

Chapter 9

Institutional Combinations and the Creation of a New Higher Education Institutional Landscape in Post-1994 South Africa

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9.1 Introduction

The institutional change agenda for higher education in South Africa post-1994 was extensive in its foci, ambitious in goals, and far-reaching in nature. There was a wide array of transformation-oriented initiatives aimed at institutional change. These included the definition of the purposes and goals of higher education; extensive policy research, policy formulation, adoption, and implementation in the areas of governance, funding, academic structure and programmes and quality assurance, and the enactment of new laws and regulations. There was also a major restructuring and reconfiguration of the higher education institutional landscape and of institutions that included the mergers of institutions and the incorporation of some institutions into others. These initiatives tested the capacities and capabilities of the state and higher education institutions and affected the pace, nature and outcomes of change. In this paper we examine one aspect of institutional change: mergers, addressing the context, determinants, dynamics and outcomes of mergers, or more generally institutional combinations, and the overall restructuring of the higher education institutional landscape post-1994.

Any adequate theorisation of institutional change in South African higher education must analyse such change within an overall analysis of the character of social-structural and conjunctural conditions (political, economic, social and ideological) post-1994. The distinction between structural and conjunctural conditions “refers to the division between elements of a (relatively) permanent and synchronic logic of a given social structure, and elements which emerge as temporary variations of its functioning in a diachronic perspective” (Melucci 1989). The distinction alerts us to both continuities and discontinuities in historical conditions and to

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analyse institutional change in higher education within an awareness of changing historical conditions (structures and conjunctures). Higher education systems and institutions operate “within the framework of possibilities and constraints presented by the institutions of our complex societies” (Keane and Mier 1989). The analysis of change in higher education “must take into account the contradictions, possibilities and constraints of the conjunctural and structural conditions” (Wolpe and Unterhalter 1991).

Institutional change in higher education, however, cannot be explained only in terms of conditions in the wider society. Change in higher education is also shaped by conditions internal to higher education, including the nature of the inherited structure and the changing higher education terrain. Furthermore, change is “the product of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints”, and of “cognitive and political praxis” (Melucci 1989; Eyerman and Jamison 1991). The goals and policies that are adopted, the choices, decisions and trade-offs made, and the strategies and instruments chosen and implemented by different social agents and actors acting in co-operation and/or conflict within the higher education system and its institutions – human agency as opposed to social structure – necessarily affects the pace, nature and outcomes of change.

9.2 The Context of Change

Colonialism and apartheid, social, political and economic discrimination, and inequalities of a class, “race”, gender, institutional and spatial nature all profoundly shaped South African higher education, establishing patterns of systemic inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation of particular social classes and groups. Apartheid ideology and planning resulted in higher education institutions that were reserved for different “race”, ethnic and language groups and allocated different ideological, economic and social functions in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid and capitalist social order. In terms of the apartheid policy of “separate development”, 87 % of the land surface of South Africa was reserved for the minority white population and 13 % for Africans, who constituted the vast majority (the bantustans – areas deemed to be the “homelands” of African South Africans). In the “white” areas of South Africa, 19 higher education institutions were reserved for the use of whites, two were designated for Coloureds, two were for the exclusive use of Indians and six were reserved for the use of Africans. There were seven institutions in the bantustans which were essentially for Africans. The structure of administrative regulation of higher education was extremely complex and fragmented, with numerous political structures and eight different state departments spanning “white” South Africa and the bantustans controlling the 36 institutions (Bunting 2002). Relative to white institutions, many black institutions were characterised by greater constraints on or denial of academic freedom, and extremely repressive conditions with respect to student governance and rights. Differences in allocated academic roles constituted the key axis of institutional differentiation and the principal basis of inequalities

between the historically white and historically black institutions prior to 1994. The institutions that were reserved for different racial, ethnic and language groups differed widely in terms of the breadth and nature of academic programmes, the quality of provision, the level of state investments and funding, and the adequacy of infrastructure and facilities and equipment. The location of the black institutions in mainly rural areas, as opposed to the urban locations of most white institutions, led to them being referred to as “bush colleges”. At the dawn of democracy in 1994, the higher education “system” comprised 21 public universities, 15 technikons, 120 colleges of education, 24 nursing and 11 agricultural colleges.

It has been contended that “white” higher education emerged at the behest of the social, economic and political demands of an enfranchised section of the community and [...] therefore tended to follow the ‘natural’ contours of economy and society. Black tertiary education, by contrast, (was) the historic by-product of racially motivated planning inflicted on a disenfranchised section of the community, and, as such, (was) not [...] primarily designed to accommodate the profile or patterns of civil society or – until recently – the economy (Van Onselen 1991).

This notion of a “complex dual legacy”, which treats historically white institutions as being the “organic outgrowth of an undemocratic political system” and the historically black institutions as the “artificial outgrowth of racially motivated planning” is highly flawed. As Ridge has commented, in van Onselen’s argument “an opposition is set up between “natural” factors and “planning” factors, with the effect of leaving only the black institutions scarred by apartheid” (Van Onselen 1991).

Ridge argues in contrast that “the conscious policies” of the historically white institutions “were also deeply influenced by central planning” and provides examples, such as “the phenomenal growth in Afrikaans university graduate programmes [...] and the growth of the white universities to accommodate the burgeoning numbers of white” secondary school graduates (Ridge 1991). He argues that there was also “a profound unconscious influence of central planning priorities on the white universities” (ibid, 1991). He notes that “in one sense white universities (were) better positioned to respond to the demands of the economy; in another they [...] “naturally” served the interests of the apartheid planners, strengthening the white hold on privilege” (Ridge 1991). The thrust of Ridge’s argument, correctly, is that both historically white and historically black institutions were profoundly shaped by apartheid planning and by the respective functions assigned to them in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid social order. It was the fundamental differences in allocated roles, whatever the differences among the historically white institutions and however diverse the origins and development of the historically black institutions, that distinguished these two sets of institutions and constituted the key differentiation and the principal basis of inequalities between them.

The USAID Tertiary Education Sector Assessment observed that “the requirements of apartheid and the historical competition between white English and Afrikaans speakers have led to distortions in planning for the higher education needs of the country and to considerable duplication of institutions and programs, particularly in the urban areas”, as well, in certain respects, between historically

white institutions and historically black institutions (USAID 1992: 6–21). It was further observed that the historically white institutions were not necessarily appropriately geared in all respects to the “modern core” of the economy, noting that “even at the leading institutions, research (was) unevenly concentrated in certain faculties and disciplines” (USAID 1992: 6.5). It was also noted that notwithstanding that the historically white South African universities were the major research institutions in Africa, with international reputations in fields such as engineering, medicine and the sciences, there were significant areas of weakness even in the fields of science and technology [...] On the whole [...] South African manufacturing depends heavily on imported technology, and has demonstrated little commitment to local innovation. In an increasingly competitive international environment, South Africa’s external technological dependence will make it increasingly difficult to maintain and develop its industrial base. More generally, analysts have noted “the lack of co-ordination between the objectives of research and socio-economic goals,” pointing to the low proportion of academic research funding expended on engineering, technology, math, and computer science [...] (USAID 1992: Appendix J, 51–2).

These comments underlie the inadequacy of the notion of the “organic” development of the historically white institutions as opposed to the racially planned development of the historically black institutions.

In summary, despite opposition at various times and in different forms from some historically white institutions and the historically black institutions to apartheid, both were products of apartheid planning and were functionally differentiated to serve the development and reproduction of the apartheid order. This racially structured differentiation was accompanied by a set of conditions, pertaining to funding, geographical location, staff qualifications, student access, opportunities and quality and so forth, which further disadvantaged the historically black institutions with respect even to the narrow range of teaching and research functions they were designed to carry out. Thus, post-1994, all higher education institutions needed to be liberated from this past to enable them to serve new societal goals. Planning had to take cognisance of and address the institutional and social inequalities and the distortions of the past, but had to also look to the future. A key challenge was for the inherited higher education institutions to be recognised as *South African* institutions, embraced as such, transformed where necessary, and put to work for and on behalf of all South Africans.

The post-1994 higher education terrain comprised a rich diversity of social actors. Higher education provision was regulated by a national ministry and department, which attempted to steer higher education to contribute to national policy goals through the instruments of planning and funding. A new body created by the 1997 Higher Education Act, (South African Government 1997) the Council on Higher Education (CHE), served as the statutory independent advisory body to the Minister of Education with responsibilities also for monitoring the achievement of policy goals and quality assurance through the Higher Education Quality Committee. Umbrella interest groups such as the South African University Vice-Chancellors Association, the Committee of Technikon Principals (later merged as

Higher Education South Africa) and the Alliance of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development existed, as did numerous national student organisations, academic and support staff labour unions and research and development agencies. The plethora of organisations representing diverse constituencies and social groups meant that policy formation was often strongly contested and mediated in different ways, with differing outcomes.

It should also be observed that there was an intractable tension between a number of the values and goals defined for post-1994 higher education. To take one example pertinent to institutional restructuring and combinations: in the light of the apartheid past, policy formation had to take into account numerous and diverse needs – social equity and institutional equity; equity and economic development, local and global issues and challenges, and global competitiveness and redistributive national reconstruction and development. A crucial question was how could South African higher education be oriented simultaneously towards all these needs and poles? How were the differing needs of equity *and* economic development, or global competitiveness *and* redistributive national reconstruction and development to be satisfied simultaneously? More specifically, what did this mean for the *system* of higher education and individual higher education institutions or for groupings of higher education institutions – such as the historically advantaged white and disadvantaged black universities and technikons (later universities of technology)? Were all higher education institutions to be oriented towards both poles, or was there to be some kind of differentiation and diversity with respect to the differing requirements of the two poles? Were these to be choices that are to be left to the higher education institutions themselves or was the state to actively steer in this regard? The transformation agenda in higher education was suffused with paradoxes, in so far as the new government and progressive social forces sought to pursue *simultaneously* a number of values and goals that were in tension with one another. The paradoxes necessarily raised the question of trade-offs between values, goals and strategies.

9.3 The Determinants and Trajectories of Change

Transforming the higher education system and creating a new institutional landscape that was better placed to meet the development goals of a democratic South Africa was part of higher education policy discourse since the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1996. In 1995 the NCHE was established by President Nelson Mandela to, among other things, advise the Minister of Education “on what constitutes Higher Education”, “the institutional types required for the system, their particular functions and missions”, (and) “their respective inter-relationships” (Moja and Cloete 1996). The NCHE reported in 1996, and buffeted by strong differences among key stakeholders advocated acceptance “in name, and in broad function and mission, the existence of universities, technikons and colleges as types of institutions” (cited in (Kraak 2001)). It also

proposed allowing a new system to “evolve through a planned process which recognises current institutional missions and capacities, addresses the distortions created by apartheid, and responds to emerging regional and national needs” (Kraak 2001). Kraak termed the NCHE view as a “middle-ground position” that “fudged” the differences between what he described as “functional and flexible differentiation” – the latter being institutional mission and programme-based differentiation (Kraak 2001).

The foundation policy document on post-1994 South African higher education was White Paper 3 of 1997, entitled *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. This committed the state to the restructuring of “the higher education system and its institutions to meet the needs of an increasingly technologically-oriented economy”, and to “deliver the requisite research, the highly trained people and the knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to address national needs and to participate in a rapidly changing and competitive global context” (Department of Education 1997). “White Paper 3”, noting the shortcomings of the structure of the inherited system, was emphatic that “the system has no alternative but to re-make itself in order to realise the vision and achieve the goals set out” for higher education (Department of Education 1997). It stated that:

A vital task [...] is to assess the optimal number and type of institutions needed to meet the goals of a transformed higher education system. Many institutions either require consolidation or retooling for new missions and goals. Narrow self-interest cannot be allowed to preclude planning which may lead to institutional mergers and closures, and the development of new institutional forms where these are necessary. (Department of Education 1997)

White Paper 3 emphasised the need “to conceptualise (and) plan [...] higher education in South Africa” as an integrated “single, national co-ordinated system”, “ensure diversity in its organisational form and in the institutional landscape”, and “diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes that will be required to meet national and regional needs in social, cultural and economic development” (Department of Education 1997). However, a “uniform system” was not favoured and it was recognised that there would be a need to “offset pressures for homogenisation” (Department of Education 1997). A diversity of student bodies, academic programmes and institutional missions were considered to be “essential features of a thriving, integrated system” and it stated that the funding framework (would) support purposeful and equitable variety in the system (Department of Education 1997). A co-ordinated system was also desired for another reason: the inherited “size and shape of the higher education system (was) determined by uncoordinated institutional decisions on student enrolments and programme distribution”, which was “untenable in the context of fiscal constraints and the need for greater responsiveness of the higher education system to the national development agenda” (Department of Education 1997).

White Paper 3 was the outcome of a largely participatory process and represented a national democratic consensus on the principles and goals of higher education. State steering, using the three instruments of negotiated institutional and national planning, funding and quality assurance – was to be the means for creating

a new higher education landscape. In 1997, however, the state structure responsible for higher education was still in its infancy and its institutional capacity was yet to be fully developed. Between 1997 and 2001 there was strong contestation between the state, the national interest groups representing universities and technikons, and individual higher education institutions around institutional restructuring and the creation of a new higher education landscape. The struggles were manifested in the documents and utterances of different actors, and during meetings between the minister and his officials and individual institutions and the representative bodies of institutions, and also found expression in the public media. This revealed the fragility of the White Paper 3 consensus in so far as specific goals were concerned and the principal and particular criteria, processes and strategies that were to be deployed to achieve policy goals. Some actors, like the South African University Vice-Chancellors Association, wanted institutional restructuring to be left to voluntary actions on the part of higher education institutions themselves. Some historically advantaged white universities wanted a new landscape to emerge as an outcome of market forces; indeed, after 1994 some of their actions led to the higher education terrain taking on a “Darwinian” character, with a reinforcing of historical and racialised patterns of institutional advantage and disadvantage. Certain initiatives of historically white contact institutions, such as the offering of academic programmes through distance learning, while professed to be in support of expanding provision gave the impression of seeking to maintain largely white student bodies and white privilege. Some black institutions were focused solely on institutional redress and silent on the critical question of redress to create what kind of institution. Some technikons claimed to be disadvantaged because they had been confined to diploma and certificate programmes as opposed to degree programmes and clamoured for a different development trajectory. Left unchecked, these developments had the danger of solidifying a “free for all” higher education “system” characterised by the supremacy of unacceptable vested institutional interests and even greater fragmentation and incoherence, institutional inequalities and inefficient and ineffective utilisation of resources.

The Ministry was well aware of this danger. It had noted that it wanted to “avoid [...] a laissez-faire proliferation of higher education programmes by an increasing range of providers, without benefit of a planning framework and without adequate safeguards to ensure the quality of provision” (Department of Education 1997). It understood that “this would almost certainly result in the unplanned blurring of institutional roles and functions, and, given resource constraints, a strong tendency to over-provide low-cost programmes in low-priority curriculum areas” (Department of Education 1997). To the extent that significant and diverse social and institutional interests were not effectively mediated, there was the danger of policy paralysis and reproduction of the status quo. In the face of the strength of particular institutional interests, which made substantive consensus difficult, the role of the state began to predominate and there was acceleration towards substantive policy development of a distributive, redistributive and material nature. Concomitantly, and unfortunately, self-imposed austerity measures introduced by the new government to manage state debt and spending and the concomitant inadequacy of public

funding of higher education served as a brake on institutional change in various areas.

The process of deciding on “the optimal number and type of institutions needed to meet the goals of a transformed higher education system”, if much contested with respect to issues such as the appropriate strategies for restructuring, the form, pace and timeframes of restructuring and which institutions should be merged, was extensive. The strong policy signals from government did not yield significant and substantive results. Competing institutional interests and divisions along various lines meant that there was a dearth of proactive and coherent proposals on the part of key stakeholders, institutions and their constituency organisations to move the issue of restructuring forward on a creative and imaginative path. As noted, there was also a lack of deliberate and concerted steering on the part of the state, as the new state department for higher education was still in the process of being fully established. In the face of the inherited institutional inequalities, leaving the issue of a new higher education landscape to market forces would have resulted in a higher education system in sharp incongruence with what was sought by “White Paper 3”.

In 1999, a new Minister of Education emphasised his determination to critically examine and reshape the institutional landscape of higher education. He stated that:

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system, responsive to the needs of students of all ages and the intellectual challenges of the twenty-first century. The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geopolitical imagination of apartheid planners [...] It is vital that the mission and location of higher education institutions be re-examined [...]. (Council on Higher Education 2000)

In 2000, the Minister requested the CHE to conduct “an overarching exercise designed to put strategies into place to ensure that our higher education system is indeed on the road to the 21st century” (Council on Higher Education 2000). The Minister called for a set of concrete proposals on the shape and size of the higher education system and not a set of general principles which serve as guidelines for restructuring. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of the point. Until and unless we reach finality on institutional restructuring, we cannot take action and put in place the steps necessary to ensure the long-term affordability and sustainability of the higher education system (Council on Higher Education 2000).

The CHE report, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the Twenty-First Century*, stated that “the problems and weaknesses of the higher education system will not disappear on their own or be overcome by institutions on their own. They must be confronted and overcome in a systemic way” (Council on Higher Education 2000). This would require the reconfiguration of the present system and the creation of a new higher education landscape; [...] extensive, integrated, iterative national planning as well as multiple co-ordinated interventions and initiatives. It will also require political will, sustained commitment and the courage to change at system and institutional level (Council on Higher Education 2000).

The CHE indicated that it sought “the development of a higher education system that delivers effectively and efficiently and is based on equity, quality and excellence; responsiveness; and good governance and management” (Council on Higher Education 2000). It argued that there was “a historic opportunity to reconfigure the higher education system in a principled and imaginative way, more suited to the needs of a democracy and all its citizens in contrast to the irrational and exclusionary imperatives that shaped large parts of the current system” (Council on Higher Education 2000). In its view its proposals provided “a framework and foundation for making the present incoherent, wasteful and un-coordinated higher education system rational, enabling significant improvements in quality and equity and ensuring that the knowledge and human resource needs of a developing democracy are effectively realized” (Council on Higher Education 2000). It recommended that the higher education system “should be reconfigured as a differentiated and diverse system so that there can be effective responses from institutions to the varied social needs of the country” (Council on Higher Education 2000). In such a new reconfigured system, institutions should have a range of mandates (principal orientations and core foci) and pursue coherent and more explicitly defined educational and social purposes with respect to the production of knowledge and successful graduates (ibid, 2000: 8–9).

The CHE endorsed institutional “differentiation and diversity” (Council on Higher Education 2000). “Differentiation” was used to refer to the social and educational mandates of institutions, which were to “orient institutions to meet economic and social goals by focusing on programmes at particular levels of the qualifications structure¹ and on particular kinds of research and community service” (Council on Higher Education 2000). “Diversity” referred to “the specific missions of individual institutions” (Council on Higher Education 2000). Three types of institutions were defined, that were to be differentiated in terms of their mandated “orientation and focus”:

1. Institutions which constitute the bedrock of the higher education system. The orientation and focus of these institutions would be quality undergraduate programmes; limited postgraduate programmes up to a taught master’s level; research related to curriculum, learning and teaching with a view to application.
2. Institutions whose orientation and focus is: quality undergraduate programmes; comprehensive postgraduate taught and research programmes up to the doctoral level; extensive research capabilities (basic, applied, strategic and developmental) across a broad range of areas.
3. Institutions whose orientation and focus is: quality undergraduate programmes; extensive postgraduate taught and research programmes up to the masters level; selective postgraduate taught and research programmes up to the doctoral level; select areas of research (basic, applied, strategic and development).

¹South Africa has a National Qualifications Framework in terms of which higher education programmes range from levels 5 to 10. Level 5 is a programme that leads to a Certificate in higher education. Level 10 is a doctoral programme resulting in a doctoral qualification.

4. An institution whose orientation and focus is dedicated distance education.
5. Private higher education institutions (Council on Higher Education 2000).

The CHE report indicated “that there should be no closure of institutions but that the absolute number of institutions should be reduced through combination” (Council on Higher Education 2000). Here, however, it was constrained by the Minister’s injunction that there should be no closures of any universities or technikons, even though White Paper 3 had left this open as a possibility. The CHE provided “examples of possible combinations for illustrative purposes”, but urged that the Ministry should “investigate the full range of possibilities for combinations, and should also be open to compelling combination possibilities that may emerge from the iterative national planning process” (Council on Higher Education 2000). It also proposed “that as part of national planning and the development of a national plan, there should be an iterative process between the Minister and institutions around the reconfiguration of the system, combination and the mandates of institutions” (Council on Higher Education 2000). The CHE stressed these critical points. First, the Ministry had to “be mindful that under apartheid, institutions designated for black South Africans and the technikons were disadvantaged in different ways”; the CHE’s “reconfiguration proposals makes possible developmental trajectories for institutions to enable them to undertake specified mandates within a new national framework”. Second, the “success of reconfiguration will require the setting of nationally negotiated priorities and targets, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress in their achievement”. Third, a new institutional landscape would not be possible “without the mobilisation of public, international donor and private sector funds for key strategic interventions” (Council on Higher Education 2000).

The Ministry responded to the CHE through its 2001 *National Plan for Higher Education*. The *National Plan* reaffirmed its commitment to the White Paper 3 goals (Ministry of Education 2001). It also signalled the Ministry of Education’s impatience with the pace and nature of change and its determination to act. The Minister of Education noted: “After apartheid, privilege and disadvantage is no longer kept in place by violence but by the workings of inertia and of continuing privilege – the higher education system, in large measure, continues to reproduce the inequities of the past. This must end”. The Minister added that the “time is long overdue. The reform of higher education cannot be further delayed. Nor can it be left to chance. The Plan is [...] not up for further consultation and certainly not for negotiation” (5 March 2001). The *Plan* elaborated seven specific objectives and 21 priorities that would be pursued in relation to five identified *White Paper* goals, the 16 outcomes that would be sought and the strategies and mechanisms that would be utilised to realize the outcomes. The goals related to the production of graduates (participation rate, student recruitment, distribution of students by fields and the quality of graduates); student and staff equity; the maintenance and enhancement of research outputs; differentiation and diversity in the higher education system, and restructuring of the higher education landscape (Ministry of Education 2001).

The “National Plan” initiated the merger of two geographically adjacent technikons in KwaZulu-Natal that were historically reserved for white and Indian students, by calling on their governing councils “to complete plans for the merger of the two institutions” (Ministry of Education 2001). The councils of the two institutions had already agreed to merge in principle. It is important to note that this was the only instance of a proactive, rational and bottom-up initiative on the part of any institutions. It set into motion the incorporation of a branch campus of one historically black university into that of another geographically closer historically white university. A Working Group was created to “facilitate the development of an implementation plan for establishing a single dedicated distance education institution” from a previous distance education university, a distance education technikon and the incorporation of the distance education unit of a university which was primarily a teacher education institution. The Working Group was also requested to “advise on the role of a dedicated distance education institution and to investigate the broader role of distance education in higher education in the light of current and future international trends and the changes in information and communication technology” (Ministry of Education 2001). One institution that was created under apartheid in “white” South Africa for urban African students and had satellite campuses in various regions was to “be unbundled and its constituent parts incorporated into the appropriate institutions within each region” (Ministry of Education 2001). In order to “facilitate mergers and the development of new institutional and organisation forms”, the *National Plan* also established a National Working Group (NWG) to “undertake regional feasibility studies to advise the Minister on the appropriate institutional structures to meet regional and national needs for higher education, including mergers and/or other forms of combination” (Ministry of Education 2001).

In 2001, the *Higher Education Act* was amended to give the Minister power to set scope of provision by public and private institutions. The NWG released its report, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, in 2002 (RSA 2002). It proposed to reduce the then 36 institutions to 21 through mergers and incorporations, though with no loss of sites of provision. Following the consideration of public submissions and the advice of the CHE, the Ministry submitted its own proposals on institutional restructuring for Cabinet approval. The government approved in late 2002 the Ministry proposals for a new landscape of 23 institutions. The emergent new institutional landscape was to comprise of the old traditional universities, six universities of technology (old technikons) and six new “comprehensive” institutions, which were created through the merger of a university and a technikon. A Merger Unit was created within the state department responsible for higher education, which in 2003 released “Guidelines” for merging institutions. Subsequently, the Ministry requested institutions to submit their proposed programme and qualification mixes and niche areas. After reviewing the submissions, it released for comment its proposed qualification and programme mixes and niche areas for institutions.

9.4 The Dynamics of Change

In 1994 the higher education “system” consisted of 21 public universities, 15 technikons, 120 colleges of education and 24 nursing and 11 agricultural colleges. By 2001 all the colleges of education were either closed or incorporated into the universities and technikons. Thereafter some of the 36 universities and technikons were either merged, unbundled or incorporated to give rise to the present landscape of 11 universities, 6 comprehensive universities (one distance) and 6 universities of technology. Two institutes of higher education were created as facilities through which particular academic programmes of the existing universities could be provided in provinces that did not have universities. After 1994, alongside the dominant public higher education a small but growing private higher education sector began to take root. The 1996 *Constitution* provided for such institutions on condition that they did not discriminate on the grounds of race, registered with the state, and maintained standards that are not inferior to those at comparable public educational institutions. The 1997 *Higher Education Act* stipulated the legal conditions for the registration of private higher education institutions and imposed various obligations. A regulatory framework was created to ensure that only those private institutions with the necessary infrastructure and resources to provide and sustain quality higher education would be registered. By 2010, there were 115 private institutions, largely small colleges that enrolled 96,000 students, as opposed to the public sector with over 900,000 students (Council on Higher Education 2000).

It was hoped that the institutional restructuring after 2001 would reconfigure the higher education system so that it was more suited to the needs of a developing democracy. In essence there were two elements in the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape. One was institutional restructuring, which eventually reduced the previous 36 higher education institutions to 23 through mergers and incorporations based on various criteria. The other was that institutions were restricted to providing specific undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications and programmes, through mechanisms of state approval and accreditation by the CHE related to the quality of programmes. Diversity was to be ensured through the universities, the universities of technology and the comprehensive university institutions having specific institutional missions, which would be the consequence of institutional planning. Despite the instruments of planning (including enrolment planning), funding and quality assurance at the disposal of the state, there has been no concerted action to clarify and settle the specific missions of individual universities.

Differentiation was and has remained a difficult and contentious policy issue for a number of reasons. First, there have been sharply contested and differing views on the kinds of differentiation appropriate for South African higher education, with support expressed for differentiation on the basis of clear institutional types, functional differentiation and differentiation based on institutional missions and programmes. Second, the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape

has had to address the issue of institutional identities, including the institutional missions, social and educational roles, academic qualification and programme mixes, institutional cultures and organisational forms and structures and practices of all institutions. Graham has argued that universities should avoid aspiring to “ideal(s) which they cannot attain”. Otherwise, “no sense of worth will be forthcoming” and they can have no “proper self-confidence” (Graham 2005). It must also be recognised that there are many conceptions and models of the “university” and that these have changed over time. It must be accepted that the “name “university” now applies to institutions with widely different functions and characters” (Graham 2005), and that this means that the “ideals each can aspire to” will be different (Graham 2005).

In as much as it may be acknowledged that the new socio-economic and educational goals and development challenges of democratic South Africa require a differentiated and diverse higher education system, in practice the trend has been towards institutional isomorphism, with “many institutions (aspiring) to a common “gold” standard as represented by the major research institutions, both nationally and internationally” (Ministry of Education 2001). This has been so, irrespective of the current capacities and capabilities of institutions with respect to the kinds, levels and breadth of academic qualifications and programmes that can be provided, and the kinds of scholarship and research that can be undertaken. There could be many drivers of institutional isomorphism: the influence of the Humboldtian model of the university; the assumption that status and prestige are associated solely with being a “research” university, and institutional redress conceived as an obligation on the state to facilitate historically black universities becoming “research” universities. Moreover, a new funding framework introduced in 2004 could also have inadvertently encouraged institutional isomorphism. The framework in seeking to promote research and the production of larger numbers of postgraduates rewards research outputs and funds postgraduate student outputs at significantly higher levels than undergraduate student outputs. Of course, there are often considerable upfront investments required to promote research and postgraduate education. Be that as it may, Graham is correct that “no sense of worth will be forthcoming” if South African universities aspire to “ideal(s) which they cannot attain”. Instead, the “ideals each can aspire to” and institutional mission and goals must be shaped by educational purposes, economic and social needs and available capacities and capabilities even if these capacities and capabilities may need to be enhanced in order to facilitate the effective undertaking of the institutional mission and goals.

Third, the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape has needed to confront the historical burden of South African higher education: namely apartheid planning which differentiated institutions along lines of “race” and ethnicity, and institutionalised inequities that resulted in universities characterised by educational, financial, material and geographical (white) advantage and (black) disadvantage. There were understandable concerns among historically black institutions that a policy of differentiation and diversity could continue to disadvantage them, especially in the absence of development strategies and institutional redress to enable them to build the capacities and capabilities to address social and educational needs.

The key question has been “redress for what”; as the *National Plan* stated “notions of redress” had to shift from being “narrowly focused on the levelling of the playing fields between the historically black and historically white institutions” to one of capacitating historically black institutions “to discharge their institutional mission within an agreed national framework” (Ministry of Education 2001).

It is clear that the achievement of a differentiated and diverse institutional landscape has been bedevilled by a number of issues. Newby argues that “today’s universities are expected to engage in lifelong learning (not just “teaching”), research, knowledge transfer, social inclusion [. . .], local and regional economic development, citizenship training and much more. No university is resourced sufficiently to perform all these functions simultaneously and in equal measure at ever-increasing levels of quality” (Newby 2008). Institutions, therefore, have to identify niche areas of strength and increase the diversity of their missions. He also suggests that “different activities in universities have different geographical frames of reference” (Newby 2008). That is to say, research tends to be more globally oriented, undergraduate teaching and learning more nationally focused and knowledge transfer and community engagement more regionally and locally focused. This, of course, has implications for different kinds of universities. To the extent that differentiation is less the product of teaching excellence as much as of research performance, and if research of international quality is to be reserved for some institutions, what is the role of other institutions beyond being considered as simply teaching institutions? This is a vital issue that Newby notes has received little attention in the processes of state planning and steering. However, it is incorrect to assume that differentiation is entirely a matter of research performance rather than teaching: the teaching function in essentially undergraduate universities and research intensive universities is different in nature.

A second issue has been that while the “name “university” now applies to institutions with widely different functions and characters” (Graham 2005), and there are today “universities”, “universities of technology” and “comprehensive universities”, this has not fully settled the issue of diversity or institutional missions. Kraak, as an advocate of what he terms “flexible differentiation” (based on institutional missions and programmes) contends that the NCHE “fudged” the issue. His own preference and that of the *White Paper 3* and *National Plan*, however, could also be said to be a fudging of the issue. What is required, as Kraak himself has argued elsewhere, is “simultaneous consideration of both the intrinsic and institutional logics of a policy” (Young and Kraak 2001). Can flexible differentiation be entirely unhinged from the questions of the historical character of institutions, their historical and current academic capabilities and capacities and academic culture and organisation? Is it not the case that despite notions of flexible differentiation, the *de facto* situation in South Africa is one characterised by functional differentiation, even if some flexibility is accommodated and rigidity that may constrain institutional responsiveness to economic and social needs is mitigated through mechanisms such as planning? The real issue in South Africa, in a context of a higher education system that is functionally differentiated, is encouraging and ensuring a diversity of institutional missions among the traditional

universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities and restricting unnecessary homogeneity, while ensuring that all institutions are adequately supported and developed to undertake their agreed specific roles and missions.

The issue of institutional aspirations, notwithstanding the current academic capabilities and capacities of an institution, has also bedevilled differentiation and diversity. Certainly, academic capabilities and capacities are not fixed and can be developed through considered institutional leadership, strategic planning, change management and investment of resources. However, where aspirant and envisaged institutional missions are currently greatly at odds with existing capabilities and capacities this can only relate to long-range projects. It may also not necessarily resolve the questions of differentiation and diversity, and institutional missions appropriate to context.

A fourth issue has been the efficacy of the instruments of planning, funding and quality assurance in shaping and settling institutional missions. Actually, it is not possible to pronounce unequivocally on this matter, as the state has not fully or effectively made recourse to the integrated use of planning, funding and quality assurance. Despite an ostensible commitment to flexible differentiation (institutional missions and programmes), the state in practice has, through creating three categories of universities (traditional, technology and comprehensive) and determining the qualifications and programme configurations of institutions institutionalised functional differentiation. This could account for the ongoing contestation between the state and some universities of technology which appear to have aspirations to offer programmes that have been generally reserved for universities.

Fifth, the creation of a new institutional landscape had to proceed at two levels simultaneously. On the one hand, new institutional identities and cultures had to be forged through the development of new institutional missions, social and educational roles, academic qualification and programme mixes for institutions and through the new organisational forms, structures and practices that are appropriate for different institutions. On the other hand, the complexity of the restructuring could not end with the issue of the identity and culture of the new institutions. It also needed to take into account the historical inequalities among higher education institutions that resulted in a system divided along the lines of advantage and disadvantage. No restructuring of the higher education system would succeed unless these issues were taken on seriously. In this regard it was fundamental to create the conditions, opportunities and provide the necessary resources for developmental trajectories for all higher education institutions, and especially the historically disadvantaged, taking into account their history as well as their envisaged new social and educational roles.

Sixth, whether mergers in general and specific mergers in particular would create equitable, productive and sustainable institutions and contribute to the effective and efficient achievement of wider national goals and institutionally specific goals could not be answered a priori. Only the passage of time and the initiative of key actors can provide an answer to the success or otherwise of

institutional restructuring and mergers. Strong and effective national shaping and steering of the system and appropriate and timely interventions are required, as well as creative thinking and change management at national and institutional levels. The dynamics of change in South African higher education shows that it is short-sighted to pursue policy goals without strong attention to the requisite human and financial resources for their achievement. From this perspective, a critical issue is the extent to which the relevant state department is able to mobilise the necessary human and financial resources to put into place the institutional arrangements, policies and practices that are essential to steer the process of restructuring, while also lending effective support to that process at the level of each individual institution and region.

Ultimately, successful restructuring had to respond to and promote the principal goals and key objectives of higher education transformation such as providing a full spectrum of advanced educational opportunities for an expanding range and number of people; ensuring greater student equity through providing opportunities for access and success; promoting staff equity to redress the historical predominance of white and male academics and senior support staff; creating an institutionally differentiated and diverse system and promoting high level research and research capacity for intellectual enquiry, application, and social development. Ultimately, the institutional restructuring of higher education and a new landscape had to “lay the foundation for an equitable, sustainable and productive higher education system that will be of high quality and contribute effectively and efficiently to the human resource, skills, knowledge and research needs of South Africa” and ensure that higher education makes an effective contribution to democracy, social justice and the economic and social development of South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2002).

The reconfiguration of the higher education system and institutions was seen as a necessary condition of a transformed higher education system that could lead to a more rational landscape for the investment of resources to pursue excellence and equity. This included a much more clearly specified range of institutional missions that encouraged universities to have coherent and more defined purposes with respect to the production of knowledge and graduates. A more rational landscape for higher education could also provide a more focused framework for innovation. Innovation in teaching and learning, in research and in community service was seen as more likely through a concentration of resources and attention on niche areas – centres of excellence grounded in real intellectual and physical capabilities – rather than across all areas within the system. Institutional restructuring and a new higher education landscape cannot, however, of themselves solve all the problems associated with the inherited higher education system. In other words, while institutional restructuring was a *necessary* condition of the transformation of South African higher education it was not a *sufficient* condition. Other strategies were also required to give effect to the comprehensive transformation of higher education and to realise its contribution to social equity and the economic, social, cultural and intellectual development needs and goals of South Africa. The Ministry itself was well aware “of the dangers inherent in focusing on structural changes, which

become an end in themselves rather than a means to achieve the broader goals and objectives of restructuring, that is, to create a high quality higher education system that contributes to the development of the high-level skills and knowledge and research needs of South Africa” (Republic of South Africa 2002).

9.5 The Outcomes of Change

In the light of it being understood that restructuring and the creation of a new higher education institutional landscape were not ends in themselves but means to the ends of creating a more rational, vibrant and effective system for pursuing equity, excellence and various economic and social goals, what have been the outcomes? The results a decade later are, as to be expected, mixed.

There has continued to be a very limited spectrum of post-school education opportunities, which have been essentially restricted to universities and further education and training colleges, many of poor quality. There are, however, at least 2.8 million people between the ages of 18–24 that are neither employed, nor at educational or vocational training institutions – the so-called NEETs (Cloete 2009). The vast majority (1.0 million) have less than a secondary school grade 10 qualification, some 990,000 have a grade 10–11 qualification and almost 600,000 have a grade 12 without exemption. There has been a critical need to reconceptualise and clarify the scope, structure, and landscape of the post-school system and institutions to give attention to the spectrum of post-school institutions that are required in relation to economic and social development needs, as well as to expand opportunities for high quality post-school education and training. Only in 2014, through a new “White Paper” has the intention been proclaimed of widening the range of post-school opportunities (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013).

The Department of Higher Education and Training’s (DHET) 2012 Green Paper *for Post-School Education and Training* acknowledges that “despite the many advances and gains made since 1994”, higher education is “inadequate in quantity [...] and, in many but not all instances, quality”, and that it continues “to produce and reproduce gender, class, racial and other inequalities with regard to access to educational opportunities and success” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). It notes that “universities are in general characterised by low success rates” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). It accepts that “university funding has not kept pace with enrolment growth”, and that despite “attempts to bring about greater equity between historically black universities and those which were more advantaged in the past” a shortage of resource shortages affected the ability of the historically black universities from “properly fulfilling their prime function – providing good undergraduate degrees to poor, rural students” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). The National Planning Commission (NPC) notes that “despite the significant increases in enrolment a number of challenges remain” (National Planning Commission 2011a). For one,

“throughput rates have not improved as fast as enrolment rates”; for another, under-prepared students have meant universities needing to establish academic development programmes and being sometimes “ill-equipped’ to do so” (National Planning Commission 2011a). As a consequence, universities have not been “able to produce the number and quality of graduates demanded by the country” (National Planning Commission 2011a). Since “race remains a major determinant of graduation rates”, this has “major implications for social mobility and. . .for overcoming the inequalities of apartheid” (National Planning Commission 2011a). The NPC recognizes that “the university sector is under considerable strain. Enrolments have almost doubled in 18 years yet the funding has not kept up, resulting in slow growth in the number of university lecturers, inadequate student accommodation, creaking university infrastructure and equipment shortages” (National Planning Commission 2011a). The NPC states that it is critical for universities to “develop capacity to provide quality undergraduate teaching” (National Planning Commission 2012). It emphasizes the need for “uniform standards for infrastructure and equipment to support learning, promote equity and ensure that learners doing similar programmes in different institutions receive a comparable education”, special programmes for “underprepared learners to help them cope with the demands of higher education”, and for these programmes to be offered and funded at all institutions (National Planning Commission 2012).

Looking ahead, the recently released *White Paper* proposes to increase participation rates from 17.3 to 25 % and university headcount enrolments from about 950,000 in 2012 to 1,600,000 by 2030 (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). It states that “as participation increases, universities must simultaneously focus their attention on improving student performance. Improving student access, success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge. . .and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). More specifically, “the relationship between equity of access and equity of outcomes must [. . .] be a substantive area of focus” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). The key to improving “success rates significantly”, it is suggested, lies in “strengthening learning and teaching across the system” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). The NPC argues that “for the increase in the number of graduates to be meaningful, the quality of education needs to improve” (NDP 2012). It also calls for improving both “the quality of teaching and learning”, as well as “the qualifications of higher education academic staff” – from “the current 34 %” with doctorates “to over 75 % by 2030” (National Planning Commission 2012). Adequate student funding is a major constraint in effecting greater equity of access, opportunity and outcomes. In this regard, the *White Paper* commits government to “progressively introducing free education for the poor. . .as resources become available” (DHET 2013). The NPC proposes providing “all students who qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) with access to full funding through loans and bursaries to cover the costs of tuition, books, accommodation and other living expenses. Students who do not qualify should have access to bank loans, backed by state sureties” (National Planning Commission 2012).

With respect to enhancing research capacity, following the institutional restructuring the enrolments of postgraduate students and the numbers graduated have all been generally on the ascendancy. In 1995 there were 70,964 postgraduate students, comprising 13.7 % of the total student enrolments (Council on Higher Education 2004). By 2010, there was a virtual doubling of the number of postgraduate (postgraduate diploma/honours, master's and doctoral) students, the 138,608 students making up 15.5 % of the total student body (Council on Higher Education 2010). During the same year, there were some 40,124 graduates: 30,083 postgraduate diploma/honours graduates; 8,618 masters and 1,423 doctoral graduates. However, there are also shortcomings and constraints. Postgraduate student enrolments and outputs remain low in relation to economic and social development needs, and between 1995 and 2010 there was a marginal increase of 1.8 % in the size of the postgraduate student body. There are relatively poor graduation rates for masters (19 % against a benchmark graduation rate target of 33 % established by the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education) and doctorates (13 % against a target of 20 %) (National Planning Commission 2011b).

Only 34 % of academics have doctoral degrees, which is generally a prerequisite for undertaking high quality research and supervising doctoral students. The research performance of universities is highly uneven, with 10 universities producing 86 % of all research and 89 % of all doctoral graduates. It has been suggested that "there is every indication that knowledge output (as measured in terms of article production) may have reached a plateau at around 7,500 article equivalents per year (which constitutes about 0.4 % of total world science production)"; that it is doubtful that doctoral graduations can be increased unless "a number of systemic constraints such as the size of the pipeline from Honours onwards and the limited supervisory capacity in the system" can be addressed, and that "both the volume of output and overall productivity of institutions will decline" unless the academic work force is broadened considerably to include "many more black (and to a lesser extent female) academics who publish and regenerate the workforce" (Mouton 2010).

The 2012 *Green Paper* acknowledges that "the number of overall postgraduate qualifications obtained, particularly PhD graduates, is too low." (DHET 2012). One "significant constraint on the ability of many students to obtain masters and PhDs" was poverty, "as poor students are under enormous pressure to leave university and get a job as soon as possible" (DHET 2012). It is recognised that "overall postgraduate provision deserves attention and that we need to drastically increase the number and quality of both the masters and the PhD degrees obtained" (DHET 2012) It is suggested that "improvement of undergraduate throughput rates must be a key strategy for increasing graduate outputs, for increasing the skills available to the economy, and providing larger numbers of students available for postgraduate study" (DHET 2012). The NPC proposes that "by 2030 over 25 % of university enrolments should be at postgraduate level" (15.5 % in 2010) and emphasizes "the number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates should increase significantly" (National Planning Commission 2012). More specifically, by 2030 there should be "more than 5,000 doctoral graduates per year" (1,423 in 2010) and "most of these doctorates should be in science, engineering, technology and mathematics" (National Planning Commission 2012).

With respect to improvement in academic staff equity, racism and patriarchy as key features of colonialism and apartheid profoundly shaped the social composition of academic staff. In 1994, academics at South African universities were overwhelmingly white (83 %) and male (68 %). The sheer inequality of representation is highlighted by the fact that although black South Africans constituted 89 % of the population they comprised 17 % of academics. The under-representation of Africans was especially severe: making up almost 80 % of the population, they constituted 10 % of the academic workforce. Over the past two decades the academic workforce has become more equitable, although in 2012 the full-time permanent academic staff of 17,451 academics remained largely white (53 %) and male (55 %). The distribution of academics across universities has continued to be characterised by the contours of “race” and ethnicity; in 2009, the proportions of black academic staff at universities ranged from 17 to 91 % and the representation of women varied between 29 and 51 % (Department of Education 2010).

In so far as differentiation and diversity in higher education is concerned, the results have been equally mixed. Some of the institutional mergers have been generally successful and have given rise to new institutional missions, identities and integrated academic, governance, management and administrative structures. The incorporations of some institutions into other institutions, though not without various challenges, have been completed and also relatively successful. An envisaged single comprehensive university that was to be created out of a university and two technikons that were large distances apart has been largely a failure. The institution has been characterised by ongoing problems of academic quality, governance, management and administration and financing. It has been under administration for the past few years. In the case of two universities that were merged (one a specialist health sciences university), a decision has since been taken to demerge the universities and for them to once again be separate, independent universities with different developmental trajectories. In 2013, two institutes of higher education created as facilities through which existing universities could provide particular academic programmes in two provinces that did not have universities were established as independent new universities.

There has continued to be a combination of a lack of policy clarification and skirmishes between universities and some universities and the state around the issue of differentiation. In 2007, recognising a range of problems related to equity of opportunities and outcomes for students, Higher Education South Africa (HESA), the representative body for South African universities, proposed in a document tabled at a meeting with the President of the country, “that aspects of the CHE’s Size and Shape Report (2000) be revisited” (2007: 30). It suggested in particular, that consideration could be given to the notion of “bedrock universities” in which the focus is on offering high quality undergraduate programmes, limited taught Masters programmes, with research activities confined to issues related to the curriculum (ibid, 30). Despite this, the proposal gained little traction and thereafter at HESA level there was a stalemate on the discussion of differentiation. Indeed, strongly held and divergent views made impossible even intellectual discussion on the matter. In 2011, there was a renewal of discussions on differentiation, and

following a workshop on this matter a Differentiation Task Team was established “to develop a framework document on a proposed HESA approach to differentiation and to develop an instrument for surveying individual universities on their views on differentiation” (Higher Education South Africa 2012).

The Task Team produced a document, which was “offered as a contribution to exploring a differentiated and diverse higher education landscape in which there is an opportunity for institutions to contribute to the many purposes and roles of universities and higher education in differing ways, to re-vision their roles in relation to the varied social and economic imperatives, priorities, challenges and needs and of our society and, if necessary to re-craft institutional missions, development trajectories and identities” (Higher Education South Africa 2012). The document stated that HESA was “convinced that for the South African higher education system to effectively meet the varied social, economic, cultural developments needs of South Africa and the African continent, which range on a continuum from the global to the local, it must evince “diversity” “in the institutional landscape” and “its organisational form””; that there was “no virtue in entirely homogenous universities, or the pursuit of absolute homogeneity, where every university seeks to be the same and to undertake exactly the same purposes and functions. Nor is there any value in universities all aspiring to become “traditional universities” or towards the supposed “gold standards” of the “world class” or “research university””; and that “a differentiated system is better positioned to address national development and social imperatives, priorities, challenges and issues than an undifferentiated system” (Higher Education South Africa 2012). The HESA process remains to be finalised.

The government’s 2012 *Green Paper* noted that a diverse university system steeped in inequality is the product of apartheid education policies, and that reality still confronts us today. While our leading universities are internationally respected, our historically black universities continue to face severe financial, human, infrastructure and other resource constraints. Universities of Technology are in some instances experiencing mission drift, losing focus on their mission of producing technicians, technologists and other mid-level skills at undergraduate level. This problem is also evident in the comprehensive universities (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012).

It stated that the “key to strengthening the system is the principle of institutional differentiation, which has long been recognised in policy but has not always been supported through funding” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012); and that “the need for a differentiated system of university education has long been recognised. Not all institutions can or should fulfil the same role” (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012).

Subsequently, the *White Paper* released in 2014 stated that it views “differentiation in a positive light” and sees it as “a way of ensuring a diverse system that will improve access for all South Africans to various forms of educational opportunities, improve participation and success rates. . .and enable all institutions to find niche areas that respond to various national development needs” (DHET 2013: 29). It proposes the following principles to “guide the focused differentiation of

universities and the formulation of institutional missions”: no “further categorisation of institutions”; a “continuum of institutions” that range from “largely undergraduate institutions to specialized, research intensive universities which offer teaching programmes from undergraduate to doctoral level”; each institution will have “a clearly defined mandate”; the “mix and level of programmes offered at any institution should not be fixed, but should be capable of being developed over time, depending on its capacity”, and “the need for developmental funding in poorly resourced institutions” (DHET 2013: 29–30). If the thinking exemplified in the DHET’s 2014 “White Paper” wins support and there is determination on the part of the state to steer effectively using the instruments of planning, funding and quality assurance, there is a new opportunity to make progress on the differentiation issue.

A major problem has been that because of financial constraints the creation of a new differentiated institutional landscape has not adequately and fully resolved the historical burden of South African higher education: namely, educational, material, financial and geographical (white) advantage and (black) disadvantage. The continued under-developed institutional capacities of historically black institutions must be emphasised; providing access to rural poor and working class black students, inadequate state support for the historically black institutions to equalise the quality of undergraduate provision compromises their ability to facilitate equity of opportunity and outcomes. The absence until 2007 of significant new funds for higher education has necessarily caused anxieties and fuelled contestation. Following the mergers and incorporations in 2001, there was inadequate financial support from government for the creation of effective developmental trajectories for all higher education institutions. “Fiscal restraint and a shift towards conservative macro-economic policy” especially affected the historically black institutions, despite the provision of merger and recapitalisation funding and a new funding formula that introduced aspects of institutional redress funding (Kraak 2001). In such a context, differentiation and diversity become a financially a zero-sum situation, with certain clear winners and losers.

Since 2007, a new DHET’s Infrastructure and Efficiency fund has allocated over \$1 billion (\$0.3 billion during 2007–2009, \$0.5 billion in 2010–2012, and \$0.4 billion for 2013–2015) to finance the backlogs and new infrastructure needs of all universities as well as address the historical backlogs of specifically historically black institutions. This is a continuing budget commitment and provides an invaluable opportunity to ensure that differentiation can be pursued more purposefully and need not be a zero-sum situation.

It can be argued that while South Africa has evinced considerable strengths at the level of higher education policy analysis, formulation and adoption, it has simultaneously displayed significant weaknesses in the equally critical domains of the planning of policy implementation and actual policy implementation. Creative change management is critical to successful transformation. Yet, the remarkable intellectual ingenuity, creativity, and inventiveness, the strategic and tactical acumen, and the stolid purpose that was prevalent in ridding South Africa of tyranny and fashioning its democracy has been sometimes lacking, both at the

level of the state and individual universities, in the innovation of the instruments, mechanisms, processes and technologies of institutional transformation. On the one hand the weakness around strategies of change could be a symptom of the under-theorisation of change or the difficulty in theorising change under new conditions. The key issues here include the respective roles of the state, universities and other higher education organisations; the possibly differing conceptions of co-operative governance, and varying notions of autonomy and accountability in a post-apartheid democracy; the appropriate balance in specific areas between institutional self-regulation and central prescription, the differing preoccupations, exigencies and capacities of key actors, and the extent to which there have been adequate institutional mechanisms for ongoing consensus-building and policy engagement within stipulated timeframes. On the other hand, the weaknesses and shortcomings could be related to the dearth of person-power with the requisite specialist expertise and experience of initiating and managing complex and participatory system and institutional change. At the same time that institutional restructuring and transformation is undertaken, various other aspects of the higher education system and universities have to continue to be steered, supported and maintained. System and university level maintenance, restructuring and change have to be addressed simultaneously (not consecutively). If not managed effectively and efficiently, parts and aspects of the higher education system and universities that are functioning relatively well can become dysfunctional, creating new problems for an already comprehensive and demanding transformation agenda.

9.6 Conclusion

Cloete and his collaborators² have posited “an analytic triangle called a network of co-ordination” which “locates change within a complex interaction between the state, society and institutions, within the context of globalisation”, in order to develop a “structural understanding of how systems change” (Cloete et al. 2002). They, argue that in South African higher education “most changes occurred not as a result of centrally driven government policies, but through complex interactions among policy, societal and market forces and, above all, through a wide range of unexpected institutional responses” (Cloete and Maassen 2002). Another scholar argues that change has arisen from the interplay of “institutional micropolitics” and “state macro-politics expressed through a range of agencies, including the government bureaucracy responsible for education”; that is to say, from “the complex of political interactions – conflicts, contestations and compromises” (Jansen 2002a). He adds, that “it is impossible to account for these changes outside the global context of higher education developments” – “much of what is happening locally

² Subsequent references to the ideas of Cloete and his collaborators for ease of reading refer to Cloete alone.

has its roots in what is taking place globally” (Jansen 2004). I have argued that the explanation of institutional change (and, for that matter, non-change) in post-1994 higher education must be related to social-structural and conjunctural conditions (political, economic, social and ideological), inherited and changing conditions within higher education itself, and the “purposeful orientations” and “cognitive and political praxis” of a range of social agents and actors acting in co-operation and/or conflict “within a field of opportunities and constraints” (Melucci 1989; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Keane and Mier 1989). I have also emphasised the need to be alert to changing conjunctural conditions and their implications for continuities and discontinuities in higher education.

There is much to commend in the theorisations of both Cloete and Jansen. There is no disagreement that globalisation is a key social-structural condition that has in different ways shaped state policies and higher education. However, Jansen’s notion that local developments in South Africa have their *origins* “in what is taking place globally” is debatable, if this suggests that countries have absolutely no room to shape their own policies and practices. There is agreement that change has occurred as a consequence of “complex interactions” or “the complex of political interactions – conflicts, contestations and compromises”; or the “purposeful orientations” and praxis of a range of social agents and actors in co-operation and/or conflict. There is also agreement that “institutions” (universities in the case of Cloete), “institutional micropolitics” (played out in universities and colleges) and social agents (which includes, but are not exclusively, universities) have for various reasons been significant in the process of institutional change. Indeed, change and outcomes such as a new and differentiated higher education and universities with new missions, identities and academic orientations and structures have been the result of multiple factors and actions. This has included state-led institutional restructuring; state-university negotiations around the qualifications and programme mixes of institutions; the ways in which, the extent to which and the efficacy with which the instruments of planning, funding and quality assurance have been utilised by both the state and universities; the ways in which universities have engaged with market forces, political institutions and organisations, state policies and civil society; the particular values, calculations, strategies and tactics that have informed such engagements, and the institutional capabilities and capacities, including knowledge, expertise, resources and leadership and management abilities, that have been deployed in such engagements.

Scott makes the important point that “organisations are creatures of their institutional environments, but most modern organisations are constituted as active players, not passive pawns” (cited in Cloete and Maassen 2002: 476). Similarly, Weiler notes that “universities are [...] not uncritical respondents to global authority” (cited in Jansen et al. 2007: 180). Further, although “it was initially assumed that the main driver of change would be government policy, informed by a participatory policy formulation process, and implemented by a new progressive bureaucracy [...] change in higher education institutions followed a variety of routes” (Cloete and Maassen 2002). This makes it clear that state-led policy formulation and adoption are just two specific aspects or phases of policy making,

and that the making of policy and policy outcomes are not reducible to policy formulation and adoption. Policies that are implemented or come to exist in practice are not infrequently different from those which exist in texts. Legally authorised formulators and adopters of policy are not the key actors in policy making in all circumstances, and to view them as such is to grossly overstate their importance. How key and influential they are in the making of policy and in policy outcomes is dependent on structural and conjunctural conditions. To put it differently, in practice other social agents and actors can be the key policy making actors.

Drawing on Carnoy and Samoff,³ Jansen argues that “in developing countries, radical changes in [...] higher education are often invoked by changes in political regime” (2002a, b: 157). This is true of South Africa: it was the transition to democracy under a progressive Constitution and substantive Bill of Rights, and the ascendance to power of the African National Congress with a commitment to transforming higher education and institutionalising a new social order that in the first instance created the conditions for institutional change in higher education. This is especially clear with respect to advances in social equity and redress for students of working class and rural poor social origins, which has been as much the effect of the prohibition of discrimination as of state policies of equity and redress. It is also reflected by the emergence of new private providers, which the Constitution made possible, even if this has been a widespread phenomenon of globalisation, and by the considerable internationalisation in the student body that has occurred after 1994.

In summary, institutional change in post-1994 South African higher education has been characterised by ruptures and discontinuities with the past, resulting in the emergence of a new institutional landscape and new configuration of public universities; by the conservation of institutional types and institutions as well as their dissolution, restructuring and reconstruction, and by successes in the achievements of goals, policy, planning, strategy and implementation as well as failures and shortcomings in these regards.

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³ Carnoy and Samoff (1990) *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

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