# UNIVERSITIES,



# EMPLOYABILITY



# AND HUMAN



# DEVELOPMENT

Melanie Walker + Samuel Fongwa

# Universities, Employability and Human Development

Melanie Walker • Samuel Fongwa

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# Preface

This book has its genesis in a research project commissioned by the British Council in 2012 on *Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development,* led by Tristan McCowan at the UCL Institute of Education, with Melanie Walker as the South Africa Lead Researcher and Sam Fongwa as the Research Assistant (assisted by various PhD students in the Centre for Higher Education and Human Development). The project had been preceded by a seven-country scoping study in 2011 which had identified various challenges in the sub-Saharan Africa region that could constrain the potential contribution of higher education to development and specifically, to producing employable graduates. An underpinning worry was increasing talk (not always substantiated with robust evidence) of graduate unemployment on the one hand, and on the other hand, whether or how universities might contribute to addressing this apparent problem. The research project was proposed to help identify what universities were already doing and what else they could do to enhance the employability of their graduates. As the project unfolded, the South African study emphasis on human development and capabilities advanced by Melanie was more widely adopted in the project so that inclusive development was understood as advancing well-being, quality of life and agency. We introduce these ideas in Chapter 1 and develop them further in Chapter 3.

The project as a whole involved five countries – the UK, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya – and it ran for three years from 2013 to 2016, with a focus on undergraduate education and case studies of universities in each country, 14 universities in total. A cross-country comparative perspective was seen to hold possibilities for understandings and explanations of

graduate employability. A comprehensive final report, including chapters on each participating country, was prepared by the research team and recommendations drawn out to contribute to discussions about the direction and practices of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa (British Council 2016).

Melanie felt as the end of the project approached that the South Africa study was sufficiently rich to be worth publishing in more detail than the project report allowed for. While not wanting to claim South African 'exceptionalism', there were striking regional differences which she felt could be addressed in a book on the South Africa case study. The project had found that employability is not a dominant discourse in South African higher education where concerns with quality, equity and redress, as well as economic development and skills prevail. There is now more discussion about 'graduate outcomes', 'graduate destinations' and 'graduate pathways'. Yet it seemed important to bring employability as a discourse and ways of framing the issue to the attention of researchers and policy-makers, given its increasing global and continental grip in ways which may not play out well for the equity concerns still evident in South African higher education policy.

For the South Africa study, we were especially concerned to understand employability as a matter of justice inside universities – what universities could do to reduce injustice – even while recognizing the real constraints imposed on universities by the broader economy and labour market. We did not expect universities to be able to do everything in the face of inequalities but we did want to know if they were doing all they could to enhance the opportunities of talented young people who manage to access higher education and who hope for decent work, jobs and career pathways. Melanie wanted to build on her earlier work on universities and development to develop a capabilities-based theoretical frame and see how it worked for student and lecturer perceptions of employability and university practices, graduate aspirations and commitments to democratic citizenship and what employers seem to want in graduates. We do this in the chapters which follow.

Ideas developed and gestated over project and stakeholder meetings in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and the UK, and at various seminar and conference presentations. We firstly wish to acknowledge our appreciation to the British Council for funding the project and our South Africa case study. The East Africa director of the British council Tony Reilly was extremely helpful and supportive, as were Nan Yeld and Carol Radiki in the final stages. The project was ably – and patiently – led by Tristan McCowan as the director of the project and we were immensely privileged

to work with our African colleagues – Eric Ananga in Ghana, Ebrahim Oanada in Kenya and Segun Adedeji and Stephen Oyebade in Nigeria. It was a delight for the University of the Free State (UFS) to be able to host all our colleagues for one of the project meetings in Bloemfontein. In addition, the British Council offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg efficiently organized two stakeholder meetings in Johannesburg on our behalf and a final meeting in Cape Town in November 2016. Pauline Gangla from the British Council Nairobi office was enthusiastic, diplomatic and helpful at all times.

We would especially like to thank the four universities who assisted us with obtaining ethical clearance and in making contact with students and staff for interviews and for the survey. Helen Garnett and then Tari Gwena undertook the administration of the project, Lucretia Smith sorted out financial matters while Helen, Oliver Mutanga, Faith Mkwananzi, Patience Mukwambo and Ntimi Mtawa all assisted with interview data collection. Faith, Patience, Oliver and Tendayi Marovah helped with coding qualitative data after Melanie had analysed all the transcripts, and Anesu Ruswa provided invaluable assistance with analysing the survey data. Elmarie Viljoen-Massyn as always provided excellent support in preparing the manuscript. We are very grateful to everyone for their help.

Colleagues in the higher education and development research group at the UFS provided a collegial working environment, while Monica Mclean and Alejandra Boni on visits to the UFS also provided helpful comments – and encouragement when it was most needed – to persevere with the book. Our ideas were also shaped by discussing the case study with colleagues at Bath University in the UK; at the REAL symposium on Education and Work in Johannesburg; the HELTASA conference in Bloemfontein; the HDCA conference in Georgetown, USA; the BAICE conference in Bath, UK; the UKFIET conference in Oxford; and the CIES conference in Vancouver, Canada. This, together with the vibrant conversations inside the project group, has been immensely valuable. We were generously funded by the British Council and through Melanie's South African Research Chair (NRF grant number 86540) to attend these various events.

Finally, Melanie thanks her partner, Ian, for his support – as always – not to mention the gas heater he bought for her as she worked on drafts of the book through freezing cold winter weather in Bloemfontein! Her appreciation also to Vicki just for being there and to Milo and Lexie for light relief. Sam thanks Rolline, Nathan and Esther for love and support.

## Reference

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CHAPTER 1

# Contextual and Policy Conditions

In our project we have been concerned with the relationship and the balance between higher education, government policies, society (labour market and social change), universities and individuals. We operationalize this concern by investigating how universities advance graduate employability but also inclusive development, understood to include access and participation to and in university, as well as future contributions to social well-being. For example, a young political science student interviewed in 2013 at the University of the Free State said, 'I want to do something that's going to help me change something in this country, get a job with my degree and also change social ills, whether it be poverty, health . . . just do something that's going to get the next person to their next level.' Her words highlight the transformative potential of higher education – in changing individual lives, but also changing societies for the better as graduates move into employment. This student had herself come from a poor rural background, had beaten the odds in getting to university and was now committed to using that opportunity for improving the lives of others. We have many similar statements from students in our research project. Of course, it also matters to South African graduates, especially those from poor homes, that they are employed when they leave university. As one young commentator noted, after speaking to students in their final year of school, 'students want to be employed as soon as they are done with studying' (Ntibane 2016, p. 3).

Getting a job and being employed matters. Van Broekhuizen and Van Der Berg (2013) point out that the rapid expansion of the graduate labour



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force after 1995 has been accompanied by a change in the racial composition of graduates from approximately 1.7 white graduates for every black graduate in the labour force in 1995 to a ratio of 0.9 by 2012, as numbers of black graduates have expanded. South Africa's public universities, they say, collectively now produce significantly more black than white graduates every year. The number of *employed* black graduates has increased since 1995 growing, on average, by 6 per cent per year from 1995 to 2012, and from 145 000 in 1995 to 454 000 in 2012. Moreover, they point out that, contrary to most expectations, the vast majority of this growth occurred in the private sector. While black graduates employed in the public sector more than doubled between 1995 and 2012, the number employed in the private sector increased more than fourfold and is likely soon to outstrip the number of publicly employed black graduates. However, in 2012 there were still more black graduates employed in the public sector (277 987) than in the private sector (176 566).

However, from our perspective while being employed is absolutely critical for graduates' futures, employability involves more than the successful insertion of individuals into the formal labour market (as we elaborate in Chapter 2), and more than contributions to human capital and economic growth (as we explain further in Chapter 3). It is shaped by: a market of jobs, desirable skills and qualifications, state steering through government policies including support for entrepreneurship, a higher education market of competition for good students and access to degrees and courses which generate decent jobs. But it also includes concerns with social justice and reducing poverty and inequality (DHET 2013) which can rein in some of the excesses of the marketization of higher education as, for example, in the UK (Collini 2012) and a full blown neo-liberal globalization impact on university, state and market. Significantly, in South Africa the former concern has so far blocked the extensive expansion of private education (unlike in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa). Up till now the view has been that, for example, a private internationally funded university, which recruited mainly privileged, mainly white, students would undermine the broader attempt to construct a non-racist and fair higher education system.

## University–Employability–Employment

Our own interest in employability has been sparked by justice concerns in the face of the current globally dominant higher education, knowledge economy and economic growth legitimating narrative (see Chapter 2;

Boni and Walker 2016) so that graduate employment and employability is – not surprisingly – an area of increasing interest and concern to university managers, government, students and employers. Where the focus of evaluation should be with regard to the employable graduate is not always clear: should it be during university, in the transition to work, or in the labour market, or all of these? Further, embedded within employability discourse are not only issues of quality, equity, funding, access and success among others, but also issues of skills and knowledge needs of the economy and economic growth, unemployment and labour market participation.

However, most research on graduate employability has not adequately theorized fairness in the process of access, success and employment outcomes for diverse students from different kinds of universities as we elaborate in Chapter 2. Morley (2001) earlier pointed out that employability discourse typically disregards key shaping aspects of students' lives and opportunities such as social class, race, gender and so on, and that these discourses may 'tend to confirm, rather than challenge patterns of disadvantage' (2001, p. 132), so that not all interests are served by a narrowed employability focus in higher education (see Chapter 2). Morley provides a compelling example of the dangers of decontextualized assumptions about employability. Communication skills are often cited as a desirable graduate outcome but, as she points out, a woman with 'impeccable' (2001, p. 136) communication skills who uses these to challenge gender harassment in the workplace may find herself less employable. Nor is the employability lens turned onto employers and their assumptions about the ideal graduate (who often turns out to be middle class and from a 'good' university). In similar vein, Motala and Vally (2014) challenge assumptions regarding the link between education and the economy from which flows the further assumption that education should serve the demands of the economy and generate individual competitive advantage. In this approach the focus and analysis is on the individual who independently adapts to the labour market, but the structure of the economy and labour market is unchallenged. Burke (2016), writing about Northern Ireland, has also produced a critical examination of this supposedly linear relationship and meritocratic (or fair) alignment between higher education and employment to show the powerful effects of social class on graduate opportunities and trajectories.

The approach, which we therefore prefer, is to understand employability as relational, contextual and structured by opportunities and

inequalities, not purely emerging from the individual's accrual of human capital. Graduates have to compete in the labour market and mobilize their advantages (bundles of knowledge, skills, biography and so on) to succeed in making themselves the right kind of candidate for employers (Tholen 2015). However, diverse graduates may be differently placed to capitalize on, or understand the need (and have the know-how), to build their positional advantage; such differences may be taken for granted and assumed as 'the way things just are' (Burke 2016).

Crucial as our concerns are with the more specific space of higher education, we need also to be concerned with the relationship of higher education and society, with wider development agendas, and the scarring consequences of inequality in South African society. There have been real gains post-1994 in terms of a range of socio-economic benchmarks, for example: a doubling of jobs from 7.9 million in 1994 to 15.7 million in 2015, a 141 per cent increase in the number of black university students, a fall in the number of malnourished children from 13.1 per cent in 2000 to 4.5 per cent in 2014 (Cronje 2016). Nonetheless, grave inequality persists. In an interview with Haroon Bhorat (2015), *professor of economics and director of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town,* Bhorat noted that depending on the variable used to measure inequality, the time period and the data set, South Africa's Gini coefficient ranges from about 0.660 to 0.696.[1] This makes South Africa, Bhorat explained, one of the most consistently unequal countries in the world. Thus we find in an Oxfam (2014) report this example: the two richest South Africans, Johan Rupert and Nicky Oppenheimer, together have the same wealth at around 155 billion ZAR as the bottom half of the population. As Oxfam (2014, p. 3) notes in its report, extreme inequality 'corrupts politics, hinders economic growth and stifles social mobility . . . It squanders talent, thwarts potential and undermines the foundations of society'. These conditions are not good for fairness in universities or in the labour market.

Bhorat attributes the reasons for such pronounced inequality to still skewed initial endowments post-1994 (assets that people and households have) in the form of, for example, human capital, access to financial capital and ownership patterns. We could add cultural and social capitals valuable for educational success (Burke 2016). All of these, and other endowments, serve to generate a highly unequal growth trajectory. In addition, South Africa is an economy characterized by a growth path which is both skills intensive and capital intensive, but not generating a sufficient number of

low-wage jobs, which is key, Bhorat argues, to both reducing unemployment and inequality. Although it is high-skills employment to which graduates will be directed, nonetheless low-skills unemployment should be the concern for all.

In our research project we therefore turned to human development (Haq 1999) and the capability approach (Sen 1999) for a rich conceptual and inclusive frame with which to interrogate higher education processes and graduate outcomes at the macro-structural arrangements and micro-agency level. Our approach acknowledges the importance of human capital but does not rest there, rather expanding skills discourse to include issues of personal and social development, values and comprehensive graduate attributes. We interrogate how universities institutionalize (or not) the development of graduate attributes which go beyond employability to include public-good aspects which, especially for developing countries, are salient for graduate education and training, as well as challenging structural inequalities in and through higher education. From a conceptual point of view, we provide an inclusive theorization of graduate employability, moving beyond alleged skills 'gaps' and 'mismatches' in meeting employer expectations. From a higher education perspective, the book provides evidence to argue beyond an instrumental or utilitarian approach in evaluating graduate outcomes, as well as challenging an individualized notion of employability based purely on student effort. Furthermore, the book uses original data from four case study universities to contribute to knowledge of what a university is doing or should be doing to enhance graduate training for employment and inclusive development of themselves and their societies, as well as the equity implications for the higher education system and public policy.

The overarching aim of the book is therefore to explore the university–employability–employment interface informed by human development values, together with the concept of capabilities to integrate the development of knowledge, skills and competences which make a graduate attractive to employers, with careful attention to equity in university and labour market/employment opportunities for all graduates. This requires attention both to supply-side (university) and demand-side (labour market) factors. We ask what universities are doing in contributing to graduate readiness both for the world of work and for contributions to society, with what outcomes, for whom and why. Based on this evidence we consider how graduate employability can be more expansively conceptualized from a capabilities perspective, which further enables us to make interpersonal

comparisons regarding who has the widest opportunities to develop their capability set. To this end we present student perceptions of their university experiences and how it prepares them for the world of work and society; explore the perception of academics as to how universities prepare students for work and society; consider factors affecting graduate employability by university types, field of study, schooling background, race and gender and explore student aspirations and their orientations to democratic citizenship. We also consider what employers say they look for in graduate recruits. We are interested thus in how universities prepare graduates both for work and for participation in society, taking history and structural inequality into educational account.

## Higher Education for Human Development, Well-Being and Agency

Bearing in mind the well-rehearsed neo-liberal international pressures on higher education and national policy directions, and building on Boni and Walker (2013, 2016), the human development and capabilities framework we develop enables us to place well-being freedoms and agency freedoms at the heart of the development to which universities and their graduates can contribute. The development to be aimed for is *human* development and human freedoms. It enables us to ask focused questions about the public good of higher education when internationally and nationally in South Africa higher education is no longer supported exclusively by the state but requires fees-based contributions from individual students who are assumed to reap private rewards from their university credentials. Indeed this latter perception is not necessarily incorrect. A recent World Bank paper (Montenegro and Patrinos 2014) claims that South Africa has the highest rate of private returns from higher education of 39.5 (compared to Ghana 28, Brazil 17, Turkey 14, Argentina 12, the USA 14). In middle- and low-income countries higher education is thus also now seen as essential to economic development and social mobility (Boni and Walker 2016). Higher education is acknowledged as being pivotal for development at all levels. Its role in fostering high-level research and technological capacity in the knowledge economy is well recognized. For example, South Africa universities contribute 2.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) – more than textiles and forestry – and they employ 300 000 people which puts higher education on a par with mining

(Coan 2016). Thus at the same time that states are reducing their investment in higher education, higher education has moved to the forefront of economic policy as a driver of knowledge economies in an international climate of economic competition based on innovation and technological and scientific knowledge (De Sousa Santos 2006). This economy based on knowledge then requires more highly skilled human capital so that producing human capital becomes the rationale for university education to the exclusion of non-material goods. As Naidoo (2011, p. 41) points out, 'there is little argument that economic advantage is seen to accrue from the production and consumption of knowledge', with universities as the new economic 'developmental actors' (2011, p. 44) and players in global competition.

At the same time there are contestations as to whether higher education can be or is a driving force behind social change and more equality. As Piketty (2014) points out for the USA, more higher education has not reduced inequality in recent times; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2012) points to similar growing inequality gaps despite substantially increased access to higher education in Europe. In South Africa the number of students in higher education has more than doubled, students with a degree have a significantly better chance of employment than those without post-school qualifications (Branson et al. 2009) – but social and higher education inequality is still a problem. Thus while acknowledging the significant development role of higher education, the very complexity of education means we should not see it as a magical solution for economic growth, or inherently socially transformative. There is a lot that higher education can do towards fair development but it cannot do everything. Fraser (2009) helpfully distinguishes between affirmative approaches which leave structures of inequality in place, or transformative approaches which change structures (of inequality in the labour market, unequal access to elite universities and so on). We keep this distinction in mind in our discussions.

There is, nonetheless, also a counter-hegemonic imaginary encapsulated in our position that higher education in universities can be claimed or reclaimed to make a contribution to the national project of building a better society with more rather than less public good – understood as human development. Higher education plays a key role in forming graduates who can build and sustain democratic societies with high-quality services for all. The positive impact of higher education, therefore, is not restricted to those who directly study there, but can potentially permeate

through the whole of society (Walker and McLean 2013). Overall, therefore in this book we take the position that while a university cannot do everything to enable employment for its students, it can do a great deal in terms of opening up economic opportunities through quality teaching and learning, actively encouraging and promoting extra-curricular participation and filling in inequality 'gaps' to enhance the employability of individual students. More than this, universities can develop inclusive citizenship values and appreciation of diversity. Universities could enable their students to flourish and to choose good lives (Wilson-Strydom and Walker 2015). As De Sousa Santos (2006) emphasizes, this requires universities being open to the outside (communities and society), but this outside opening should not be limited only to opening to the market.

We think that equitable and quality higher education can be critical for promoting sustainable development, potentially advancing knowledge, skills, spaces for innovation, enquiry and debate, fostering public-good values and promoting effective participation in public decision-making. Furthermore, there are promising signs that higher education as a sector is featuring somewhat more prominently in development discourses and new global goals than was the case with the previous millennium development goals. Thus in September 2015, the global 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) were approved at the United Nations General Assembly. They aim to shape development policies for the next 15 years and include higher education institutions as development actors (Boni and Walker 2016). Directed to the challenges of poverty, climate change and sustainable development, education can be a development 'multiplier'. At the same time universities are located in continental and transnational spaces and global agendas which increasingly emphasize science and technology subjects and intensifying university competition (including recent Africa-university rankings), which are potentially extremely difficult to counter (Naidoo 2016).

Nonetheless, the inclusion of higher education as a development actor more firmly integrates higher education into development agendas, notwithstanding what some have argued is the more limited human capital focus. Still, higher education can be – and ought to be – inserted into equity and poverty agendas, offering opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge required to improve conditions of poverty and other inequalities. Our framework therefore draws both from higher education and from development (see Naidoo 2011), from well-being and from learning. Further, attention to development intersecting with education

requires that we take a normative stand regarding both what we take to be a decent society in which all can flourish and, following on this, a normative stand on decent universities (what is higher education for?) and, from here, decide on what should be our priorities.

## Education Purposes

Our analysis is therefore informed by a rich (and hopeful) understanding of education offered in universities, drawing on Dreze and Sen (1989, pp. 4–5) who propose that education is valuable to each person's freedom in five distinct but multidimensional ways: (1) education is of *intrinsic* importance and is a valuable achievement in itself. While not gainsaying the instrumental and social functions of education or education outcomes we must not overlook its intrinsic contribution to a flourishing life with a plurality of valuable dimensions: a love of poetry, or landscape drawing, or mathematical problems. Current global education policy and measurable outcomes neglect this intrinsic role but there is evidence that it persists strongly in the 1997 South African higher education White Paper (DOE 1997) although more faintly in the 2013 White Paper (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET 2013). (2) Education has an *instrumental personal* role in that it can support a person in doing many valuable things, such as forming human capital and enabling economic opportunities. This remains crucial for contributions to inclusive economic development; an unemployed graduate is a wasted' resource' for the individual, family and community. (3) Education plays an *instrumental social* role in developing public reasoning skills for contributions to public discussions and policy; education can teach us to reason and deliberate with others as active citizens in an informed and critical way taking account of different perspectives. This is crucial in building a functioning democracy and for informed public debate over issues like student funding and access which are current in South Africa. (4) Education plays an *instrumental process* role bringing young people into contact with others and broadening the horizon of their experiences. In the light of the persistence of apartheid spatial segregation in neighbourhoods and most schools, encountering diversity (of race, nationality, language, social class and so on) cannot be underestimated as a crucial awareness-making feature of university education. Finally, (5) education plays an *empowerment and distributive* role enabling the knowledge and skills for persons to organize politically, challenge oppression between groups but also

within the family, for example, reducing gender inequalities. It can open opportunities for others, for example, younger brothers or sisters or people in the communities of which people are a part, and interrupt intergenerational inequalities. In this way it has an inclusive and public-good impact towards more equality.

Education in this reading is intrinsically, instrumentally and socially valuable. It is fundamental to what Sen (1999) calls well-being (individual and social), the formation of 'human capabilities' and 'agency freedoms', that is being able to choose and act towards a life one has reason to value, a life which includes obligations to others; we elaborate in Chapter 3. Thus we have been guided in our analysis by our understanding of employability as involving how the university prepares graduates for employment by developing students' knowledge, skills and values to have choices regarding work and a career but we see employability also more broadly to encompass how university education enables students' agency to decide on their life plans and to value their contributions to an inclusive society. We need attention to what individual students are able to be and do, what appropriate university conditions are in place to foster individual employability and an understanding of how external conditions influence employment of diverse students (and whether or how these might be changed at all).

What each individual student is able to do cannot be divorced from his/her opportunity set provided by the educational and social context (Walker 2006, 2015). While income is important and jobs for graduates are necessary because this enables graduates to have more choices and to lead comfortable lives, what also matters is how they contribute in some way to reducing inequalities and improving other lives as well as their own, and that they should have work with genuine choices. In this respect, we understand that universities have a responsibility towards inclusive development and reduced inequalities both in terms of access to and progress and participation at university, and in contributions to society through the graduates they educate, linking development to a commitment to higher education for a fair and prosperous society. In multidimensional ways, higher education contributes not only to private benefits but also to citizenship by fostering knowledge, democratic pedagogical processes and inclusive cultures, with adequate mechanisms that allow the real participation of all young people, paying special attention to the most marginalized groups. Overall, it is clear that education includes both economic and non-market goods and both need to be included for a full account of what education achieves. In Chapter 3 we explore this in more depth.

## Tracing Key Policy Developments in South African Higher Education

We elaborate further on South African higher education and society context in Chapter 2. We note here that the higher education system is imbricated in the social and political inequalities landscape. Pre-1994, higher education was used as one tool to enforce apartheid ideology by creating two separate systems for the white and black[2] populations, described by Bunting (2002) as fragmented and uncoordinated, enshrined in the apartheid government's policies and politics of race. Higher education was aligned along five artificial geographical units[3] used to segregate the country. The first four were considered as 'independent' countries, but never received international recognition as they were internationally regarded as 'bantustan' apartheid constructions of the National Party (Bunting 2002). The fifth entity (Republic of South Africa (RSA)), consisted of 'South Africa' and was dominated politically and economically if not numerically by whites so that Africans needed a 'pass' or authorization before visiting, working and staying in the so-called RSA and were subject to a colour bar determining what work could be done by whom and where.

Similarly, higher education institutions (HEIs) were designed to serve one of four apartheid racial groups ('Africans', 'Coloureds', 'Indians' and 'Whites'). By 1985 based on the deeply flawed notion of 'separate but equal', 19 HEIs (universities and technikons) for the exclusive use of white people, two for coloureds, two for Indians and six for Africans had been established. By 1994, there were 36 HEIs which included: (1) 10 'historically disadvantaged' (HDIs) universities and seven 'historically disadvantaged' technikons designated for all black[4] South Africans, with (2) 10 'historically advantaged' (HAIs) universities and seven historically advantaged technikons for whites and (3) two distance HEIs catering for all races; the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Technikon South Africa (TSA). The higher education system in pre-1994 was thus seriously skewed towards the advantage of white South Africans and structured to entrench the racial ideologies of the apartheid government.

In the wake of new government policies post-1994 and the 1996 Constitution,[5] which enshrines the ideals of improving the quality of life of all citizens and establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights, government now emphasized values of non-racism, non-sexism, democracy and redress. This was no different in the higher education sector. The higher education

'transformation' project in South Africa has been premised on a complex triad of goals of economic development, social equity and deepening democracy (Badat 2009) to be pursued simultaneously. This is somewhat challenging, given the historical context of inequalities, uneven development economically and educationally, and currently faltering economic growth. With regard to the last, a central feature of South Africa's economic policy since 1994 has been the recognition that in order to achieve economic growth, it is essential to develop the capacity to participate and compete in the global knowledge economy. Thus, one of the major roles that the higher education system has been required to play has been to develop highly skilled graduates in scientific, technological and business fields (Council on Higher Education 2004; National Development Plan 2011). The recent National Development Plan (2011) emphasizes the role of universities in economic development: 'Higher education is the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development' (NDP 2011, p. 262), 'good science and technology education is crucial for South Africa's future innovation' (2011, p. 262), and universities 'will need to identify their areas of strength' and respond to 'the needs of their immediate environment, the African region and global competitiveness' (2011, p. 267).

If higher education was to contribute to redress, equity and development a new policy framework would be needed post-1994. The new government set up processes to construct an overall policy framework for higher education transformation, culminating in the White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Education (DOE) 1997) and the Higher Education Act of 1997. The White Paper mapped out a broad transformation agenda underpinned by core principles of equity (of access and the distribution of success along lines of race, gender, class and geography), and redress of past inequalities. It declared that higher education was to be transformed to meet the challenges of a new non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society committed to equity, justice and a better life for all. It thus mapped out a broad transformation agenda so that higher education was seen as an important vehicle for achieving equity in the redistribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens. Higher education was to provide access to learning and the fulfilment of human potential through lifelong learning, as well as laying the foundations of a critical civil society with a culture of debate, tolerance and critical engagement. It was also expected to address the human resource needs of a developing society, providing the labour

market with the high-level skills needed for participation in the global economy. Thus the core pillars of the new higher education system emphasized a three-pronged approach to transformation through increased participation by black students, greater responsiveness to social needs and increased cooperation and partnership in university governance by involving more stakeholders. The Higher Education Act of 1997 further assigned responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the Council on Higher Education (CHE), with a government mandate which includes quality promotion, quality assurance institutional audits, subject field audits (such as social work education), programme accreditation and, more recently, quality enhancement (see http://www.che.ac.za).

## The Current Higher Education Context: Policy, Participation and Funding

However, continuing geographical dispersion, racial fragmentation, structural inefficiencies and institutional duplication triggered a further rethink of the higher education landscape.[6] In 2003, it was decided to reduce – not without controversy – the number of universities from 36 to 23 through mergers including merging HDIs and HAIs to address apartheid race-based university divisions, while also increasing the efficiency of the system (CHE 2004). The 23 public HEIs comprised of 11 'traditional' universities, six 'comprehensive' universities including one for distance education and six universities of technology. Traditional universities were to focus on research and a mix of disciplined-based and professional degree qualifications, while universities of technology offered technological, vocational, career-oriented and professional programmes. The comprehensive universities were formed from the merging of universities and technikons and were to provide both types of qualifications (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2004). The number of public universities has recently been increased to 26 by the establishment in 2014/2015 of Sol Plaatje University in the Northern Cape, the University of Mpumalanga and Sefako Makgatho Health Science University in Pretoria. The private sector remains highly regulated and forms less than 10 per cent of all enrolments.

Higher education in South Africa now falls under the ambit of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training (MHET) and the Department

of Higher Education and Training (DHET). In 2013, the DHET published its White Paper for Post-School Education and Training outlining an ambitious vision in which transformation is still argued for:

> To build a post-school education and training system that is able to contribute to eradicating the legacy of apartheid. It will assist us to build a non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa characterised by progressive narrowing of the gap between the rich and the poor. Access to quality post-school education is a major driver in fighting poverty and inequality in any society. (2013, p. viii)

While economic development is important, the DHET proposes that the education and training system should not only provide knowledge and skills required by the economy but should also contribute 'to developing thinking citizens, who can function effectively, creatively and ethically as part of a democratic society'. Such people should 'have an understanding of their society, and be able to participate fully in its political, social and cultural life' (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2013, p. 3). Like the 1997 White Paper this seems to locate the policy framework beyond human capital and the assumption that more and better education will solve problems of unemployment. On the other hand, the 2013 White Paper notes the practical reality of a stuttering economy and it claims that: 'few can argue with the need to improve the performance of the economy, to expand employment and to equip people to achieve sustainable livelihoods' (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2013, p. 3). It explains that the social and economic challenges facing South Africa have shifted national priorities in the face of structural challenges associated with unemployment, poverty and inequality so that economic development has been prioritized, together with the role of education and training as a contributor to such development. Again, seeming to prioritize employment, albeit for its social impact and benefits as well, the White Paper further notes that 'Education will not guarantee economic growth, but without it economic growth is not possible and society will not fulfil its potential with regard to social and cultural development' (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) 2013, p. 5). If we look at transformation-leaning word counts as a rough indicator of emphasis we find: quality 207, diversity 96, equity 14, social justice 7, empowerment 0, agency in the form of 'social agency' 1, transformation 11. But we also