

Higher Education Differentiation: The Good, the Bad and the Incomprehensible

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Context: Policy History and Debates

From NEPI to Green Paper (2012) the key policy issues were equity, democratic participation, efficiency, development

NEPI – dealt mainly with equity as black access, democracy demand for greater governance participation and put on table: equity vs development and equality vs ‘justifiable differences’

NCHE – equity (individual, institutional and massification), democratic structures and weakly raised knowledge/innovation (the dentist)

White Paper – equity as individual black and gender advancement, (planned growth), democratic structures (but not a national forum), introduced efficiency and called development quality

National Plan and Mergers – equity (institutional) but mainly efficiency

NPC and DHET GP – equity is mainly participation, development = knowledge production, efficiency = through put and democratic participation is indigenous knowledge and African languages



Three Main Functions of Higher Education

1. Responsible for the education and training of professionals and other high level human resources
2. Produce new knowledge and find new applications for existing knowledge
3. Provides opportunities for social mobility and simultaneously strengthens equity, social justice and democracy.

Outcome of 20 Years of Policy

Combination of Diagnoses: World Bank, NPC, Green Paper

1. medium knowledge producing
2. low participation and high attrition rates
3. insufficient capacity for adequate skills production
4. differentiated (though not formally recognized for steering purposes)
5. small number of institutions in ‘chronic crisis’ mode.

In 2008 Shanghai rated SA HE system in the range between 27 – 33 along with the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Ireland and the top university (Cape Town) in the 250-300 range.



Outcome of 20 Years of Policy (2)

1. There is a steady increase in publication, masters and doctoral outputs, but it is too slow to meet labour market demand, including the academic labour market
2. The knowledge production system is sharply differentiated, both in terms of research output and the production of masters and doctoral degrees
3. In addition to a general undersupply of high level skills, a major problem is with post secondary (medium level) skills
4. Black participation can only increase significantly in a massified and differentiated system. Will require consistent, but modest increase in the university sector and a dramatic increase in the public and private post secondary FET/college sectors – private provision will have to be incentivised
5. A key priority must be to improve throughput and retention
6. Improve quality of undergraduate education across the board



DHET/DST Complimentary but disconnected discourses

1. DHET

- a) Shocked by Charles finding of 3 million NEET's and have become 'besotted' with FET and training
- b) In Ministers budget speech referred to research on page 12 and never used knowledge economy and Africa, not to mention the globe (a local communist)

2. DST

- b) Opening line knowledge economy and global competitive
- c) Presses all the knowledge production buttons
- d) Never spoke beyond pleasantries to DHET advisor

3. Two Departments deal with different aspects of the system, without any co-ordination -- wrong merger? (Einstein)



Differentiation (NPC) Functions of HE (1)

Higher education is the major driver of the information-knowledge system, linking it with economic development... Universities are key to developing a nation. They play three main functions in society.

Firstly, they educate and train people with high-level skills for the employment needs of the public and private sectors.

Secondly, universities are the dominant producers of new knowledge, and they critique information and find new local and global applications for existing knowledge. Universities also set norms and standards, determine the curriculum, languages and knowledge, ethics and philosophy underpinning a nation's knowledge-capital. South Africa needs knowledge that equips people for a society in constant social change.



Differentiation (NPC) Functions (2)

"Thirdly, given the country's apartheid history, higher education provides opportunities for social mobility and simultaneously strengthens equity, social justice and democracy. In today's knowledge society, higher education underpinned by a strong science and technology innovation system is increasingly important in opening up people's opportunities." (p262)

For the first time knowledge production and equity are linked by stating that "high quality knowledge production cannot be fully realized with a low student participation rate" (p274).

Also universities are not mainly for individual mobility or for equity redress -- equity is mentioned last and transformation in the Castells sense.



Differentiation (NPC) Knowledge

The NPC is so enthusiastic about knowledge that it declares that "knowledge production is the rationale of higher education" (p271) - indeed a radical departure from the traditional 'rationale' of higher education in Africa, that is, disseminating (teaching) knowledge from somewhere else.

Posters outside Parliament for Thursday's State of the Nation:

"Knowledge Economy and Development Opportunities"

At ANC 100th Zuma said: "Education and skills are the key priority for our people"

These are huge steps away from HE as individual mobility and an equity instrument



NPC Knowledge Policies

1. the notion of knowledge production consists of a combination of PhD education and research output.
2. a target of tripling the number of doctoral graduates from 1,420 to 5,000 per annum, and increasing the proportion of academic staff with PhDs from 34% to 75%
3. a number of world-class centres and programmes should be developed within the national system of innovation and the higher education sector.
4. a new future scholars programme needs to be developed, both to increase the proportion of staff with PhDs and to meet the increasing demand for professional PhDs in the non-university research, financial and services sectors
5. role of science councils should be reviewed in light of the world-wide tendency to align, or merge, research councils with universities



NPC Differentiation (1)

"South Africa needs to strengthen research excellence through performance-based grants. More weight should be given to building departments, and centers or networks of excellence. Given that performance-based grants can entrench historical privilege and disadvantage, capacity-building grants should be provided with clear targets for improvement in five-year intervals.

"...progressive differentiation requires that all higher education institutions provide high quality education and skills training, underpinned by common standards for student facilities, libraries, laboratories, computer access and staff qualifications. Adequate resourcing will be needed to enable historically disadvantaged institutions to achieve these standards and overcome historical backlogs." (p291)



NPC Differentiation (2)

1. deals with the worldwide policy debate about the concentration of resources by proposing world-class centers and programmes across institutions (High science - SKA)
2. advises the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities that such revisions should be based on the needs of a differentiated system with adequate provision for both teaching and research
3. requires flexible pathways for student mobility between institutions
4. the Higher Education Quality Committee should finally start developing a core set of quality indicators for the whole system.
5. Should be guided by evidence-based planning and performance monitoring which will require maintaining and strengthening the current Higher Education Management Information System and the additional capacity to analyze national trends and changes between and among institutions and institutional groups.



DHET Green Paper (1)

History/diagnosis

1. Diverse system steeped in inequality
2. Leading universities internationally respected, HBUs mired in constraints
3. Univ of Technology, and Comprehensives mission drift losing focus of their mission to produce technologists mid-level undergraduate skills
4. low success, low throughput at undergraduate
5. too few post graduate, particularly PhD
6. Aging academic staff and shortages in scarce skills areas
7. Lack of coherence and articulation



DHET Green Paper (2)

Research and innovation

1. Economic depends on innovation and technology absorption
2. While investment in research has tripled, there has not been a commensurate increase in personnel
3. Total knowledge output has increased 64% (2000-2009) but the system must become more productive
4. Poverty is a significant constraint on masters and PhD studies – students under pressure to obtain jobs??
5. Drastically increase number and quality of masters and PhD's
6. Need for increased coordination between DHET and DST
7. Caliber and workload of academic staff must be addressed
8. Long-term plan for renewing the academic profession - doctorates for academics and professions



DHET Green Paper (3) : Differentiation

1. No further categorization of institutions
2. All institutions must have a clearly defined mandate
3. Undergraduate/post graduate and academic/professional/vocational equally important
4. Mix and level of programmes not fixed
5. All must offer high quality undergraduate programmes
6. University system must interface with PSE (FET, colleges)
7. Funding regime must do justice to current institutional realities, and accept need for redress (development)
8. Funding for agreed upon outputs



NPC and DHET: The Good

1. Differentiation (whatever form) is official
2. Knowledge production (PhD and research output must increase – different counts of research outputs) – at last recognising the knowledge producing role of the university
3. Big focus on doctorate – for academics (target more than 60%), professions research councils and other sectors (finance)
4. Good quality undergraduate education – including infrastructure funds for labs, libraries, housing
5. Improvement of through put – efficiency
6. Dramatic increase in participation rate – mainly in FET
7. Mission and profile differentiation
8. Creation of a connected system
9. Improved Coordination between DSHT and DHET (HESA meeting)
10. More funding for higher education



DHET: The Bad

1. No world class institutions – in sports, culinary and high science – Castells no marker institution (Norwegian Janus faced protestant hypocrisy)
2. “ all over the world there are universities with a predominant teaching mission” - University or college?
3. Combining 1 and 2 could be aiming for a “mediocre system” - Africa syndrome
4. Don’t conceptualise college sector – black hole without identity
5. Oscillation between performance and capacity building
6. Confusion between redress and development
7. Critique of previous policies but no recognition of implementation failure – bad policy or capacity
8. No recognition of lack of a Pact (NPC applies it to schooling, crucial for differentiation)
9. No recognition of Departmental capacity required for mission and profile differentiation and the lack of a capacity building strategy
10. The state will provide – deep ambiguity to private provision



DHET: The Incomprehensible (1) – No Tradeoffs

Lets go on holiday without money

1. Differentiation must take cognizance of historical inequalities, existing institutional types, and a few relatively research intensive universities responsible for most of the post graduates and cutting edge research. Their needs must not divert resources from all the universities, particularly poorer ones - all must have sufficient resources to be effective institutions
2. Because of the high unit value per research output, funding framework is biased towards rewarding research at the expense of teaching



DHET: The Incomprehensible (2)- Inconsistency

1. Deep ambiguity, and confusion about evidence based policy making, performance and incentives

“High increase in research output by advantaged universities who have the means to “chase” research. The rigidity of the funding system discourage implementation of flexible curricula like 4 year undergraduate degrees than can cater to diversity of students ...” (p46)

2. Oscillation between performance (research), capacity building (without performance) and teaching (without evidence)
3. Input vs output funding (European debate is about proportions)



NPC Consistency

"South Africa needs to strengthen research excellence through performance-based grants. More weight should be given to building departments, and centers or networks of excellence. Given that performance-based grants can entrench historical privilege and disadvantage, capacity-building grants should be provided with clear targets for improvement in five-year intervals.... The NPC makes a recommendation that could have very far-reaching implications for the higher education system:

"...greater emphasis should be placed on incentivizing graduate output. Such a shift would be in line with the international trend towards greater emphasis on output-based funding. The higher education department would have to put measures in place to ensure that the risk of this approach discouraging universities from taking students from deprived backgrounds is reduced."(p292)



Concluding Comments

The South African higher education system has, for years, operated a 'win-win' situation. Universities admit students who they say are not adequately prepared for higher education. At least 50% of these students fail. But universities take the subsidy (more than 80% of the total government allocation) and blame the school system for the failure. In other words, they keep the money and displace the blame.

This does not only operate at undergraduate level. In a longitudinal study of masters and PhD students, CHET came across an institution that had enrolled 1,930 masters students and two years later 1,157 had dropped out, but the institution pocketed the enrolment subsidy of R12.3 million rand (direct teaching input). (NPC Radical Plan)

