the Deans and faculty representatives mentioned that from the year 2000 all courses had to be refashioned to meet demands of relevance as laid down by SAQA/NQF. This the respondents said they did *radically*, starting with major programmes which they had developed in collaboration with professional boards and then moved over to electives. Modular formats and unit standards were some of the products of the process of curriculum redesigning.

6.4.2 Success in enhancing students' learning experiences

The next important question on issues of relevance of the curriculum was:

Please state whether your faculty is successful in offering the following aspects of the curriculum which are believed to enhance students' learning experiences: practice-oriented study programme, opportunities to link with prospective employers and learners' prospects of obtaining a job after graduation.

Their responses were the following:

6.4.3 Practice-oriented study programmes

The extent to which learners received work-related practicals depended largely on the faculty and even the course of study one was pursuing. NU's Dean of Economics and Management Sciences emphasised that *it is not possible to do some commercial degrees without venturing into the practical*

side as well (Lumby 2000). Deans disclosed that some disciplines, specifically within the Faculty of the Humanities (at all three universities) tended to be more on the theoretical side. In the Management Sciences, learners were asked to compile a business plan which would be implemented by a company. Performing a task of this nature has irrefutable benefits for the quality of students' learning circumstances. It builds learners' confidence in the courses, increases the likelihood of earning a job and lets them know they have reached a certain level of competence.

The Humanities also jumped on to the relevance band wagon. The establishment of courses in Industrial Psychology, Communication Science and other new subjects are initiatives which signal the setting-in of a new identity. A B.A. degree in Sports Management (at the UFS) qualifies learners for internships at the Health and Racquet Club (now Virgin Active), thereby giving them work experience which enables them to gain deeper insight into the study programmes. A teaching practice facility for B.A. Education students and short-term internship programmes for psychology students are some of the ways in which the Faculties of the Humanities enhance student learning experiences.

Courses in Information Technology, Chemistry and Physics have, according to respondents, traditionally been backed up by laboratories which concretise theory and provide an additional mode of learning, making it easier for learners to grasp and expand on the learned concepts.

6.4.4 Opportunities to link with prospective employers

As far as learners' chances of acquiring a job are concerned, the researcher got an impression that all is well for graduates of the Economic and Management Sciences and those from the Natural Sciences. As more and more business concepts emerge, so do the job opportunities for graduates

with commercially-inclined training. The Deans in this area are therefore comfortable about the future of their products. The same observation applies to graduates from the Natural Sciences. A handful of them hold bursaries from interested companies which, in some cases, bind students to working for them on completion. This in a way serves as a guarantee for future employment.

The benefits of establishing links between students and the employer community do not start after graduation; rather they commence during the time of study. Apart from the obvious financial benefits, the prospects of a "waiting" position are likely to increase learner motivation to achieve better results. This is the type of academic access that strives to satisfy learners' career inclinations and feed into the labour market as well advances the national policies' aspirations for the production of more personpower in selected disciplines. The information pertaining to learners' chances of getting a job is based more on perception than hard facts because no formal tracer systems are in place at the three universities; the details they have are mostly anecdotal.

The Humanities depict a different trend from the other two faculties. Currently there are very few students who are connected to potential employers, either through sponsorship learnership or by other means. The chances of acquiring a job after graduation are equally slim and this places them in a situation of disadvantage. The trend of minimal chances of obtaining employment for Humanities' graduates seems to originate from the conservative perception that Humanities do not necessarily have to prepare people for employment, because, as McCracken postulates, *This is quite a new area – we haven't seen ourselves as a professional faculty.*

In essence, McCracken admitted that the Faculties of Humanities were not successful in enhancing student experiences with regard to many aspects of

relevance of the curriculum. McCracken and the other colleagues in the field do, however, acknowledge the need to fortify the provision of these aspects of academic access; hence a collective shift towards assuming new educational objectives. This move is very welcome because it happens at a time when universities in South Africa and the world over are expected by the public to play a role "as producers of graduates with relevant capabilities for their use as employees, self-employed professionals or employer" (Gallagher 2000:2). In recognition of this fact, the UFS Faculty of the Humanities shares information like the fact that *students are prepared for the labour market from their first year*.

6.4.5 Determination of learner satisfaction with programmes

Determining whether learners are content with their study programmes does not seem to be an issue of great concern where faculties are concerned. From the responses they gave, it became clear that, for a number of years, there were no mechanisms for learners to provide feedback regarding programmes and the way they were presented. It is since recently that students' feedback has been given some attention, though not to any convincing degree in some universities. When feedback is obtained, the information is used chiefly for the rearticulation of programmes, for staff development purposes, and to promote increased service delivery within programmes. Differing trends are prevalent though, because while some institutions do it annually after examinations, other departments do it after every three years or so, because according to them the exercise is time-consuming. Questionnaires are the common means of data collection from students. In a few cases class representatives liaise with the faculty student council to try and solve problems where they occur.

6.4.6 Pass rates

Pass rates are another indicator of students' satisfaction with programmes. It is common practice in all three universities that, after all major examinations, results are analysed course by course in order to establish strengths and weaknesses for self-evaluation purposes. Some departments take it a step further and link the analysis of results to student evaluations so as to decide on an appropriate intervention.

6.4.7 Support for lecturers

In the researcher's view academic staff training should be at the centre of all academic access processes if institutions are to realise their vision for the enhancement of academic access. To find out if universities share in the same view, respondents were confronted with the following question:

Please elaborate on strategies that have been/are being employed to prepare academic staff for the implementation of institutional access policy.

A generally bleak picture was portrayed by respondents, but a ray of hope could also be spotted in the discussions as illustrated below. For many of the respondents the first reaction fitted within the following sample verbatim responses:

Support for lecturers is *always taken for granted*; there is actually *very little actually... we try to ad hoc it*"; *not much*; and *not at the moment*.

6.4.7(a) Involvement in policy development

The first handicap is that academic staff do not get involved in access policy drafting – either at the national or at the institutional level. The only faculty members that seem to be part of the policy development are Deans because by virtue of being members of the executive councils they participate in most decision-making processes; other than that, there does not seem to be any kind of involvement.

6.4.7(b) Dissemination through documents

The Deans admitted that after academic access policy had been developed, no clear strategies were adopted to cascade it to the level of lecturers. A few modes that are often utilised would be for the availability of a policy document to be announced by the faculty head or another person in a position of power. While this is undoubtedly one way of supporting staff, methodological gaps may be attached to it. The interpretation of written text often differs from one reader to another. So, to disseminate policy only through documentation, may open its implementation to various objectives based on the many different interpretations.

6.4.7(c) In-service training

There are pockets of good practice as far as staff in-service training is concerned. In addition to what was referred to as *a few information sessions through school boards and faculty committee meetings, in-service staff training is carried out in workshop situations where topics like 'cross-cultural etiquette' and 'promoting student-friendly faculties are discussed* (Strauss 2000). There are cases where training in academic access issues is targeted mainly for newly-appointed staff. This approach assumes that "old" staff

members know it all, but the question may be whether they were offered training when they first entered the universities. If not, how would the universities ascertain that the information they have on academic access policies is updated to match the rate at which the South African higher education sector is transforming?

A noteworthy concern was raised by one of the Deans and, according to the researcher, this could account for why universities are not very eager to invest resources in supporting staff for the better implementation of access policy. The feeling is that there are no incentives from government for institutions who make efforts to institutionalise academic access policies. In his own words, the respondent complained that *government doesn't appreciate... it does not give additional subsidy to conforming institutions* (Strauss 2000). The researcher regards this as a valuable contribution from institutions which calls for government to step up positive efforts of encouraging proper implementation of academic access policies in South African universities.

6.4.8 Academic support (from lecturers to students)

With regard to student support, conflicting views were heard from respondents. Specific aspects like the teaching methods of lecturers, consultation periods outside class and the language of instruction had to be considered.

6.4.8(a) Teaching methods of lecturers

Concerning the teaching methods of lecturers some respondents mentioned that they were varied to suit different students' learning styles and levels of preparedness but others stated that the methods were *not sufficiently varied due to the fact that most academic staff are not trained teachers* (Lumby

2000). Imbalances in student:staff ratio were advanced as another factor which made it difficult for lecturers to utilise other methods of instruction to supplement the predominant lecture method. Some courses register between 100 and 300 learners and this makes it practically impossible to use, for instance, group work within the restricted space available within lecture halls.

The researcher sees a gap here, which negatively affects the implementation of academic access. Regardless of the general consensus that learners must have equal opportunities to learning at policy level, the implementation process exhibits shortcomings. The predominance of the lecture method over other teaching techniques means that only those learners whose learning styles suit the lecture method benefit. Learners who learn better from other instruction techniques may never get an opportunity to actualise their potential if lecturers use mainly methods that conflict with their learning styles. In this way the principle of equal opportunity for all learners is violated.

6.4.8(b) Consultation outside the lecture sessions

As was the case with the aspect of teaching methods, respondents failed to reach consensus on the availability of lecturers in support of students outside the lecture rooms. On the positive side, it was mentioned that it was the *policy of the faculty and indeed of the university* (Lumby 2000) that *lecturers are awfully helpful to students* (Havemann 2000), although she could not commit herself to pronouncing it a formal and structured faculty policy. The positive side of the practice in out-of-class consultation arrangements was diluted by utterances like, *We leave it to students to take the initiative to seek assistance* (Lumby 2000) and *not all courses offer out-of-class tuition or consultation due to the downsizing of staff and because lecturers are already teaching to their fullest* (Bevis 2000). Another statement that proves that the issue of support is left largely to the student was: *the lecturer gives as much*

as you want, if you don't trouble the lecturer you may not benefit much from the learning situation (Lumby 2000).

6.4.8(c) Language of instruction

For all three universities, English is an official medium of instruction. In including this aspect as a point of discussion, the researcher wanted to find out how universities offer students access to information in the midst of under-preparedness and second-language speaker status incurred by many students in South African universities. Faculties seem to pay due attention to this. There are in-house language proficiency programmes aimed at equipping learners with the right language skills to tackle their respective fields of study. Also, *courses are designed with second language-speakers in mind'* (Ori 2000).

As pointed out in an earlier section [6.2.1(g)], the UFS operates according to a parallel-medium policy. According to Deans at this university, there are very few problems originating from this policy; questioned about the language capacity of lecturers who underwent most of their schooling in Afrikaans, Havemann declared that *practice makes perfect... Afrikaans-speaking lecturers now speak better English*. Crous mentioned that contrary to the general impression that African students are disadvantaged by the parallel-medium system, *Afrikaans learners face problems of English text books*. He said that although some students choose to take tuition in Afrikaans the problem is that textbooks are for international consumption and are thus written in English. Crous and other Deans are effectively ruling out speculations of black students being disadvantaged by the parallel-medium policy, but this must still be tested against end-users' (students') opinions in subsequent sections.

Procrastination seems to be the name of the game when it comes to issues of student support. The Registrars (institutional) passed the responsibility to faculties (operational level), citing that academic access is a university concern, but a faculty input and the faculties are passing the buck to learners in that they leave it up to students. The researcher identifies this attitude as a major deficit in the implementation of academic access of students, because lack of student support has a history of entrapping learners within the system and letting only the fittest survive. In actual fact the researcher wishes to lodge strong criticism against neglect of student academic support since, in her opinion, success in studies becomes the primary goal of students' participation in different disciplines. Failure to encourage learner progression with the ultimate goal to support them through to completion and graduation leaves one with no choice but to question the integrity of the universities' student admission agenda. One may equate this failure to the principles of the expedient perspective discussed in 2.7.4. Is it not a self-serving endeavour which has no other interest but to exploit students to ensure the continued existence of these institutions?

6.5 STUDENTS' SUCCESS RATES

Another major category in academic access debates is the ability of the system to process students and see them through different stages of study until they reach completion. Some of the commonly used success indicators in this regard include students' pass rates, retention rates and graduate employment levels. To determine what the *status quo* is with regard to the above success indicators, Deans and faculty representatives were asked to comment on patterns of students' throughflow at the faculty level for the past three years, specifically referring to the success indicators highlighted above.

6.5.1 Pass rates

As far as pass rates are concerned, differences were observed in institutional achievements, though the sources of information may not be as reliable as desired. From what the researcher could gather, responses for this part were mainly based on speculations, not statistical evidence. Many of the respondents were reluctant to comment on their faculties' pass rates because they said that pass rates were usually investigated at the institutional level. Inconsistency of responses transpires at this point, culminating in repercussions for academic access policy implementation. When asked to comment on how they measured students' satisfaction with programmes, respondents mentioned that faculty results were analysed on a regular basis [see section 6.2.1(e)]. What can be concluded from the above observation is that either faculties do not self-evaluate their academic access practices - in which case it would be difficult for them to improve - or faculty management treat issues in isolation, analysing results for purposes of assessing learner satisfaction and failing to see the possibility of using the analysis to determine students' progression as well.

Despite the uncertainty, respondents were still able to respond (though vaguely) to the question of patterns of pass rates, using benchmarks like re-admissions statistics. Verbatim responses included utterances like, *Can't quite say, but re-admissions were quite a lot at the beginning of the year* (Havemann 2000). The researcher's interpretation of the above statement would be that many students did not make it into the next year of study, essentially amounting to high failure rates in the Faculty of Science on behalf of which she was speaking. It was also highlighted that pass rates were satisfactory for all learners in the first year except for low performance in Information Technology, which resulted from a lack of preparedness of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds in this area of study.

Low performance in other areas of study could be attributed to limitations in numerical and language skills.

6.5.2 Retention rates

Some degree of speculation could also be detected in responses to enquiries about retention rates. A statement like *no study has been undertaken on this, but the drop-out rate is not significantly high* (Ori 2000) is evidence of this. Based on the responses gathered, the researcher realised that retention rates differed from discipline to discipline and the factors which affect these patterns negatively or positively were also identifiable.

Retention rates were said to be generally good in the Economic and Management Sciences and in some Natural Science subjects. The greatest attraction luring students to persevere in these fields seems to be the availability of prospects for employment after completion. This observation brings us back to the issue of the importance of offering a curriculum that is in some way or another suited to the world of work. The Humanities seemed to experience problems in keeping students in their faculties because, according to respondents, learners transfer to explore other fields of study: *They first use us as a spring board to other faculties* (Bevis 2000).

Consensus was reached among all respondents that financial and academic barriers accounted for considerable numbers of drop-outs. Students from historically disempowered backgrounds are the worst hit, especially if they are enrolled in programmes which do not easily attract sponsorship from student financing bodies. They are often unable to pay for studies at some stage in their student life and are thus forced to leave university. A lack of or low capacity in handling the subject-matter has also claimed students' enrolment at either the universities or in certain disciplines. The tendency has been for

learners to change course of study from the traditionally "difficult" subjects like Natural Sciences to the presumably "easier" ones like Arts.

6.5.3 Graduate employment levels

As revealed by the Registrars, there are no tracer systems at universities to establish where students go after graduation but Deans admitted that such a system could be useful as a way of judging the quality of academic access and to use the information in formulating new curricula or improving existing ones. On this matter the researcher could only obtain a few remarks.

There was a feeling among Deans in the Humanities that employment is hard to come by for their products and thus far there is no end in sight for this trend. The Deans said that until new programmes were introduced, employment levels would continue to be low for graduates in the Faculties of the Humanities. The future looked brighter for graduates in the Economic and Management Sciences, more so in departments like Information Technology (IT) and Accounting. According to Crous, *Accounting courses are very demanding to study, but they fare very well on the employment charts.*

O'Shea introduced a unique point of discussion in response to questions on employment patterns of graduates. He said that, in his opinion, *The university is not only about employment, but it's about broadening one's mind for the health of the society.* O'Shea's contention was that too much emphasis is often placed on employability, projecting it as a chief indicator of student success. According to him, students' success in studies can also be assessed by observing personal growth attained by students and the contribution they make towards societal development. The researcher accepts this point of view because among other things, it brings out the concept of "access for the common good" which was discussed briefly in the literature review. O'Shea did, however, not rule out employability of students

as one of the objectives of academic offerings, and reported that learners in some of his departments are employable both locally and internationally.

On the whole, Deans were not content with patterns of students' throughflow in their respective faculties and had taken the trouble to institute some strategies to intervene in this regard.

6.6 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THROUGHFLOW OF STUDENTS AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Many of the strategies were covered in the academic support section, but some are worth discussing in this section as well. Most of the strategies are self-explanatory and as a result no lengthy discussion will be entered into.

Two overarching statements were made to summarise the prevalence of strategies used to enhance the success of students. The first is that *universities have (at the operational level) implemented better strategies than there were a number of years ago* (McCraken). The second observation points to the nature of strategies as generally focusing on *increased support for students* (Crous). This is achieved through the following *modi operandi*:

- Provision of re-tests to encourage good semester marks.
- Strengthening of support structures like offering personal guidance and tutorials to learners.
- Introducing mixed mode instruction methods like computer-aided instruction for students to have alternative ways of engaging with the subject-matter.

- Regular curriculum refabrication to prevent students from switching over to other fields of study.
- Programme evaluation by learners.

As was noted with the aspect of student support, universities again fall short on handling the issue of student success. The biggest problem would seem to be the absence of a sound information management system which would ideally serve as a resource which institutions may fall back on for self-evaluation purposes, for decision-making on relevant issues and for the general information of all members concerned to improve efficiency and effectiveness of all academic access processes. The promising thing is that universities have recently been able to pick it up that some form of intervention is needed to enhance students' success rates. The result was the exploration of the strategies discussed above. It must be noted, however, that the universities' efforts to promote the success of students in studies do not necessarily mean a complete eradication of obstacles. Some factors which hinder student success could still be identified and these are illustrated below.

6.7 BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A host of variables surface as hurdles which frustrate students' aspirations towards the realisation of academic success. These multifaceted forces can be grouped into the following categories: system-related barriers, student-related barriers, teacher-related barriers and barriers emanating from the students' socio-economic backgrounds.

6.7.1 System-related barriers

The fundamental system-related barrier, as pointed out by Deans, is the low level of preparedness that is increasingly displayed by first-time university entrants. The Deans expressed the opinion that the school system failed to equip learners with basic skills like organising, studying, writing and reading skills, without which learners find it very difficult to cope with university education.

Large numbers of students who are admitted to universities (massification) make teaching a daunting task. As more and more students enter the universities, classes become bigger and bigger, compelling lecturers to rely mainly on the lecturing technique (with all its limitations) for classroom interaction. The problem is exacerbated by enormous cuts in staff numbers. The disadvantages of exploiting one method of instruction were illustrated in earlier sections.

6.7.2 Student-related barriers

The first mistake that learners make is to make the "wrong" choice of study field. This view was advanced by several respondents. They observed that the phasing out of career guidance at the school level had a detrimental effect on learners. The latter come to universities with little or no information regarding which careers they may pursue and they use this meagre information to choose a field of study. The problem arises when students choose courses which demand more from them than their intellectual capacity can match, or when they discover somewhere in the middle of the course that is not likely to lead them to their desired career. The consequences of choosing the inappropriate course of study include frustration, a lack of motivation and sometimes subsequent failure or drop-out.

Recent years saw the emergence of a new type of learner – the student-earner. As the South African economic situation is deteriorating, Deans observed that more and more learners are compelled to work full-time and study full-time. In the past, a student could study part-time and or work full-time, but not do both on a full-time basis. It defies any reason to assume that anybody who registers for full-time studies while holding a regular job can perform to maximum capacity in either role. One of the two responsibilities is bound to suffer and usually it is the studies, because students still regard attendance as optional, not compulsory. This situation is not unique to South Africa. It has been observed, that in the United Kingdom there is evidence that a majority of all students are working in some type of employment, on or off campus. A large number of students indicate that work is a necessity to meet expenses of college and avoid accumulating heavy loan debts" (Newton 2000:9). The researcher shares in the misery of these students, because they are often pushed by circumstances, but at some stage either the student or the university must intervene to rectify the situation.

Another barrier to academic access is what participants called wrong priorities and/or poor work ethics. Laziness, lack of commitment to task and lack of discipline on the students' part are components of the unacceptable work ethics that Deans referred to. Reversed priorities are exhibited in behaviour like pre-occupation with parties, over-indulgence in extra curricular and boycotts by students. Often they fail to realise that university study programmes *are not a picnic... there is no play time* (Havemann).

Absenteeism is a widespread problem and a big hindrance to academic success as perceived by the Deans. In all three case study universities, some learners were reported to habitually engage in truancy. They treat attendance of lessons as optional and this usually catches up with them

during test or exam time. When this happens, a few of the irregular attenders face up to the consequences and attempt to write tests unprepared, but others opt for skipping tests under the pretext of unfit medical conditions. The Deans mentioned that currently there are regular demands for *sick tests*. *Maybe we admit learners who are medically unfit to study*, Crous speculated.

By not attending lessons and exams, students are compromising their chances of succeeding in their studies. The consequences of irregular attendance are negative for both the average and above-average performer. The former usually ends up in total failure, whereas the latter may obtain a pass which does not reflect his/her intellectual capabilities, thereby jeopardising the chances of fully or partly achieving success in their studies. It did not come out clearly in the interviews whether there were some mechanisms, either in policy form or otherwise, employed by universities to encourage regular attendance of classes and tests, thereby contradicting their efforts of promoting the success of students in their respective programmes.

6.7.3 Lecturer-related barriers

Lecturers are as responsible as students, if not more, to see to the removal of all obstacles in the teaching/learning situation, but some lecturers still fail to do so, either due to attitudinal or technical problems. On the technical side, there have been cases where lecturers have exhibited incompetence and lack of mastery of the subject-matter. The problem can be traced back to the lecturers' training or to other factors, but the fundamental issue is that incompetence on the part of the lecturer puts students at the risk of receiving even less than the little knowledge that the concerned lecturer has – a situation which definitely works against the principles of achieving academic success.

Another disabling condition is disempowerment which some lecturers exhibit in as far as didactical techniques are concerned. It was postulated by Deans in an earlier section that the majority of lecturers are only experts in the specific discipline but that expertise is not backed up by knowledge of various teaching methods. According to NU's manager of the Faculty of the Humanities, the degree to which teaching is successful is not only determined by the supply of information, but it also depends on *how well things are taught* (Bevis 2000).

Besides the above-mentioned problems, Crous believes that some lecturers just do not have empathy for students. They have no patience for students and often declare themselves unavailable for consultation outside of class. This kind of attitude can be very intimidating to learners, it is not conducive to learning and the result is often that students do not perform well under the guidance of such lecturers.

6.7.4 Students' socio-economic backgrounds

Diversity in the student population expands into students' economic status as well. The respondents suggested that their experiences had been that learners from poverty-stricken backgrounds are less likely to complete their studies than their counterparts from wealthier backgrounds. If they do, it sometimes takes longer than the time spelled out for the completion of the relevant programme. Black students seem to be the victims in this case. Though expressed in different ways, the Deans were unanimous that *black students have endless problems... they spend most of their time trying to sort out financial matters* (Van den Berg). According to respondents this pattern becomes more visible at the beginning of the semester, the time when foundations are laid for deeper comprehension of the study fields. Theoretically students who go without proper foundation in specific subjects would have a hard time trying to catch up, both with the content and with

his/her classmates. The optimisation of academic success in such cases becomes almost an unachievable dream.

Gangsterism was said to be another barrier to academic success. The Deans are convinced that gangsterism and the collapse of moral and work ethics that are evident in the learners' conduct is a reflection of the kind of society learners come from. It does not emerge from universities themselves, rather *malpractice from communities spill over into universities* (Brimer 2000). Students who engage in dubious non-academic activities often find no or little time to study and their chances of succeeding in their studies are slim. The foregoing discussion of the impact of socio-economic factors on student academic access is one of the indications that universities have lost their "ivory tower status". The realities of life outside those previously "untouchable", "unapproachable" entities have caught up with them and in the researcher's opinion it is time for them to respond accordingly in order to assist the achievement of the vision to provide quality academic access for all deserving students.

The researcher found it intriguing to listen to the eloquent extrapolation of forces that manifest as barriers to the attainment of academic success. Only in a few instances were solutions highlighted to counteract the expansion of this educational dilemma. The provision of student bursaries and loans, the utilisation of counselling services (though more as a remedial service so far) and verbal encouragement for teachers to persistently strive to create a student-friendly environment, were some of the means which Deans believed could result in the minimisation or eradication of barriers to academic success. A larger number of concerns were left unattended and this could signify the expanse of an academic battle still to be won.

6.8 ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES

The availability of resources is an important consideration in determining whether the institution is in a position to actualise its academic access policy. It transpired from the Registrars' responses that institutions and even departments within them command differing capacities for resources. Some are adequately resourced while others are in need of more resources.

6.8.1 Physical resources

For some universities there are no problems as far as physical resources are concerned. They can afford to say *OK, we have capacity* (Havemann). Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with what they call *limited lecture space*. Growth in student numbers over the recent years is the one reason why some faculties suddenly need more space.

6.8.2 Financial resources

As far as finances are concerned, most Deans support the Registrars' concern about diminishing financial resources. Some faculties are financially under-resourced due to high running costs and a low budget from the institution while others are experiencing a cut in their budget in line with declining numbers of students registered in their faculties. A peculiar situation exists at the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the UFS where the senior faculty secretary disclosed that for them money is no problem. *We are in the blue, this faculty is financially very strong, especially after the recent merger with what used to be the Faculty of Agriculture*. The surprising thing about Havemann's disclosure is that the UFS as an institution is confronted with serious financial problems; how the Faculty managed to escape the financial stringency might be a good example for other Deans to follow.

6.8.3 Human resources

Human resources are also scarce at many departments. Rationalisation of staff and competition from the corporate sector are exacerbating this problem. Deans in Management Sciences even concur that *it is difficult to retain staff in Computer Science and Statistics* (Van den Berg). The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the UDW has stepped up efforts to intervene in this crisis. It launched a programme in which high performers are appointed as "development staff" – they are groomed for lecturership and allocated classes to teach. According to the programme director, the programme has alleviated the problem of overloading for staff.

6.8.4 Physical resources

Imbalances are again revealed in terms of the availability of specialised structures which enable students to learn better. These include laboratories and libraries. On a positive note, Deans mentioned that they were building computer laboratories. Resource centres are also being established and strengthened. The negative side reveals that there is mounting pressure on facilities. In trying to improvise some departments are said to have subdivided their laboratories so as to create more rooms. All in all facilities are *running at maximum capacity* (Bevis 2000) in these universities. Besides being unable to accommodate more students than previously intended, libraries are also packed with outdated books, because as Bevis explains, *Library books are prohibitively expensive these days*.

Technology is taking the world by storm these days. Universities are well poised to flow with the tide by utilising technologically appropriate equipment in their offerings. *I have been buying like crazy in the last few years* (O'Shea 2000). The bulk of the money is invested in building computer laboratories,

but all Deans agree that there is a dire need for more computer resources, seeing that most faculties offer basic computer studies as a compulsory course.

From the foregoing discussions it appears that resourcing is one aspect of academic access implementation that needs serious attention. The picture portrayed in this section is an unpleasant one. Clearly Deans are bothered by the situation but, given the dwindling financial muscle there is little hope that change will take place in the immediate future.

6.9 ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY AND MONITORING

If one were to go by the Registrars' premise that academic access is a university concern but a faculty input, one would draw further assumptions that, after publicising the policy "concerns", universities would be held responsible for ensuring that those concerns were actualised at the operational level. So basically the institutional level is expected to facilitate the implementation of academic access policy and monitor the implementation processes throughout. The Deans shared in this assumption and professed that it was happening at their universities, though there are gaps which still need to be filled.

The Deans convinced the researcher that academic access policy monitoring starts at the programme level. According to them, the universities' Executive Councils and the Vice-Rector: Academic scrutinise programmes to determine, among other things, their relevance to the university mission and vision and the world outside the university. The Deans also account to Senate.

Examiner boards are structures which have been established at some universities to act as watchdogs of students' pass rates. After all major examinations have been written and assessed, examiner board meetings are

convened. Apparently there are, in addition to other matters, standing items on the agenda for all the meetings which include the examining of pass rates and recent developments in the performance of students in the alternative access programme. The same kind of job is carried out by what other universities call faculty heads.

The key implementers of academic access policies are lecturers; hence the unwavering emphasis on the need to support them. The theme of negligence that surfaced in earlier sections as far as teacher support is concerned, continues to this end. It transpired that teacher support was restricted to the induction of newly-employed staff members and the monitoring of access policy implementation continued along the same pattern – it was done with incoming staff, and used mainly as a staff performance appraisal device rather than ensuring proper implementation of policy. Probationary reports are released annually in the first two years of employment.

It is important to think of implications for not monitoring "old" staff's access practices like the universities seem not to be doing. The major handicap according to the researcher is the fact that most lecturers are professors who have served long years in the university sector. These long terms of service cut across two eras in the political and educational contexts in South Africa, namely the apartheid era with its prohibiting policies and the post-1994 era which calls for the widening of academic access for all deserving students irrespective of colour, race and gender. In order to operate efficiently in the new dispensation, this group of lecturers had and still has to make the required paradigm shift - in some cases from an élitist university to a mass-oriented university and/or from a monocultural university to a diversified university. This is where the universities' presence should be felt in order to advance the national academic access policies. The apparent failure in this regard puts the universities' integrity and status as transforming institutions at stake.

Deans were themselves disillusioned about the universities' approach to academic access policy monitoring. Some of the responses that the researcher collected with regard to the aspect of policy monitoring were that *there is no formal structured way, head of departments do the monitoring but we are learning how to do these things as it is a fairly new field* (Bevis), and it is *fairly informal due to current restructuring* (Havemann). *Senate relies on the Deans anyway, they tend to go with what the Deans say.* (McCraken) and with decentralised systems, *faculties draw up academic access policy and Senate approves, so implementation is done and monitored at faculty level* (Ori).

Generally speaking, the monitoring of academic access policies at sample universities seems to be more of a failure than a success. The fact that Deans themselves have lost faith in the effectiveness of the procedures could mean that they could misuse and abuse access policy as much as they wish, capitalising on the loopholes they have spotted, thereby defeating what universities believe to be in place – proper practice in academic access provision. An observation that academic access policy as drawn and monitored at the operational level awards the faculty the statuses of both the evaluator and the one being evaluated creates a situation which, it might be assumed, would be characterised by deficiencies and irregularities.

6.10 GAPS IN ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY

Universities are aware that the current academic access policies are not without faults when confronted with the following question:

Has the university identified some gaps in the current academic access policy and its implementation?

The Deans raised different concerns based on circumstances at their universities. A collection of queries is outlined below. In most of these universities the trend is either that there is no equity plan or the plan has not been implemented. In one case there has never been an access policy and the university is not developing one. For the other two universities, the process of revising existing access policies is already in motion. Whatever shape they will be in when they are finally complete, the researcher commends the fact that the two universities realised the need to upgrade access policies in accordance with the emerging characteristics of the South African higher education.

The current use of the year-book was said to be problematic. It is common practice for universities to supply students with year-books as one of the ways in which learners may familiarise themselves with the course offerings in different disciplines. Some Deans view this as a problem because students find them difficult to understand and are sometimes unable to extract the kind of information they require before they can make a course choice.

A disparity was pinpointed by Crous in the way faculties formulate their requirements. His biggest concern was that a pass in Maths was a precondition for admission into the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, yet learners from faculties which do not require a pass in Maths are allowed to take courses in the Economic and Management Sciences. In summing up, Crous expressed the wish that eventually there will be *at a stage where there is a single access policy for this university*. Whether it was testing for core skills or conceptual ability did not matter much to him as long as the policy applied to all.

Instead of providing a summary for the section on the Deans' interview responses, the researcher prefers to highlight a few observations, comparing perspectives from the institutional level and those at the operational level.

Consensus was achieved between Registrars and Deans on aspects such as access routes, pre-entry guidance measures, relevance of the curriculum and other aspects of academic access on which information had been sought.

The biggest policy drawback emerged in the monitoring process. It looks as if the universities' Executives operate on trust. They often have the institutional academic access aspirations spelled out and they trust that Deans have internalised them to the extent where they can see to the implementation process. The widespread method of monitoring, it would appear, is the collecting of reports from Deans, drawing conclusions and making decisions on them. The researcher could not establish how the reports are validated, but it may well be that the mode of verification is left open.

6.11 ACADEMIC ACCESS AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL – FEEDBACK FROM (STUDENTS) END-USERS

6.11.1 Introduction

In order to arrive at a balanced view regarding the status of academic access at universities, the researcher deemed it fit to involve the other leg of the operational level, the end-users. Students were included in the study because the investigation was not only about them, but it was meant to profit them more than any other party. Another reason for involving learners was to determine whether their academic experiences matched the universities' academic access policies and initiatives. At each of the three universities, a group of learners from the Faculties of Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences was given an opportunity to share their academic experiences with particular reference to academic access policies and practices. The students' profile and responses are outlined below:

Table 6.3: Profile of students' focus groups

UNIVERSITY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Natal University	19
University of Durban-Westville	20
University of the Free State	36

In essence the learners had to respond to almost the same questions as the Registrars and the Deans with modifications to suit their level of understanding. Even for the questions that may appear to be different, the researcher took the necessary care to maintain the inherent essence. In reporting on the learners' responses, more emphasis will be laid on areas where major differences occur between students' perceptions and those of Registrars or Deans. Similar opinions will only be referred to in passing.

6.11.2 Students' responses

6.11.2(a) Access routes into universities

Students confirmed that matriculation exemption with the inherent point system, selection tests, academic development programmes and Deans' discretionary admission policy were the widely accepted university entry paths [see section 6.3.3a(i) for detailed explanation of these access routes].

6.11.2(b) Pre-entry guidance

This aspect of academic access will also not be discussed at length, since no major variations were detected in all the participants' responses. Students agreed that they had received initial information regarding courses of study through the year-book or the prospectus, media advertisements, school visits

by university officials and pre-entry counselling during their first days at universities. The students mentioned, however, that an opportunity to receive guidance from the head of department or faculty Dean arose *mainly if there is a specific problem*. From the cited statement one realises that middle management's involvement in direct student guidance takes a remedial format. This may not be a problem if Deans are certain that alternative ways of guidance are effective; if not, some rethinking has to be engaged in to find out how often and under what circumstances they can avail themselves for students' pre-entry guidance. Comments like *I was lost in the first year; friends chose courses for me, and names of degrees are difficult for learners* are clear evidence of practical limitations in the implementation of pre-entry guidance.

6.11.2(c) Academic support

With regard to academic support students were asked the following question:

What kind of academic support is available to assist you as students to succeed in your studies?

Surprisingly learners' responses portrayed a clearer and more optimistic picture than that of both Registrars and Deans, probably because - as recipients - the service affects them in various ways; hence their ability to corroborate effectively. Interestingly, students managed to bring out a comparison between earlier and current experiences. Their message was captured in utterances like *When we came here, there was nothing in the name of support, just started* which trend was replaced by a period when *The university offers more than academic support - it is home away from home*, (NU student), when students are proud that faculties *have achieved a lot in student support*, (UDW student) and they can openly say that *Certain lecturers make an effort to assist students* (UFS student). The use of the

word "certain" to qualify lecturers suggests that not all of them are dedicated to supporting students. This assumption is confirmed by observations from students that some lecturers are *unprofessional*, while others are *unfriendly*.

Learners at all three universities were content with other mechanisms for student support. The tutorial system (which happens to be compulsory at the UDW), the poor mentorship system (more predominant at the UDW), re-testing of students who could not make it the first time and individualised counselling were found to be particularly helpful by students.

Opportunities for students to provide feedback on their academic experiences were said to be present. Mediation between students and lecturers happens through recognised discipline-related students bodies like the Law Students' Council (Law falls under Economic Management Sciences at the UDW) whose students were impressed with its achievement in this regard. The class representatives are also elected to mediate, but *the system is not effective* (NU student) because there was still a communication gap between students and lecturers.

In comparison, learners from the NU and the UDW seemed to portray a more optimistic picture with regard to student support than learners at the UFS. Students complained that, although there was in principle an open door policy, in reality it did not seem to be working. They attributed failure of this policy to the unavailability of most lecturers for consultation outside class. The tutorial system at the UFS was also alleged to have limitations. Students mentioned that attendance of tutorials was optional and this did not motivate them to attend.

On the one hand one may put the blame on students for not taking advantage of an opportunity that had been created for them. On the other hand, one may argue that because respondents in the study were

undergraduates (most of whom were in their teens), they had not reached the level of maturity required for managing their progress. According to the researcher, universities should take cognisance of this fact and support students accordingly.

Malfunctions in the students support system(s) coupled with other variables affecting university education provisions may culminate in hindrances that make it difficult for students to benefit maximally from the teaching/learning situation.

6.12 BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC ACCESS

In all three cases students were asked to comment on elements of their academic life that make it difficult for them to succeed in their studies. Financial problems, the organisation of the programme, and racial differences were singled out by all groups of learners as predominant barriers to academic success.

6.12.1 Financial problems

Students agree with Deans that it is generally difficult to pay university fees. From the beginning of the year learners are struggling to find money in order to register. For students who come from deprived backgrounds, registration is never until a few weeks after universities reopen – subjecting them to late starter positions from the beginning. For some lucky students, paying fees lasts only until the end of the first semester. If they pass well, universities organise some form of funding for them. Students pointed out, however, that financial aid was available *only to those who can afford a deposit* (NU student) – benefiting those who are already advantaged.

Learners in Human Sciences said there were *few bursaries for them because there is no specific direction you are going* (NU students), unlike their counterparts in the Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences who are often sponsored by potential employers. A few students find a lot of rationale in the financial policy of the NU. *I like the financial policy of this university... it keeps some order* (NU student). The argument advanced was that, if no deposit was paid, some learners could easily disappear with the money or fail to commit themselves seriously to study, as the aid would appear like a "handout" to them.

In the midst of scarce financial resources, learners are overwhelmed by skyrocketing tuition fees and book prices. They find the amount payable to the universities per learner per year a *rip-off* (UFS student). The student suggested that a holistic package should be negotiated between students and universities, which would reduce students' financial burden while retaining high quality service.

6.12.2 The organisation of the programme/course of study

Major criticism against the course structures was the timetabling of classes, tests and examinations. What students find inconvenient about class timetables is the fact that some lessons are scheduled for late in the evening and *this is potentially risky, especially for female students*. Besides the inherent danger for female students, students who come from the surrounding townships experience transport problems as a result of classes extending into the night. Some students said they had lessons ending at ten o'clock at night and this causes them either to have to choose between skipping such lessons and facing the risk of travelling at night if one is lucky to catch a taxi home. When they choose to attend, one may deduce that they experience such fear and worry that the amount of concentration they put into the lesson is very little, enabling them access only to a portion of the lessons.

Students complained about tests and examinations as well. What prevented them from succeeding as far as tests were concerned, was that lecturers acted insensitively in deciding on test days. Learners said that some lecturers had a tendency of giving tests on awkward times like the first day after holidays or a day before intervarsity games. Examination timetables came under fire for being packed. Some learners claimed having written five examination papers on five consecutive days. The catch in this arrangement is that in some universities, timetables are precompiled, so the excuse that universities have is that learners have the examination timetable from the onset, thus suggesting that learners must choose their courses to fit the examinations timetables. Deeper interpretation of the foregoing excuse unveils that universities are indirectly denying students access to preferred courses of study in that learners are often compelled to drop some of the subjects they would otherwise have registered for if it had not been for the positioning of the subjects in the examination timetable.

6.12.3 Language of instruction

It was only learners from the UFS that identified the language of instruction as a barrier to academic access. The parallel-medium policy of the university seemed to pose problems for learners. Black students, who are commonly classified as the "English" group for choosing to participate in lessons where teaching is by medium of English, raised a concern about the poor quality of classroom presentation. According to students, most lecturers at the UFS are Afrikaans-speaking people who pursue their studies in Afrikaans, learning English only as a curriculum subject. This situation has placed these lecturers in a disadvantaged position when it comes to the mastery of the English language. African students found it disturbing that lecturers who struggled to express themselves in English were trusted to deliver the content to them.

Besides the fact that students had to struggle to understand what these "low-competence" lecturers communicated, the students highlighted that they were subjected to rote learning. They said that, to cover their limitations in the English language, most lecturers expected students to memorise the content and reproduce it verbatim in tests and examinations. Attempts on the students' part to express themselves in their own words usually resulted in endless squabbles about perceived unfair assessment of work and alleged inability of students to respond to questions in a manner that satisfied lecturers.

In Section 6.4.8(c) Havemann was cited as claiming that there were no longer problems emerging from the use of English by Afrikaans speaking lecturers because, in her opinion, such lecturers had mastered the language, but as illustrated above students had a different story to tell. Fourie and Fourie (2000) are also positive that the introduction of a parallel medium of instruction was one of the ways in which academic access of black students was encouraged, but from what the concerned students said, it looked as if it was more frustrating for learners to discover that tuition in English was all that bad. The researcher identified a gap in what administrators believe to be an effective academic access initiative which, unfortunately, is experienced as ineffective by end-users. The critical question is whether the university has undertaken the responsibility to formally evaluate the effectiveness of the dual system since its inception or not. If it has, one would wonder why it has not taken measures to help the situation; if not, the researcher would advance strong recommendations towards such an evaluation.

6.12.4 Racial tension

The problem of racial discrimination or tension like the language one is peculiar to the UFS. According to students there is a lack of trust between black students and white lecturers. Often students interpret treatment from

lecturers as racially motivated. The students believe that, in most cases, they *have been made to fail* (UFS students) and this injects a constant feeling of paranoia in them. Black students described the atmosphere in classrooms as *tense* and *intimidating*. It is common knowledge that an unrelaxed classroom environment is not conducive to learning, so whether black students' allegations are correct or not, the fundamental issue is that, because they are frustrated where the learning process is concerned the matter is in need of dire attention.

It is worth noting that although there were factors which were unanimously identified by administrators (Registrars and Deans) and learners as barriers to academic access, some differences of opinion were also presented. The administrators' perspectives were more encompassing, whereas the learners only highlighted external factors. No reference was made by students to elements like lack of commitment to studies, underpreparedness and difficulty to cope with the subject-matter which had been spelled out in Deans' interviews.

6.13 RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

With regard to the issue of relevance learners were requested to state the extent to which they were satisfied with each of the listed aspects of the programme. On the whole, students expressed confidence in the relevance of the curriculum they were following. Their actual responses are discussed below.

6.13.1 Relevance of the course to the world of work

More job-orientated courses are being developed annually (UFS students). Learners exhibited great satisfaction with this aspect of the curriculum. They backed the Deans up in observing that the *curriculum is updated to suit*

national and international trends, that the curricula are accredited by professional boards, and that lecturers of late put emphasis on core competencies: We teach you to think, to be problem-solvers. An NU lecturer was quoted as always saying those words to students. The students were also pleased that lecturers emphasise the importance of self-employment. These trends were noticed mainly in the Natural Sciences and Economic and Management Sciences. While appreciating the management's commitment to offering relevant curricula, learners' advice was that curriculum redesign should be done in consultation with students (NU student).

6.13.2 Employment prospects after graduation

Varying viewpoints were again expressed by students as was the case with Deans. As the Deans pointed out, there were more opportunities for learners in the Economic and Management Sciences and the Natural Sciences to secure a job after graduation than for learners in the Humanities. Besides the national recognition of Management and Natural Sciences as priority need programmes, the nature of training employed in these disciplines facilitates the employability of graduates. During the course of their training, students are attached to companies in the relevant fields for internship purposes. This practice opens avenues for students to enter the world of work shortly after completion.

It is trendy these days for employers to consider the students' professional strength before employing them. The institution in which the learners are training becomes part of important considerations to make. Students from the UDW shared their experiences of alleged "rejection" by potential employers based on the fact that they had been prepared in a historically disadvantaged university which, above all, had been plagued by instability and unrests. Learners in this university were without doubt regarding the quality of their curricula but the reality they knew was that their chances of

obtaining a job were *slim due to the stigma attached to the University of Durban-Westville* (UDW student).

Consistency of perception emerged among students and Deans on the importance of offering curricula that are responsive to students' societal and economic needs. A common understanding that learners *cannot afford to study for degrees which are worth nothing* appears to be the propelling force behind the universities' rigorous attempts at continuous rearticulation. For a relevant curriculum to benefit students, implementers (in this case lecturers) have to play a role in assisting learners to engage with the curriculum to ultimate fruition.

6.14 SUPPORT FROM LECTURERS

In order to establish whether and how students experienced the support mechanisms which Deans claimed to have had in place, the following question was posed:

Please state how important the following aspects of support from lecturers are to your experience as a student and explain the extent to which you are satisfied with each of the aspects.

In response to the above statement, students found it easier to give either a positive or a negative mark to each of the aspects of support, but did not have much explaining to do. Thus, the responses that follow will be a brief outline rather than a full discussion. Some of them were extrapolated in earlier sections of this chapter.

6.14.1 Subject content and delivery modes

Generally, there were no queries regarding lecturers' mastery of the subject content. What seemed to worry students was the reliance of most lecturers on the lecture method. The major limitations of the lecture method is that it lacks creativity and may not assist understanding of some concepts that require concrete illustration. Students mentioned, however, that *depending on the module and an individual lecturer, new modes of delivery are being experimented with* (UDW student).

6.14.2 Availability of lecturers

Except in a few cases, learners were satisfied with the amount of time lecturers committed to helping students. They said that, in most cases, a small timetable was put up on the lecturers' doors to indicate the times during which students might visit lecturers. There was also an open-door practice whereby students just walked in to consult with a lecturer on matters requiring urgent attention. Learners appreciated the degree of availability of lecturers and termed this a consoling act, since it gave them a guarantee that they were not alone in these difficult times of their lives. What seemed to make them appreciate it even more was that *some classes are too big* (NU student), but *tutors will sit with you until you get it right* (NU student).

6.14.3 Approachability of lecturers

In earlier sections, learners mentioned that some lecturers were friendly and supportive to students and this afforded learners the courage to approach lecturers to discuss academic matters at any time. In recounting their experiences at the universities learners commended some lecturers for getting involved in matters that fall outside academic boundaries if such

matters threatened to affect the academic performance of learners. A first-year student at the NU informed the researcher that, after he had lost a mother in the first week of university reopening, a lecturer took over and played second mother to him. The learner shared this experience because, according to him, the act was unbelievable. This emphasises the fact that lecturers at the NU are not only approachable, but are also spontaneous in offering assistance to students. A student at the UDW proudly said, *I have developed good relationship with lecturers, I know them well.*

In contrast to the gloomy picture projected by Deans, learners held a range of positive views about the amount and type of support most lecturers were willing to offer. The Deans perceived lecturers as individuals who could only help students upon request, but learners proved that lecturers' support to students transcended academic boundaries, that was indeed reactive in that students (especially those who requested individual attention) indicated their need for support but a pro-active approach illuminated when lecturers extended a helping hand to students. A cogent argument to be tabled here is that the Deans themselves are casual about whether lecturers support learners or not and as such hardly take the trouble to check whether students are supported or not.

6.14.4 Examinations

The information sought with regard to examinations was whether learners had information on the grading system in tests and examinations. The findings were that they knew very little on how their work was assessed. The students said that familiarity with assessment procedures would be valuable information for when they prepared to write. All the students knew was that different types of questions were graded differently, but other than that the whole picture was "unclear".

6.15 THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Academic access occurs within a broader institutional context. For students to succeed academically, certain preconditions are of the utmost importance. The institutional environment emerges as an all-encompassing condition which can either enable or hinder the academic success of students. Operating from this premise the researcher requested learners to voice their opinions on several aspects of the campus atmosphere and below is a discussion of what they had to say.

6.15.1 Opportunities for students to influence university policies

All three universities were said to be falling short with regard to this aspect of academic access policy. From what students told the researcher, the old practice whereby universities exclusively designed policies and "imposed" them on students is still very much evident. The students come into universities and find policies already designed and finalised for absorption by students. Although students problematised it as an unjust practice in which management talked about them and not with them, the attitude seemed to be *We have learned to live with it and it is just OK* (UDW student). The researcher views this practice as a very serious shortcoming because, in reality, it means that administrators design access policies for students largely on what they perceive to be right, regardless of whether the recipients of the policies (students) share in the perspectives or not.

6.15.2 Diversity

Regarding this aspect, the researcher aimed at establishing whether efforts were made by university management to promote gender and racial diversity. The situations were portrayed differently by students from different

universities, especially with regard to racial diversity. Because of its student composition, the UDW is not greatly challenged by issues of race. The challenge lies more with the two historically white universities. The NU has apparently won the diversity battle because, although one or two concerns were raised about students from different races not mingling much, especially at residences, those queries were ruled out by the majority of the students who observed that the divide occurred from natural personal inclinations, not from any serious race-related attitude.

According to students at the NU, the university management had done all in its power to promote diversity on campus but admitted that *the problem is with the students* (NU students). All in all the NU students were satisfied that *Diversity is benefiting the students* (NU student). An Indian student who claimed to have been paranoid about mixing with other races prior to studying at the NU declared that the NU alleviated her fears and changed her attitude. Expressed in her own words, the message was, *When I came to this university I was so glad, I made so many friends from all races, it's like magic* (NU student).

According to students the diversity situation at the UFS is unpalatable. *We are diverse only in numbers*, they said. Unlike the NU students who accepted responsibility for not fully benefiting from a diverse student population, the students of the UFS cast the blame on the university management. Besides deliberate allocation of students according to colour at residences, (although students perceive it as a University's Management decision to divide students according to residences the researcher is aware that UFS affords learners an opportunity to choose a preferred hall of residence when applying) the students complained that the parallel-medium system whereby learners are classified as "the English" or "the Afrikaans" group is the major dividing factor. The students were disappointed that they had come to the UFS hoping to learn to interact with other cultures and to learn from them too, but

as matters stood then, they could not share even academic experiences because they attended *at different times, in different languages [and used] different text books* (UFS student). The students, particularly Africans, experienced the campus as hostile and as one of the students would advise first-time entrants *Be with your own people as much as possible because you will always need them*. Probed on whether being with one's own people would not aggravate the unfavourable diversity situation, the student responded that, *It is the only way one can survive* (UFS student). In emphasising the intensity of the non-conducive learning institutions, responses like *It is not just happening*, and *Most of us just wait to get out of this place*, coloured the discussions.

There seems to be great variations in the way the three universities are experienced by their clients. The NU students spoke very affectionately about their institution, describing it even in other sections of the discussions as *a home away from home*. Their only concern was that the campus was *too academically inclined* and *the work load was too much*, but other than that all was well. The UFS students on the other hand, harboured bitter feelings based on what they perceived as the executive management's disregard for the merits of diversity. Their aspirations to interact had, in their opinion, been scattered and this left them unfulfilled. Learners at the UDW had a different war to fight; achieving academic success in the midst of an unstable institution. Recent unrest arising from the alleged poor management of the university triggered a renewed awareness in the students that their academic success was primarily their responsibility. Therefore they formed support study groups within which they assist one another. They said they worked in self-established teams *since two years ago after continuously failing many courses* (UDW student).

6.16 CHANCES OF SUCCESS IN STUDIES

One of the ways in which the success of academic access policies and practices is demonstrated is by determining the success rates or at least the likelihood of students' academic success. As part of determining the efficiency of the academic access policies and processes, the students were asked to predict the chances of succeeding in their current study programmes. They were also asked to substantiate their responses. The majority of students claimed to be confident that they would complete their studies within the normal duration of the courses. They attributed the likelihood of success to the hard work which they were supposedly injecting into their studies, the availability of course material, the support they received from different sections of the universities, and the push factors like financial strain and the desire to succeed.

A significant number of students predicted that they were likely to complete their current study programmes but it would take a longer period than the normal duration of the course. Students confessed that *I have gone beyond the normal time, I am two years over the time, I failed Engineering*, etc. Reasons cited for staggered progress included difficulty in understanding the course content, a lack of preparedness after high school: *When I arrived here, I did not know what a test tube looked like* (UDW student), and registering for courses which did not match their interests and abilities.

Students disclosed that high expectations from parents put them under a lot of pressure. Instances of these high expectations were that sometimes parents forced their children into the supposedly prestigious areas of study irrespective of whether a student was interested or even gifted in that respect. This poses problems because, according to students, *it is very hard to study for what you do not appreciate* (UDW student). Another kind of

pressure oozes from parents' expectations that stretch beyond learners' intellectual capabilities. Students were not happy that parents emphasised *beating the best* (NU students), thereby meaning all the students have to come up tops. The effect that these demands have on students is that failing to "beat the best " leaves students with a low self-esteem and a negative view of their capabilities, resulting in a conformity syndrome where students regard themselves as failures and ultimately behave as such. The finality of dropping out of a programme and leaving the university was not considered an option by many students.

6.17 CONCLUSION

Chapter 6 has been a presentation of results from the Registrars' and Deans' interviews as well as of focus group discussions held with learners. Key areas of discussion revolved around issues of multiplicity of access routes into universities, forms of pre-entry guidance used, forms of academic support available for both students and lecturers, and the relevance of the curriculum. Consensus was reached by all respondents (with slight differences in some cases) on the universality of practice in the above-mentioned focus areas. Consensus was also reached that mechanisms for assessing student success rates were in most cases insufficient. Efforts were, however, being made to improve policy and practice in this regard. Another area that was discussed was the monitoring of academic access policy. Results reveal that a lot was done in this regard, but the implementation processes are not accurate.

This section provides a comparison of results from the quantitative data that was discussed in Chapter 5 and the qualitative data expatiated in Chapter 6.

An analysis of vision/mission statements of all three universities unearth the institutions' commitment to academic access, equity of results and relevance of the curricula (cf. 5.4.1(a) (b), (c), 5.5.1(a), (b), (c) and 5.6.1). This

commitment recurred in Chapter 6 through flexible entry routes (cf. 6.2.1(b) to accommodate as many learners with potential as possible and through a myriad of pre-entry guidance techniques (cf. 6.2.1(c).

Efficiency indicators that were highlighted in sections 5.4.4, 5.5.4 and 5.6.4 respectively were confirmed by the presence of support systems at all three universities ranging from psychological counselling, tutorials, mentorship programmes and enrichment courses to mention but a few (cf. 6.2.1(d), 6.3.4 and 6.11.2).

The three universities pronounced their intention to offer curricula that is responsive to national and regional needs as one of the efficiency indicators and this was confirmed by the fact that faculties in the three universities had, by the time of the research investigation, redrafted their curricular in accordance with the SAQA/NQF demands (cf. 6.4.1). What seems to be lacking through is the indicators of efficiency as demonstrated by throughput rates as neither registrars nor deans could provide a clear account of success rates both at the institutional level and as per faculty (cf. 6.5).

The researcher would like to round off this section by paying tribute to the universities' management for their efforts in providing students as far as possible with quality academic access. There are, however, serious shortcomings in certain areas of provision like student support and financial assistance which should, in the researcher's opinion, attract urgent scrutiny.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES

"Since Aristotle, educators have known that the educational cycle means finding strategies to tackle myriad data, process them to become information, integrate sources of information to become knowledge, reflect on and experience knowledge to find understanding, and through understanding reach some level of wisdom" (Komives 2000:31).

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The major intent of the research study was to investigate the relationship between academic access policy and implementation in South African universities. In order to accomplish this goal, a number of important aspects with regard to academic access were explored:

- Theoretical perspectives (Chapter 2)
- Policy developments in South African higher education (Chapter 3)
- Current realities on academic access implementation (Chapter 4)

- Trends of academic access policy and practice based on the three-year rolling plans and other institutional documents (Chapter 5).
- Academic access policy and implementation at South African universities (Chapter 6).

In this chapter, a review of the whole study will be portrayed in the form of conclusions. Recommendations and guidelines for effective implementation of access policy and implementation in South African universities will be arrived at.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

7.2.1 Conclusions from theoretical perspectives on student access

- (a) The multifaceted nature of student access hinders common interpretation of the phenomenon and thus complicates the process of policy formulation surrounding it, leading to further difficulties in instituting access practice.
- (b) Quality and student access are inseparable phenomena which can simultaneously be realised under the thesis of a unified perspective (cf. 2.7.5). The South African higher education system subscribes to this school of thought in that legislation like the White Paper on Higher Education of 1997 and the Three-year Rolling Planning guidelines of 1998 do not only emphasise equity in student profiles, but also insist on equity of inputs with equity of outcomes.

- (c) Different forms of access should be provided along with academic access since their presence enhances the quality of academic access. However, there still seems to be a problem in terms of, for instance, geographical access where many universities are located in urban areas where the majority of students from historically disadvantaged groups cannot easily access them. The same applies to financial access where government funding for economically challenged learners is insufficient. Universities have some academic merit bursaries, but these are often attainable only for learners who come to the universities well prepared.
- (d) Literature (cf. 2.5) reveals that access initiatives are often directed at designated groups like women, blacks and people with disabilities. South African higher education has made great strides in providing access to women and blacks, but academic access for disabled people is still lurking behind.

7.2.2 Conclusions from policy developments

A review of higher education policy developments in South Africa unearths some achievements in progression from a racially segregated to an undifferentiated higher education system. A synopsis of some of the advancements follows:

- (a) The current landscape in South African higher education is a direct result of the apartheid ideology which instituted the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the University Education Act of 1959.

- (b) A revolution towards a non-racist, democratic higher education which would result in the formation of a unitary education system started in the 1990s with the establishment of NEPI (1992) as the first step towards redress. The NEPI Report of 1992 advocated for, among other things, a review of concepts of "equal access for all" and an "equal opportunity option" for all South African citizens. Although some efforts can be cited, it remains unclear how much success has been achieved in offering equal opportunities for all.
- (c) The recommendations of the NEPI Report (1992) on redress were addressed in the NCHE (1996), the Green Paper on Higher Education (RSA DoE 1996), the White Paper on Higher Education (RSA DoE 1997), the Higher Education Act (RSA 1997), the CHE Annual Report (1998) and the Higher Education Planning Framework (1998). They are further emphasised by the pronouncement of the new Higher Education Plan (MoE 2001).
- (d) Social, economic, educational and personal circumstances were identified in 3.3.1 as some of the major factors influencing access policy initiatives and goals in South Africa.

7.2.3 Conclusions from access issues in South African higher education

- (a) The composite political structure in South Africa has resulted in a manifold higher education system which, in turn makes the operationalisation of access policies a complex undertaking,. The fact that government's access initiatives occur within a period of political transformation makes the interpretation of policy a subjective exercise

which is clouded either by political undertones or mere resistance to change.

- (b) The open access of the period after 1994 has encouraged increased learner mobility within the system. The result has been an abandoning of some (especially HBUs) universities, plunging them headlong into the beleaguered position.
- (c) Although there has been an increase in the enrolment of black students and females in South African universities, a descending graph characterises overall university enrolments from the year 1998. Statistics on the enrolments of students with disabilities are not available.
- (d) By and large, admission into university is dependent on matriculation examination exemption, but other access avenues like RPL, pre-entry tests, and academic support programmes are increasingly being explored as strategies to afford access to learners who, due to the apartheid policies, did not have the opportunity to attend schools that prepared them adequately for university education. However, the diminishing number of matriculation exemptions, the difficulty of pre-entry tests, lack of information regarding university courses and lack of financial resources act as barriers to academic access to South African universities.
- (e) An unfortunate reality is that retention and throughput rates of black students are still far below that of their white counterparts (cf. 4.8).

7.3 CONCLUSIONS FROM AN ANALYSIS OF ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION IN THREE CASE STUDY UNIVERSITIES

The reinforcement of the framework for institutional planning processes has assisted universities in refocussing their priorities. It has also facilitated ease of analysis of access initiatives at different universities.

- (a) An analysis of the three case study universities' three-year rolling plans shows that universities regard the incorporation of access (as a strategic focus) in a vision/mission statement as a basis for access policy and implementation. Access is an integral part of the three case study universities' vision/mission statements (cf. 5.4.1; 5.5.1 and 5.6.1).
- (b) Strategies for operationalising access implementation at universities are clearly stipulated in the institutional plans. This is in accordance with the National Planning Framework.
- (c) With regard to the size and shape of universities, there seems to have been some growth in total student enrolments in HWAUs from 1995 to 1998 – but a contrasting trend was evident in the HBUs during the same period. A related trend is the significant shift of learners from the Humanities to the fields of Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences in HWUs, while the highest registrations in the HBU were in the Humanities.
- (d) Equity in student profiles at the three case study universities is still problematic both in terms of race and gender. The statistics show that the dominance of males has shifted to female domination of the student population. Also, the majority of students at HWUs are white,

although the margins are getting narrower. UDW on the other hand, comprises mainly African and Indian students, while an insignificant number of white students are registered at the university.

- (e) Generally universities have bought into the idea of improving efficiency of outcomes. To achieve this goal, curricula have been redesigned, academic development programmes have been established and expanded and student support systems have been instituted. These initiatives seem to be propelled by an understanding that the improvement of quality in the teaching and learning and other areas of student academic experiences has a positive effect on access implementation.

Deficiencies still prevail in the quality of information management systems particularly with regard to student enrolment and graduation records. The magnitude of this defect is reflected in the statistical presentations which sometimes do not explain the components of certain statistical categories (cf. Tables 5.3 and 5.9).

7.4 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

The qualitative investigation proved to be a highly informative part of the study. Certain important conclusions can be drawn from data provided by registrars, deans of faculties and students in three universities:

- (1) In line with the observation made in Section 7.2.3(d), Matriculation exemption still dominates as the primary access route to university, but the use of pre-entry tests and academic development programmes is becoming widespread, particularly in the Faculties of Natural Science and Economic and

Management Sciences. The Faculties of the Humanities rely mainly on Matriculation examination scores.

- (2) Pre-entry guidance is provided basically through the yearbook of a given university. Results show that this mode of guidance has limitations since the contents are often not easily comprehensible to learners. Career counselling, school visits, outreach programmes to high schools and media announcements are some of the ways through which prospective students are guided.
- (3) Student academic support systems are in place in all three institutions, though one institution may be using more of a certain support device than the other(s). Student counselling services are supposedly the cornerstone of support in all universities, but students seem to hold them in lower regard than the mentorship programmes. Some tutorial systems or even student feedback (which students hope is taken seriously by the faculties and the lecturers concerned) are in place. The emergence of extended degree programmes is another noteworthy achievement in efforts to support insufficiently prepared students.
- (4) Fortunately for universities in South Africa, policy (SAQA/NQF) encouraging the provision of the curriculum that is responsive to national, institutional and individual students' needs has been rigorously formulated and implemented. From the Humanities' point of view, however, the issue of relevance seems to be a thorny one since all participants agree that correct as it is in structure, the curriculum in these faculties is proving to be outmoded. One of the effects of this is rising unemployment for

learners graduating in the Humanities – a situation which contradicts the aspirations of the White Paper on Higher Education (RSA DoE 1997), preparing graduates that will have equal chances of getting employment on completion.

- (5) An implementation gap transpired when the registrars and most deans admitted that academic staff participation in the development of access policies or guidelines is limited, both at the national and institutional levels. This trend could be linked with another apparent loophole in the way lecturers generally give support to learners. From the students' and the deans' responses, one could gather that this aspect of access is left to the discretion of individual lecturers.
- (6) The output criteria (cf. 2.8.3b) identify student success rates as one of the indicators of the effectiveness of access initiatives. However, this area seems to be "neglected" by all three universities. A review of pass rates at faculty level is common practice, but these are not done within the broader analysis of institutional throughput rates. No tracer system was reported at any of the three universities in place to keep track of where graduates of different disciplines go after graduation.
- (7) Resourcing in terms of physical facilities, laboratory and technological equipment does not seem to be a big problem for universities. The biggest frustration seems to be shortages in financial and human resources. The diminishing government subsidy to universities and the rationalisation of academic staff in some universities have affected the implementation of academic access adversely.

- (8) Another area which falls short, is the monitoring of access policy implementation – both at the national and institutional levels. The NDoE, it would appear, is caught up in a technocratic web of policy promulgation without accompanying monitoring systems. This pattern is replicated at institutional level where the universities' administrations seem not to be proactively monitoring the implementation of access at faculty level. The current practice is for Deans of faculties to feed executive management with reports, but as some of the deans indicated in 6.2.1(m), reliability of such reports so far cannot be confirmed. The monitoring of academic staff activities by deans of faculties is equally problematic in that there is no clear policy on what mechanisms can be employed to monitor staff and what the frequency of the monitoring exercises would be. This gap has been identified by institutions and preparations are underway for the establishment of committees that will deal specifically with access issues.
- (9) Varying levels of satisfaction were portrayed by students from different universities. Students from NU expressed satisfaction with the environment; they described it as being conducive to all groups within the student population. The conduciveness of the environment at the UFS was met with mixed feelings. The majority of white students responded in the affirmative, but black students observed that it was both academically and (mainly) culturally hostile (cf. 6.2.3b). Learners at the UDW do not necessarily find the campus environment very enabling, but they seem to have grown used to it and can thus function amidst the periodic turmoil at the institution. It is difficult for the researcher to conclude that the variance in institutional

ethos could be associated with type (HB, HWA, HWE) of university and whether this trend could be generalised to other institutions of similar type. The one thing which students concur on is that the university structures do not allow students an opportunity to contribute to the development of academic access policy.

The perspectives expressed by research participants implied that the South African higher education system is aligned with a unified model of access as it was discussed in Section 2.7.5 of the study. The transitional, fleeting nature of the system, however, overloads institutions with a myriad of complex demands which make effective provision of academic access slow in some instances.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE TRIANGULATION OF RESEARCH DATA

The necessity and benefits of triangulating research data, *inter alia*, by means of the use of different research methods (e.g. both qualitative and quantitative) were discussed in Chapter 1 (see 1.6.1). Whereas the preceding sections of this chapter (7.2 to 7.4) present conclusions drawn separately from the different parts of this investigation, this section endeavours to bring together those conclusions that surfaced in every part of the investigation, thus sustaining their validity and importance.

Access is, above all else, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (see 2.1). It takes on different forms and is directed at different groups of people (see 2.4.1 and 2.5). The fact that access takes on different forms and is directed at different groups necessitates a diversity of access routes in order to open access for all; this has been emphasised in South African higher education (see 4.2.3, 6.2.1(b) and 6.3.3a[I]). These conclusions from the literature

review were substantiated by the investigation into the policy developments in South African higher education (see 3.3 and 3.4.1), the analysis of three-year rolling plans (see 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.6.3, 5.6.4).

A close relationship between access and quality was a recurring theme in the literature review (see 2.8.2), the historical developments (see 3.10.3), the three-year rolling plans (see 5.3.4) and the qualitative investigation (see 6.2.1(i), 6.3.4). This is further confirmed by the emphasis of the National Plan on Higher Education on through-put of students, i.e. access with success. This conclusion underlines the importance of closing the gap between access policy and access implementation. These will be addressed in the next part of this chapter.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

7.6.1 Introduction

Although Chapters 3 and 4 of the study illustrated government's efforts at transforming the implementation of academic access at universities, a policy vacuum surfaced at the institutional level (cf. 5.1) where the evident access practice was not guided by clear access policies, which led to disparities in access practice both within the university sector and within individual universities. Instead of delving into recommendations for the improvement of the implementation in smaller institutional units, this chapter will pay particular attention to the root problem of all academic access initiatives. Recommendations will centre around a framework for academic access policy development, academic access policy monitoring and closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation.

7.6.2 Guidelines for closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation

As it has been pointed out in Chapter 3 of the thesis, the phenomenon of academic access has been catered for within other important areas of higher education. Not overruling the reality that the South African government is grappling with a lot of other burning issues, the researcher wishes to recommend a specific policy for access (including but not restricted to academic access). It should also devise mechanisms for access implementation which would direct universities towards a coherent academic access model. This recommendation is underpinned by the researcher's confidence in the government's mandate to exert pressure on universities with a view to eliciting better quality of access and improved efficiency.

7.6.2(a) Framework for academic access policy development

Chapters 3 and 4 of this study shared that fragmentation currently characterises national access policy aspirations. Although the issue of academic access is repeatedly categorised among other national priorities, there is no single broad policy that is specifically formulated to guide its provision at universities in South Africa. Chapter 5 unearthed a policy vacuum at the institutional level. In an attempt to address these problems, the researcher suggests a framework for access policy development as it is illustrated in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: A framework for access policy development

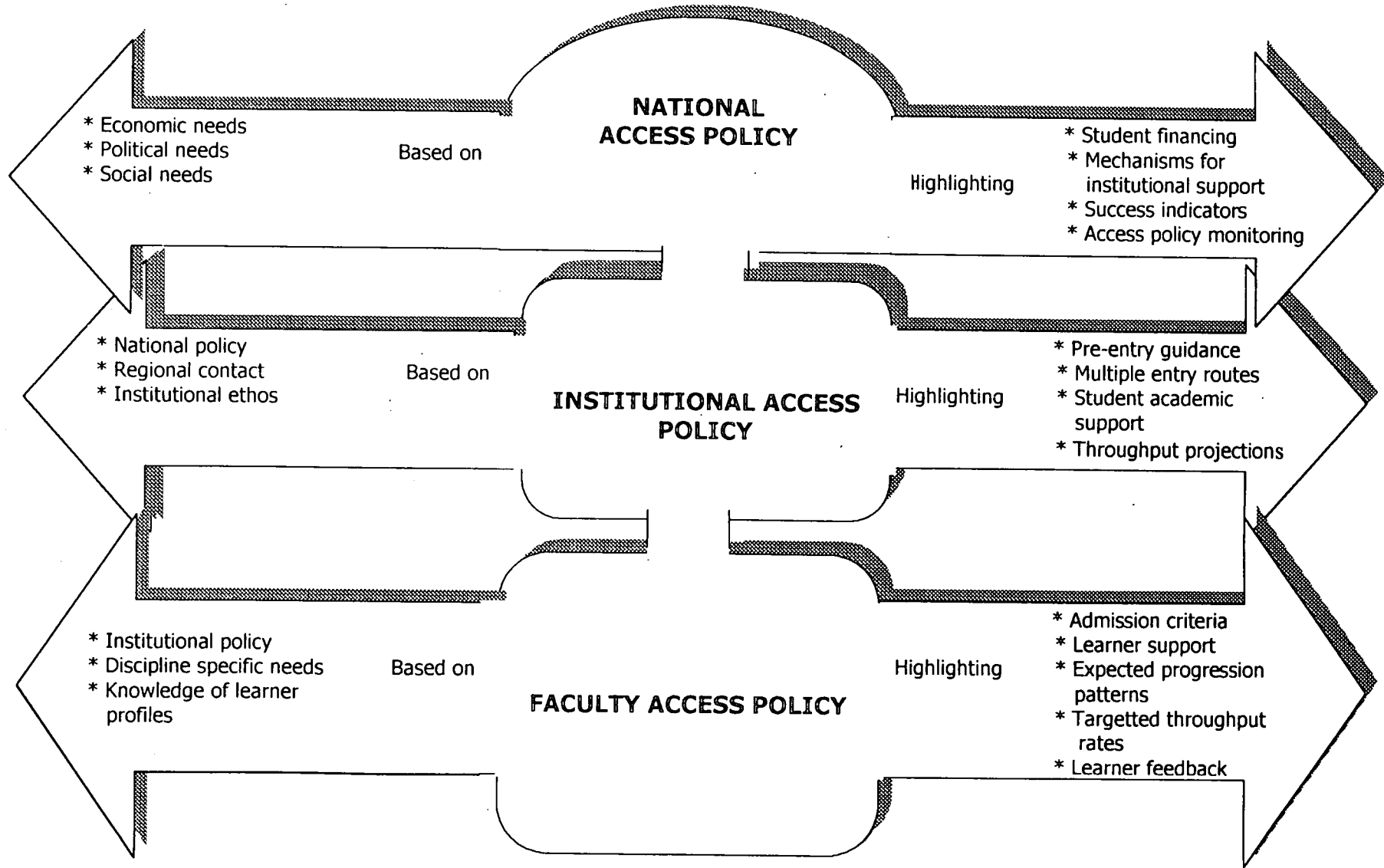


Figure 7.1 is a diagrammatic presentation of the possible model that can be used to develop a coordinated access policy which will flow from the national to the institutional and the faculty level.

The model recommends that the NDoE should formulate a national higher education access policy. This policy should be preceded by and based on an analysis of the country's economic, political and social demands. It should stipulate in clear terms how the NDoE will contribute towards student financing, which mechanisms will be available for giving support to universities, how the NDoE will measure the success of access policy and how the effectiveness of the access policy will be monitored. This policy should then be cascaded to the institutional level.

At the institutional level, the national access policy should be interpreted and narrowed down to accommodate regional and institutional contexts. The institutional access policies should spell out ways in which learners will be guided prior to enrolment at universities, which pathways will be available for students to enter universities and what kind of support will be offered to students during their period of study. Emphasis should be laid on developing a culture of projecting annual throughput rates.

A clearly formulated institutional access policy should inform the operational level. Different faculties within institutions should, in accordance with the broader institutional policy, develop their own discipline-based access policies. It is important for faculties to have their own policies since they are the ones that interact directly with learners. Faculties also comprise experts who have the capacity to follow global trends which could be useful in curriculum development, for instance, while aligning themselves to institutional access policy prerogatives. Faculties should set guidelines on additional admission criteria, structures for learner support and channels for students to give

feedback to lecturers. Faculties should also make projections for the throughput rates of their various disciplines.

7.6.2(b) A framework for policy process

Ideally, the promotion of policy starts at the national level, flows into the institutional and further into the operational level. The recommendation here is that the NDoE in South Africa should, as part of the policy implementation, communicate the policies to universities and conduct workshops to enhance understanding of national policy. Benchmarks should be agreed upon between NDoE and universities which would serve as success indicators. Analysis of enrolments attrition and graduation rates and conducting full-fledged institutional audits are some of the ways by which the NDoE can ensure and monitor the implementation of student access at the institutional level.

The university's role in the academic access framework is three-fold. It involves the formulation, implementation and the monitoring of institutional policies. Implementation happens mainly at the faculty level where, in addition to guidelines set by the national and institutional policies, issues like additional entrance requirements and student support systems are developed and executed. While reserving space for academic freedom, the institution has the responsibility of consistently monitoring that faculties do not deviate from institutional access aspirations. It should be understood that an interface exists between access policy and practice at both the institutional and faculty level in that policy influences practice and practice also informs policy. Figure 7.2 provides an overview of the above explanation.

Bridging the divide between academic access policy and implementation would result in quality academic access. Figure 7.3. is an illustration of how this can be achieved.

Figure 7.2: A framework for access policy

N DoE

- Access indicators
- Institutional audits
- Analysis of statistics
- Support mechanisms for universities

INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS POLICY

- Formulation
- Implementation
- Monitoring

Faculty access policy

Faculty access practice

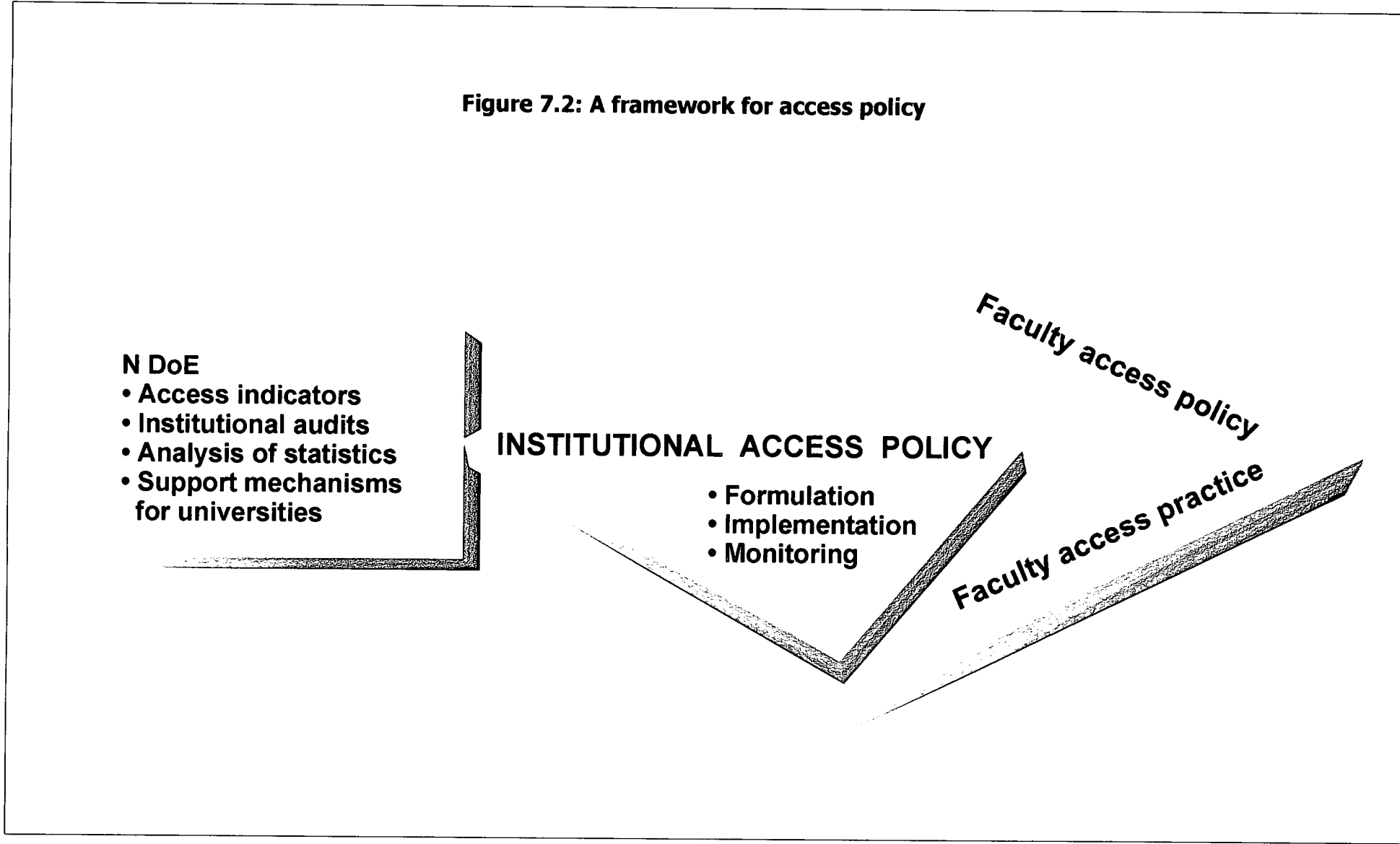


Figure 7.3: Closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation

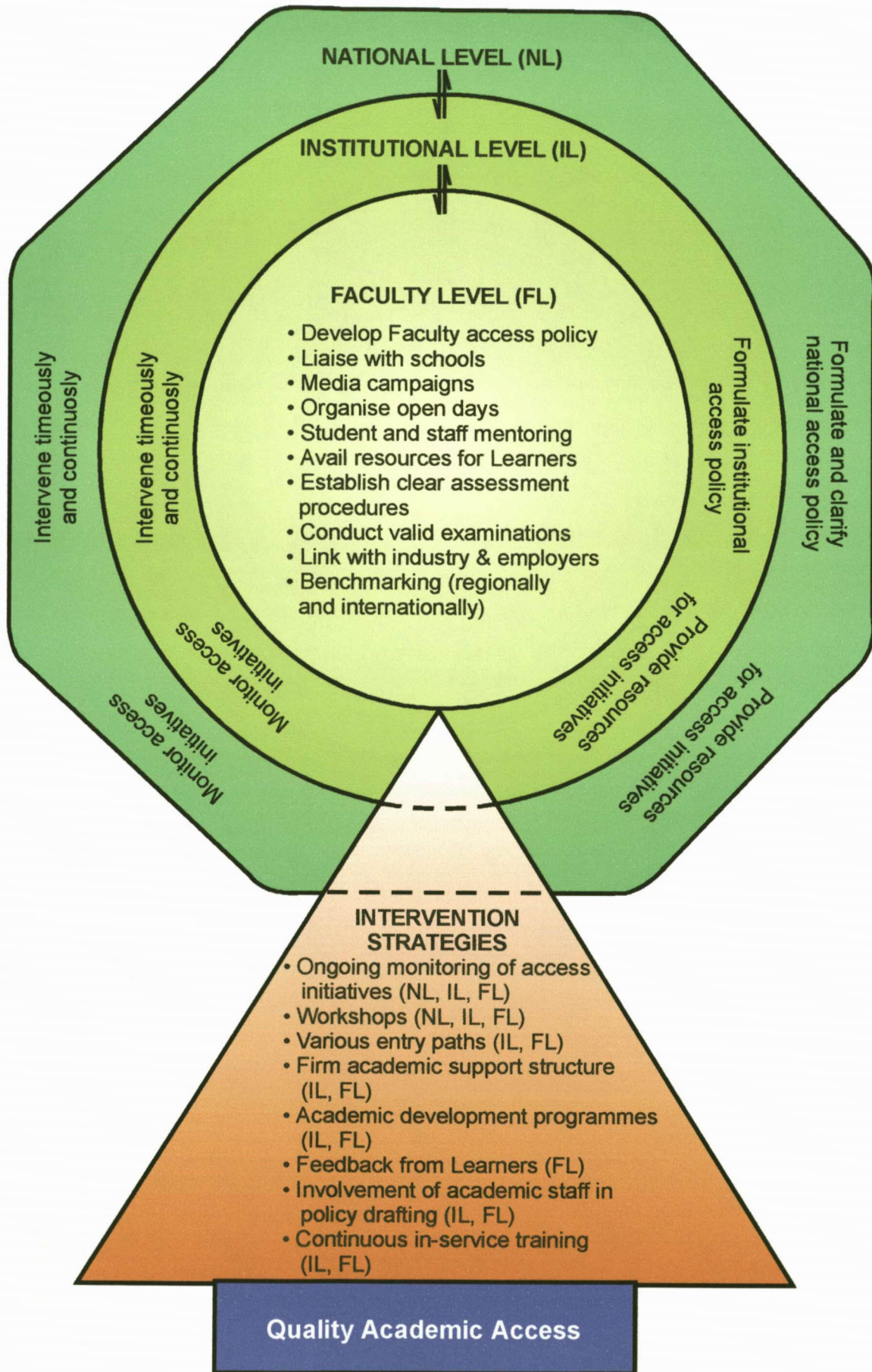


Figure 7.3 is an integration of ideas captured in participants' feedback on a tentative model for closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation and for improving throughput rates at South African universities. Original responses are attached as Appendix 6. The proposed framework for closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation suggests that there be constant communication between the National Department of Education, universities and faculties, in order to offer learners the kind of access that will enable them to progress successfully and complete their studies in record time.

Different (but sometimes overlapping roles) are recommended for the three levels concerned with the academic access of university students. At the macro level, the National Department of Education should direct universities by formulating and clarifying national access policy. Policy development would be based on among other things, the national socio-economic and political needs of the country and should be informed by inputs from stakeholders like business and industry, representatives of the civil society and university staff and student unions.

As results from the investigation revealed (cf. 6) that availability of resources enables universities to advance the course to increase access, the model suggests that the dissemination of academic access policy should be backed up by financial, physical and other resources from government. This would reassure universities of government's commitment to the access agenda.

Guided by national access policy and regional needs and demands, universities are advised to develop institutions – specific access policies that would respond to stakeholders' (students, parents and communities) demands. The structure of higher education institutions is such that the implementation of institutional policy happens at faculty level. It is important,

therefore, that after cascading institutional academic access policy to faculties, universities should, on continuous basis, monitor all access initiatives. This should be done with a view to support faculties in their implementation processes.

As the operationalisation of academic access policy is realised at the faculty level, the academic access model proposes that based on both the national and institutional academic access policies, faculties should draw their own access policies. These policies should direct the activities of departments within faculties which would include pre-entry guidance (like liaison with schools and conducting open days) and support systems (like student and staff mentoring and establishment of clear assessment procedures).

Figure 7.3 outlines specific strategies that can be employed in order to close the gap between academic access policy and implementation. The model indicates that the suggested intervention procedures can be applicable at the national, the institutional and the faculty level. Some strategies could, however, be more relevant at one level than at the other and the distinction is made indicating with an NL, IL or an FL. For example, learner feedback would be dealt with at the faculty level whereas the conducting of workshops would be applicable at all three levels. The necessity for having a system of student feedback, support and linking with different stakeholders, for example may be highlighted at the institutional level, but the responsibility of establishing such a system may rest more with the faculties.

The researcher realises that the suggested guidelines are not comprehensive, cutting-edge, solutions to the access dilemma. It is the researcher's hope, however, that they will serve as a basis for the achievement of quality in academic access endeavours.

7.6.2(c) Concluding remarks

Deliberation on how a gap might be closed between academic access policy and implementation emphasises the importance of clear policy formulation and interpretation. Commitment of resources to access initiatives and monitoring of access policy and implementation are key factors. It can be gathered from the model (7.3) that constant interaction between the national, the institutional and the faculty level is another important imperative for enhancing the success of access policy implementation. The involvement and support of students in instituting access is also valued.

7.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite careful planning on the side of the researcher, the study suffered some pitfalls in the following areas:

7.7.1 Sample population

The intention was to achieve representivity in the sample. The sample composition would reflect gender, race and disability aspects; however, there were no disabled students in any of the focus groups. At the beginning the researcher assumed that the small number of disabled students on campuses would facilitate easy identification, but logistically people who assisted in the coordination of focus group discussions said the small numbers actually made it difficult to get hold of them, so the student perspectives may not be generalised to the situation of disabled people. The researcher acknowledges at this stage that exclusion of disabled learners in discussions is inexcusable as it, in a way, propagates the ideology of discrimination for some sectors of the population.

7.7.2 Learner contribution in the development of the access model

Another handicap to the study was the fact that in assuring confidentiality of responses, the researcher never asked participating students to identify themselves by name, this was ethically and methodologically acceptable but the problem was that it was later difficult to contact those learners and request their input towards the development of a more synchronized model of access policy and practice.

7.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research into the correlation between input and output of universities in South Africa is recommended. This would provide a clearer picture on the quality and success of access endeavours in these universities. The recommendation is supported by Thanki and Osborne (2000:88) who posit that "research on student access at the aggregate level has tended to concentrate on entrance figures while ignoring equal opportunities issues in relation to progression". Unlike the current study which focused mainly on three universities, the proposed study could be conducted in more universities in order to be able to generalise the findings across the sector.

7.9 CONCLUSION

This study has not only provided perspectives on an issue of national importance, but it has served as a basis for the case study universities and faculties to engage in activities of self-evaluation, evaluating access initiatives (policy and implementation) internally and aligning them to external, national priorities. The study may be useful for non-participating universities to, on the basis of the critical questions the study posed, start reviewing their own access practices and design strategies to achieve greater success in this regard.

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Personal Interviews

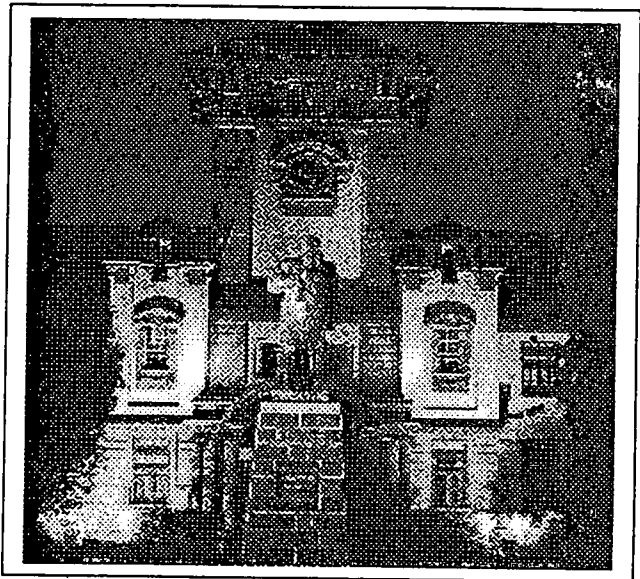
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APPENDIX 1

BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

To give an indication of the processes of change that have been part of the University of the Free State (UFS) ever since its inception and to contextualise the present processes of transformation at the UFS, a short history of this institution is considered apposite.



During the previous century pupils in the Orange Free State who wished to continue their studies at a higher education level first had to write the so-called "Cape Matric" of the then University of the Cape of Good Hope [later the University of South Africa (Unisa)]. As from 1898 matriculants were prepared in English at the Grey College School for the so-called "Intermediate B.A. Examination", a diploma course which was the equivalent of first-year bachelor's degree study.

On 28 January 1904 the first Free State institution for higher education was founded when the university division was separated from the Grey College School. Six students reported for study in 1904. By 1907 the number of students of the Grey University College had grown to 29 and the number of lecturers in the Faculties of Arts and Natural Sciences to ten.

Legal recognition by the Orange River Colony for "het onderwijs en opleiding in Kunsten en Wetenschappen" was granted to the Grey University College in terms of Act 5 of 1910. From the twenties to the late forties there was fierce resistance against the predominantly English teaching at the double-medium institution. In the process Prof. D.F. Malherbe, who was appointed at the Grey University College as the first professor in Afrikaans in South Africa, was suspended in 1938, but at the insistence of the students he was later reinstated.

In 1939 the Afrikaans-speaking chairman and ten members of the Students' Representative Council were also suspended, but re-admitted after a ten-days' boycott of all classes by the students.

After students had threatened in 1943 to leave the University *en masse* and pressure had been exerted on the University from several circles in favour of Afrikaans, the government of the day, after an investigation, decided to request the Council to respect the interests of what was regarded as the predominantly Afrikaans Free State. In reaction to this the Council was reconstituted in 1944.

On 18 March 1950 the Governor-General by way of a proclamation in the Government Gazette officially declared the University College of the Orange Free State a university in terms of the University of the Orange Free State Private Act (No. 21 of 1949). Its name would henceforth be "Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat"/"The University of the Orange Free State". During 1997, after a process in which all stakeholders of the University had been consulted, an Amendment Bill was submitted to the Parliamentary process in order to change the name to University of the Free State in accordance with the change of the name of the province. This request was, however, turned down. During 1998 an extensive consultative process, including all role-players, was again followed to bring the Private Act of the University in line with the Higher Education Act. The proposed Free State University Act, which was aligned with the Higher Education Act and in which the name of the University was proposed to change to "University of the Free State"/Universiteit van die Vrystaat/Yunivesithi ya Freistata" was again submitted to Parliament on 16 September 1998.

The Minister of Education, Prof. Kader Asmal, approved the name change of the University. The new names are: University of the Free State (English), Universiteit van die Vrystaat (Afrikaans), Yunivesithi ya Freistata (SeSotho). The abbreviations are UFS (English) and UV (Afrikaans).

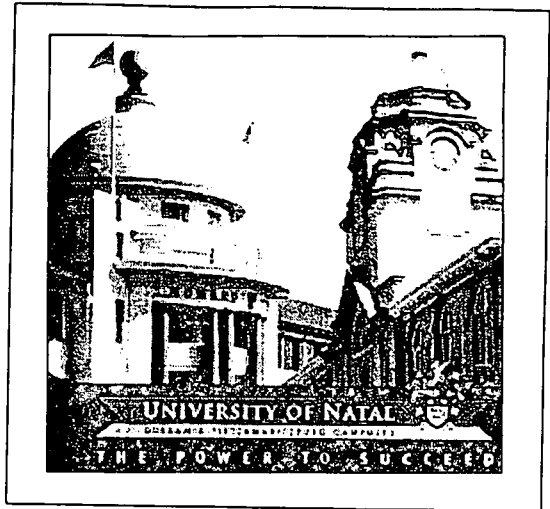
APPENDIX 2

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL HISTORY

Durban and Pietermaritzburg Campuses

The University of Natal was born out of a technical education commission who recommended that *"a University College should be established in Pietermaritzburg, with the provision for an extension of its work to meet the needs of Durban and also of other centres when the need arises."*

The Council of Natal University College (NUC) first met on 21 January, 1910. Fifty seven students were registered in February of the same year. The first buildings were opened in August 1912. On 2 April 1919, the NUC became a constituent college of the University of South Africa. After World War I, the NUC extended to Durban. In the years that followed World War II, extensive development took place within the NUC. In 1946, the government approved a Faculty of Agriculture in Pietermaritzburg, and in 1947, a Medical School for African, Indian and Coloured students in Durban. Because of its rapid growth in numbers, its range of course, and its achievements in, and opportunities for, research, the NUC was granted independent University status in 1949.



Located in KwaZulu-Natal Province's two main centres, the University of Natal offers prospective students the choice of two campuses, each with its own distinctive character.

Pietermaritzburg is located in the centre of the scenic Natal Midlands, close to numerous nature reserves and parks, and only one hour's drive from Durban and two hours drive from the Drakensberg mountain range. The city has a rich architectural heritage, with many fine examples of Victorian and Edwardian buildings.

Durban, by contrast, is a vibrant coastal city and major South African port, renowned for its beaches and coastal resorts. The magnificent game reserves and estuaries of Maputaland are a favourite getaway for staff and students alike.

While there is considerable overlap in the subjects offered at both Centres, there are some important differences: Architecture, Medicine, Music, Social Work and Nursing are

only offered in Durban, while Agriculture, Theology and Fine Art are only offered in Pietermaritzburg.

The University has a worldwide reputation for academic excellence in teaching and research and all degrees awarded are internationally recognised. The University has formal links, exchange programmes and collaborative teaching and research programmes with many other universities around the globe. A large number of agreements and Memoranda of Understanding have been signed with various institutions in Asia, Europe, USA and other parts of Africa.

Recognising worldwide trends and the restructuring of the entire South African educational system towards a more "outcome-based" approach, the University of Natal has taken a leading role in curriculum development.

Many challenges cannot be solved by a single discipline. New curricula are arranged into modules, and redesigned to include a large element of inter-disciplinary work. In this way, students will be exposed to a wider range of disciplines, enhancing their understanding of the society in which they live and work.

(Source: <http://www.nu.ac.za/bkqnd/htm>)

APPENDIX 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN- WESTVILLE

Located within an environmental conservancy about 8 kms from the CBD of Durban and Pinetown, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) is regarded as a major player in the transformation of the higher education sector nationally and internationally. The University combines a state of the art infrastructure with beautiful natural surroundings.



The striking architecture of a Hindu Temple and adjacent Jahmaat Khanna or Islamic place of worship greets the visitor at one of the University's three entrances. Though the majority of today's students are not of these persuasions, the buildings speak of an earlier period in the University's history when it had a very specific profile of students.

UDW's history is punctuated with some of the most powerful moments in South African politics. It was established at the height of political repression forty years ago as the University College for Indians on Salisbury Island in Durban Bay. The apartheid legislation of the day designated universities on ethnic and racial grounds. UDW was compelled to only admit students of Indian origin, the vast majority of whom trace their forebearers to the indentured labourers shipped to sugar cane fields of Natal by the British colonial authorities. Politically progressive sections of the Indian community boycotted the University in line with the Congress Alliance's policy of shunning apartheid structures. Student numbers were low throughout the 1960s.

The late 1960s saw a change in the boycott strategy in favour of "education under protest" designed to transform apartheid institutions into "sites of struggle". Student numbers grew rapidly, drawing ideological sustenance from the emerging Black Consciousness Movement. Steve Biko, then a student leader at the University of Natal's Medical School, emerged as a leading light of this movement. He readily found comrades at the University of Durban-Westville. The radicalisation of student politics in this period was to leave a permanent imprint on the history of the university and the anti-apartheid struggle. Prominent student leaders of the subsequent period currently occupy high profile positions in the cabinet, the judiciary, commerce and industry.

In 1971, the College was granted academic independence and became a fully-fledged University. The following year, the newly named University of Durban-Westville moved

to its impressive modern campus. The University gained a reputation as a hotbed of radical student activism. This was in spite of a highly repressive University administration, which hounded student activists and fired Faculty who were vocal about their opposition to apartheid. UDW students spearheaded the campaign for Student Representative Council's to be recognised by University authorities. SRC's became rallying points for activist politics.

In the wake of the 1976 Soweto Uprising many UDW activists fled the country to joined the exiled liberation movements both as combatants and organisers. These numbers grew after 1980 when the celebrated school boycotts of that year were actively promoted by UDW students. In KwaZulu-Natal, UDW student structures were among the most active opponents of the 1983 apartheid co-option strategy, the Tricameral Parliament. Student resistance formations were at the forefront of the United Democratic Front (UDF) formed later that year as an umbrella body of the internal anti-apartheid movement.

UDW became an autonomous institution in 1984 operating under the same financial formula as the older universities in South Africa. A change in the Education Act and enormous pressure from students and faculty resulted in a more open policy on student admissions. UDW became open to all students, regardless of race, language or ethnic origin. The wave of political resistance and state repression sweeping the country was soon to grip the university. The 1980s saw pitched battles between student activists and the police and military. The increasingly authoritarian posture of the Apartheid State was confirmed with the military establishing bases on the campus during the periods of virtual martial law. The State Security Branch's presence on the campus had been well known for several years.

Despite these constraints, a rich diversity of ideological opinion flourished on the campus. By the end of the decade, the diversity profile of the student population changed radically and the concept of a national university was gradually coming to fruition. Faculty and staff energetically engaged in national policy debates about the form of the post-apartheid dispensation.

The appointment of the institution's first black Vice Chancellor co-incided with the momentous political events of 1990 which was to lead to the eventual liquidation of the apartheid state. The post-apartheid transformation of the university gained momentum. The University hosted the first internal conference of the African National Congress since its banning in 1960. Vigorous curriculum reform and degree restructuring continued. The transformation agenda unintentionally sparked internal discord from which the university has had difficulty recovering. In 1998, the University Council appointed the current, Vice Chancellor and Principal, Professor Mapule F. Ramashala, heralding an exciting new era for the institution. During the late 1990's, the university underwent far-reaching reviews of its operations. Strategic audits on the basis of state mandates resulted in the preparation of a three-year rolling plan intended to guide the university's strategic repositioning in the domestic and global environment.

UDW is poised for a magnificent future in the new millennium.
(Source: <http://www.udw.ac.za/aboutudw/aboutmain.htm>)

APPENDIX 4

Closing the gap: The relationship between academic access policy and implementation at universities (UFS, NU, UDW) in South Africa

PROFESSIONAL DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

Position held.....

How long have you been in this position?.....

Was your previous job related to student access or policy issues?

ACCESS ROUTES INTO THE UNIVERSITY

What criteria are used to admit learners into this university?

Prompts:

- Matric exemption
- Matric pass and an aptitude test
- Matric exemption and a pre-entry test
- Through the Career Prep/Bridging Programme
- Recognition of prior learning and experience
- Other (please elaborate)

PRE-ENTRY GUIDANCE

How are learners assisted in selecting courses of study?

Prompts:

- Prospectus/Year-book
- Pre-entry counselling
- Career guidance
- Other (please elaborate)

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

What kind of academic support is available to assist students to succeed in their studies?

Prompts:

- Ongoing career counselling
- Psychological counselling
- Academic development programmes
- Enrichment courses

- Mechanisms and procedures for students to provide feedback to lecturers
- Mechanisms and procedures for students to provide feedback to management

Other (please elaborate)

RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

Please state if and how your programmes have been re-designed/adapted to meet the requirements of the SAQA/NQF.

Prompts:

- Modular formats
- Unit standards etc.

Please state how important the following aspects of the curriculum are in enhancing students' experiences at this university and indicate the extent to which your university/ Faculty is successful in offering them to students.

Prompts:

- Chances to participate in research projects
- Practice-oriented study programme
- Provision of supervised practical work experience
- Choice of fields/Areas of specialisation
- Opportunities to link with prospective employers
- Learners' chances of getting a job after graduation
- Other (please elaborate)

How do you assess the extent of learner satisfaction with programmes?

Prompts:

- Continuous evaluation of programmes by departments
- Pass rates
- Feedback from students

SUPPORT FOR LECTURERS

Please elaborate on the strategies that have been/are being employed to prepare academic staff for the implementation of institutional access policy.

Prompts:

- Introductory workshops
- Involvement in access policy drafting
- Continuing in-service training for lecturers on diversity management and related issues
- Other (please elaborate)

SUPPORT FROM LECTURERS

Please state how successful the following aspects of support from lecturers are in enhancing students' academic experience and indicate to what extent lecturers at your university/in your faculty are succeeding in offering support in each of the aspects.

Prompts:

- Teaching methods of lecturers
- Consultation periods outside class
- Supply of teaching material
- Language of instruction, etc.

STUDENTS' SUCCESS RATES

What have been the patterns of students' throughflow at your university/faculty for the past three years? Please provide accompanying documentation if possible.

Prompts:

- Pass rates
- Graduate employment levels
- Retention and success rates

What strategies are in place to improve on the throughflow of students at your university/in your faculty?

From an institutional point of view, what factors enhance academic access of learners?

From an institutional point of view, what factors work against academic access of learners (barriers)?

Please rate the importance of the following types of access as prioritised by your university.

Prompts:

- Financial access
- Academic access
- Physical access
- Cultural access, etc.

RESOURCES

How appropriate and adequate are the resources of this university/faculty to enhance implementation of access policy?

Prompts:

- Physical resources
- Availability of financial resources
- Availability of human resources
- Libraries, labs, workshops etc.
- High technology equipment
- Other (please elaborate)

ACCESS POLICY AND MONITORING

Please describe what mechanisms and procedures are in place for the monitoring of access policy implementation at this university.

Has the university identified some gaps in the current access policy and its implementation? Please specify.

Is the university planning to rectify identified gaps (if any)?

GENERAL COMMENTS/CONCLUDING REMARKS

Please state any remarks/comments/observations regarding the university's/faculty's access policy and practice/ implementation.

APPENDIX 5

Closing the gap: The relationship between academic access policy and implementation at universities (UFS, NU, UDW) in South Africa (focus group discussions with learners).

BIOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS

Age cohort

Gender profile

Female	Male

Population group

African	White	Coloured	Asian

Do you have any form of disability?

Yes	No

If YES, please specify the type of disability.....

COURSE DETAILS

Faculty in which you are registered.....

Who pays for your course fees? (Please tick as many options as appropriate.)

Yourself/ Parents/ Relatives	Bursary/ Loan	Potential employer

Other (please specify).....
.....

A. ACCESS ROUTES/ENTRY PATHS INTO UNIVERSITY

Through which selection criteria were you admitted to this university?
(Please tick the appropriate box.)

Prompts:

- Matric exemption
- Matric pass and a pre-entry interview
- Matric pass and an aptitude test
- Through a bridging/foundation programme
- Recognition of prior learning and experience

Yes	No

Other (please specify).....

B. PRE-ENTRY GUIDANCE

Through which channels did you obtain information to help you select a course of study? Please tick as many options as it is appropriate.

Prompts:

- Pre-entry counselling at this university
- Ongoing study guidance and support at this university
- Media (e.g. radio and newspapers) advertisements about this university
- School visits by university officials while you were still in high school
- Personal interview with Head of Department or Faculty Dean
- Brochures

Yes	No

Other (please specify).....

C. ACADEMIC SUPPORT

What kind of academic support is available to assist you to succeed in your studies? (Please mention as many as applicable.)

Prompts:

- Ongoing career guidance at this university
- Psychological counselling at this university
- Academic development programmes
- Winter/summer schools for low performers
- Enrichment courses, e.g. time management, study skills
- System in place for students to provide feedback to lecturers on programmes and teaching methods

Yes	No

Other (please specify).....

D. BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Which of the following elements make it difficult for you to succeed in your studies? (Please mention as many as it is appropriate.)

Prompts:

- Physical disability
- Emotional problems
- Financial problems
- Transport problems
- The geographical location of this university
- The physical structures
- The organisation of the programme, e.g. time-tabling, range of modules prescribed
- Your gender
- Your racial group
- The language of instruction

- Difficulty in understanding the subject content
- Teaching methods used in the classroom
- Lack of formative feedback from lecturers
- Lack of academic support, e.g. extra tutorials
- Lecturers' ability to cope in a diverse academic context

Other (please specify).....

E. RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

Please rate how important the following aspects of your course curriculum are to your experience as a student and rate the extent to which you are satisfied with each of the aspects.

Prompts:

- Relevance of the course to the world of work
- Practice-oriented study programme
- Provision of supervised practical work experience
- Choice of fields/areas of specialisation
- A variety of elective modules
- Opportunities to link with prospective employers, e.g. internships
- Chances of obtaining a job after graduation

Other (please specify).....

.....

F. SUPPORT FROM LECTURERS

Please state how important the following aspects of support from lecturers are to your experience as a student and describe the extent to which you are satisfied with each of the aspects:

Prompts:

- Teaching methods of lecturers
- Mastery of subject content by lecturers
- Consultation periods outside class
- Assistance with regard to external examinations
- Grading system in examinations
- Supply of teaching material
- Language of instruction
- Availability of lecturers
- Approachability of teaching staff
- Offering of tutorials

Other (please specify).....

G. STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE/PROGRAMME

Please indicate how important the following aspects of your course organisation are to your experience as a student and describe the extent to which you are satisfied with each aspect of the organisation of the course:

Prompts:

- Duration of the course in years
- Time-tabling
- Possibility of individual structuring of studies
- Possibility for team work with classmates

Other (please specify).....

H. THE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Please indicate how important the following aspects of the campus environment are to your experience as a student and describe the extent to which you are satisfied with each one of them:

Prompts:

- Opportunities for students to influence university policies
- Efforts of the university management to promote gender diversity
- Efforts of the university management to promote diversity in race
- User-friendliness of the campus for disabled students
- Welcoming/peaceful atmosphere on campus
- Feeling of oneness in educational identity among students

I. CHANCES OF SUCCESS IN STUDIES

Please indicate which one of the following options best describes your chances of succeeding in your current study programme: (Please choose only one option.)

- I am likely to complete my current study programme within the normal duration of the course.
- I am likely to complete my current study programme, but in a longer period than the normal duration of the course.
- I am likely to discontinue my current study programme and change to another programme.
- I am likely to drop out of university completely.

Other (please specify).....

.....

APPENDIX 6

Responses from some participants on the framework which the researcher proposed for closing the gap between academic access policy and implementation at universities in South Africa

Contents:

- Appendix 6(a)
- Appendix 6(b)
- Appendix 6(c)
- Appendix 6(d)

APPENDIX 6(a)



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Ms M Maharasoa
University of the Free State
P O Box 4345
Bloemfontein 9300

30 May 2001

Dear Maboreng

Thank you for sending me the diagram on access policies. I am not very good at such things, but I enlisted the help of Professor de Kadt, who is the Head of the School of First Level Study in our faculty, and together we came up with a few comments and questions. The model seemed to us both to be basically sound, but the following matters perhaps need to be clarified or sorted out:

The model implies, by default, that funding should be provided at the national level only. In general, the question of resources should be given more prominence, both the kinds of resources needed and the responsibility for providing them.

Who is meant to drive the intervention strategies ?

The intervention strategies, as they stand at present, are a mixture of those aimed at staff and those aimed at students. Obviously both are needed, but the model would be easier to interpret if the two groups were separated where possible. There are areas where the two overlap, of course, and this should also be conveyed.

Similarly, in the Faculty Level section of the diagram, clearer distinctions could be drawn between the different types of strategies/actions, e.g. to distinguish between different stages of the process: recruitment, post-registration etc. In our university, much of the recruitment phase is handled at the institutional, not the faculty, level, and this seems to me to be a sound policy as long as there is good communication between the levels. Perhaps that (communication between levels) is an aspect of the process that should receive some recognition in your diagram.

Our only other comment is not so much on the validity of the diagram as on the difficulties that we would face, and do already face, in trying to implement (some of) them. With our present staffing levels and the absence of funding for such initiatives, we simply cannot do very much. We hope that your research will be able to make a difference.

Yours sincerely

Aileen Bevis

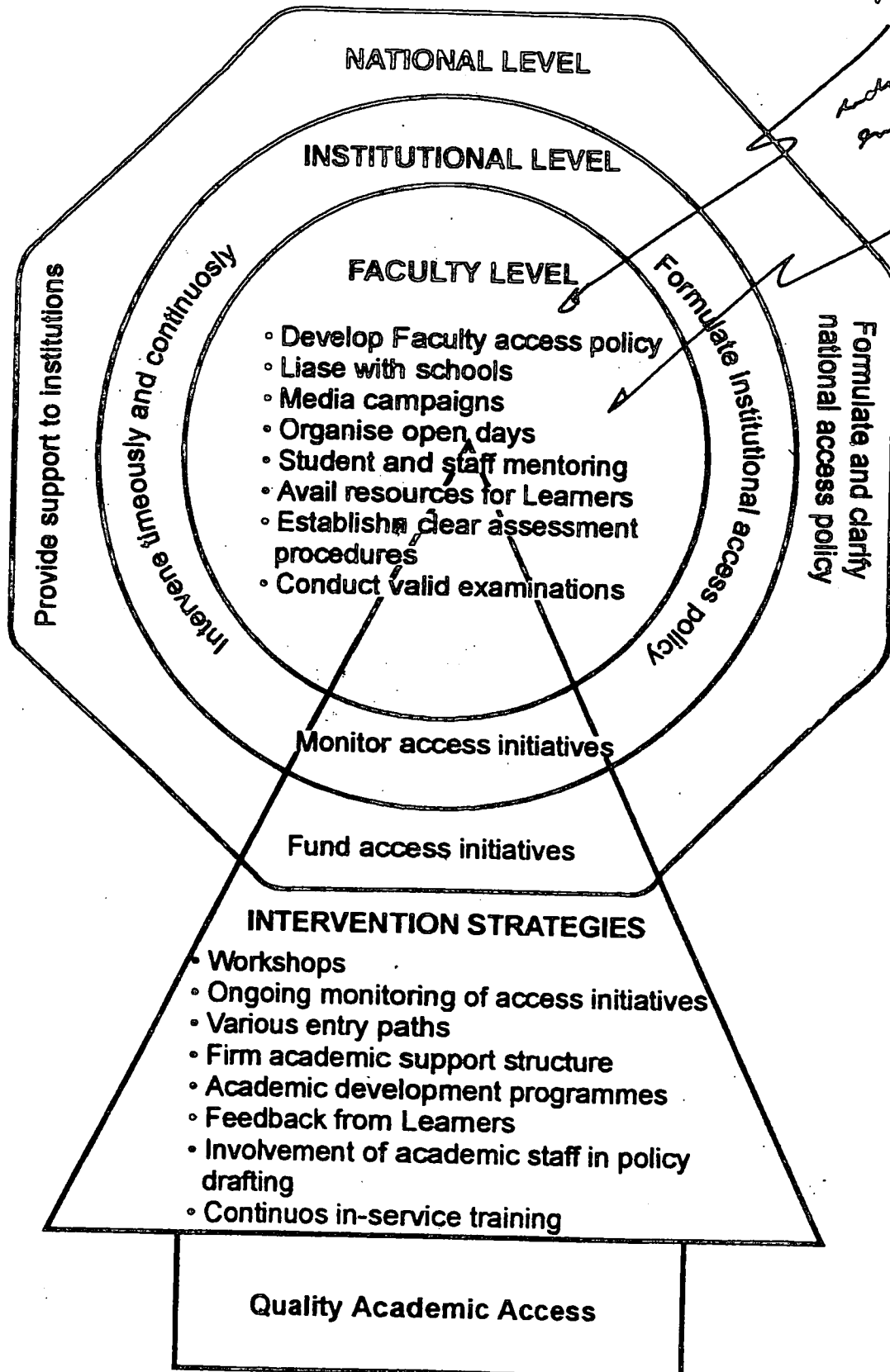
Aileen Bevis

Good work! Only two marks/questions

APPENDIX 6(b)

M. J. Chase

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION



What about contact with industry and employees?
Benchmark international

APPENDIX 6(c)

5 June, 2001

Miss M Maharasoa
Strategic Service
UFS

Dear miss Maharosoa

Thank you for the explanation and the diagram, which I received in connection with the interview, you had with me on Access policy and implementation.

It looks fine to me and I hope you proceed with your studies in a successful manner,

Cordially yours



Prof DFM Strauss
Dean

APPENDIX 6(d)

A SUMMARY OF PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACCESS POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA:

A telephonic response from Mr P. Malgas, Registrar:

University of Natal

(6 June 2001)

On the whole, Mr Malgas perceived the model as having the potential to make a contribution in the enhancement of student access to South African universities. Nevertheless, he observed that the issue of "resource commitment" had not been emphasised in the framework. According to Mr Malgas, the government should back access policies with provision of resources (financial, physical and otherwise) to facilitate ease of implementation. Drawing from his previous experience at universities in South Africa, the Registrar: Natal University, mentioned that even with the institutional access policy aspirations in place, only a limited number of learners were normally admitted to avoid over-stretching the existing resources.

Mr Malgas also suggested that the question of student support be included in the framework, because in his opinion, it would be unacceptable to admit learners and not help them through their programmes.

U.O.V.S. BIBLIOTHEEK