



NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR COUNCIL

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ROUND TABLE SERIES

REPORT ON THE 6th ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 5 April 2000, Nedlac launched its 'Expanding Dialogue' series. This series aims to provide constituency representatives the opportunity to engage in informal discussion amongst themselves and with specialists, who do not ordinarily attend Nedlac meetings, on topics that are of relevance to the pursuit of economic growth and social equity.

Omano Edigheji, Nedlac Research Coordinator chaired the session and it was attended by 31 participants.

The speakers at this, the sixth of such discussions, were

Speakers:

John Pampallis, Director, Centre for Education Policy Development;

Thami Mseleku, Director-General, Department of Education;

Shireen Motala, Director of the Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand.

1. AN ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN THE SENIOR CERTIFICATE EXAM (SCE) RESULTS, 2000

(This is a summary of the presentation Mr. John Pampallis. The full paper

is available on request.)

1.1 Although SCE results are by no means a definitive measure of the state of education in the country, they do provide some basis for comparison on a year-to-year basis. However, the 9% improvement in the 2000 results cannot be seen as a 9% improvement in the performance of learners.

1.2 Reasons for the improvement in the pass rate include:

1.2.1 Departmental initiatives

- (a) A national monitoring forum was established. In each province, schools that achieved a less than 20% pass rate were identified and support measures were concentrated on these schools
- (b) Trial examinations, which enabled schools to design relevant support and advice strategies
- (c) Saturday and holiday classes

1.2.2. Decreasing number of learners writing for endorsement (entrance to University, which requires a certain number of subjects to be passed on the higher grade).

There appears to be a strong relationship between the increased number of learners writing standard grade and higher pass rates. The number of students writing for endorsement came down from 411 739 in 1998 to 280 257 in 2000.

1.2.3. Implementation of the Continuous Assessment Policy

The continuous assessment mark constituted 30% of the total mark in 2000. However, marks from 6 provinces could not be used because of inconsistencies. SAFCERT established that all provinces whose year marks were questionable were disadvantaged by 1.5%. As a result, this was added to ALL candidates' final mark.

1.2.4. Repetition rates

In 1998, there were 85 000 repeaters; in 1999, this had come down to 62 697 and in 2000, there were only 6326 repeaters. Repeaters usually have a lower pass rate than first time writers. This would account for at least 1% of the increased pass rate.

1.2.5. Greater stability in schools

1.2.6. Improved exam administration

1.3. Persistent inequalities

1.3.1. Race

Since 1995, there have been no data on SCE results by race. However, it is worth noting that the provinces with the best results are those with higher proportions of non-African learners (the Western and Northern Cape and Gauteng).

1.3.2. Gender

Although 55% of candidates are female, between 1997 and 2000, a higher proportion of male learners passed SCE than their female counterparts. However, all provinces achieved improved percentages of female learners passing in 2000.

1.4. Future prospects

1.4.1. The exclusion of repeaters raises a challenge to the Department of Education, other departments, business and civil society organs to increase provision of adult education.

1.4.2. Unless those who pass can get jobs, there is little incentive to work hard to get an SCE.

1.4.3. Continued, but more limited improvements in the results are expected, mainly due to departmental interventions and the trend to write on standard grade.

1.4.4. Interventions at Grade 12 level are not enough. There needs to be sustained improvements lower down. This will depend on the development of the new Quality Assurance System.

1.4.5. Inherited resource inequalities will persist, although these may be addressed over time through state funding.

2. THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

(This is a summary of the presentation by the Mr. Thami Mseleku, Director-General, Department of Education. The full paper is available on request.)

2.1. Introduction

- 2.1.1. The restructuring of the higher education system is a key part of the **Tirisano** implementation plan, which committed the Department to releasing a national higher education plan.
- 2.1.2. The case for restructuring in **Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education** (July 1997) is based on two inter-related factors:
 - (a) Need to overcome the fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency of the old system
 - (b) Need to produce graduates with the appropriate skills and competencies to meet the challenges of reconstruction and development in the context of the process of globalisation, in particular the revolution in information and communication technology.
- 2.1.3. Restructuring is also necessary in order to address the dysfunctions of the system which have seen the Ministry having to take on a crisis management role in the past few years. These dysfunctions include: declining enrolments; poor throughput, success and graduation rates; race and gender inequalities in the distribution of academic staff; low research outputs; paucity of management and governance capacity and the increasing overdrafts in some institutions.
- 2.1.4. The financial crisis in higher education needs to be highlighted. The projected total overdraft for the 2001/2002 financial year is just under R500 million. In most cases the overdrafts are small and of a short-term nature, which reflects poor financial management. However there are a few institutions where the projected overdrafts amount to more than 50% of their projected income.
- 2.1.5. The Minister, in line with the White Paper, requested the Council on Higher Education to advise him on the restructuring of the higher education system in July 1999.
- 2.1.6. The Council on Higher Education established a Task Team to undertake the investigation and its report, **Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century**, was released in June 2000. The Minister subsequently called for public comment on the

report and over 60 institutional and individual responses were received.

2.1.7. The Minister indicated that his proposals for the restructuring of the higher education system, including his response to the Council on Higher Education Report would take the form of a national plan for higher education, which would be released in early 2001.

2.2. National Plan for Higher Education

2.2.1 Size of the Higher Education System

The plan proposes to:

- (a) Increase the participation rate from 15% to 20% (% of 20-24 year olds in higher education) in 10-15 years. South Africa does not compare well with other countries in this regard.
- (b) Focus on improving the efficiency of the system through increasing the number of graduates:
 - The current graduation rate of 15% of total headcount enrolments for undergraduates is unacceptable. In a normal system it would be closer to a third.
 - Graduation rate benchmarks/targets will be established which institutions would have to meet.
 - Improving the graduation rates would also require addressing the underlying factors that contribute to low graduation rates, in particular, the lack of academic development programmes for under-prepared students and inadequacies in the current national student financial aid scheme in terms of the cut-off point for eligibility and the practice of dispersing funds to cover the largest number of students.
- (c) Increase the participation rate by recruiting working and mature students, particularly women, and recruiting from SADC countries.

2.2.2. Shape of Higher Education System: Fields of Study.

The plan proposes to rectify the imbalances in enrolments between the humanities and science, engineering and technology. The focus will be on shifting the balance in enrolments in the next five to ten years between the

humanities, business/commerce and science/engineering/technology from the current ratio of 49%:26%:25% to 40%:30%:30% respectively. Further adjustments to the ratio would not be possible in the short-term because of the low number of students leaving the school system with the required proficiency in mathematics. The desirability of shifting the humanities total below 40% is debatable given the continued need for skills in education, law, private and public sector management.

2.2.3. Equity

The plan proposes that the increase in the participation rate must focus on the access of African and coloured students to higher education.

- (a) Black and women students are under-represented in business and commerce and in science, engineering and technology, as well as in post-graduate programmes in general. The latter is especially problematic as it impedes the production of black intellectuals and knowledge workers.
- (b) Black student access in some cases is limited to distance education programmes and satellite campuses.
- (c) Equity of access has also not been complemented by equity of outcomes, with black students accounting for a larger proportion of drop-out and failure rates.
- (d) Institutions will be expected to establish equity targets. Funding will be used as a sanction against institutions that do not establish and meet equity targets.
- (e) Institutions will also have to improve staff equity.

2.2.4. Institutional Restructuring

The plan proposes that institutional diversity will be achieved based on mission and programme differentiation. Redress will be linked to agreed missions and programme profiles. The mechanism for leveraging this will be programme funding. The existing programme differentiation between technikons and universities will be maintained. The proliferation of distance education programmes in residential institutions will be regulated. In future, only approved distance education programmes will be funded.

2.2.5. Research

The plan proposes that research funding should be separated from the core funding formula and linked to graduate outputs in terms of masters and doctoral students and research publications.

2.2.6. Institutional Landscape

The plan proposes that the development of new institutional and organisational forms will be achieved through:

- (a) Institutional collaboration at the regional level in programme development, delivery and rationalisation. Thus, for example, in KwaZulu/Natal it has been agreed that from this year there will only be one music faculty, which is being established through the rationalisation of the five faculties that previously existed.
- (b) Investigating the potential and possibility of reducing the number of institutions but not the number of delivery sites on a regional basis, where appropriate, to address the administrative, human and financial capacity constraints, but also the racial fragmentation of the system. An initial analysis of the available data suggests that the number of institutions can be reduced. The key issue is to determine the number and form this should take. The Ministry will establish a national working group to undertake the investigation and to make recommendations. The working group will:
 - Develop its recommendations in the context of the principles for the transformation of the higher education system outlined in the White Paper.
 - Investigate all regions and all institutions within each region.
- (c) The following mergers are proposed to go ahead as they are not dependent on the investigation:
 - The Merger of Natal Technikon and ML Sultan Technikon. The Councils of Natal Technikon and ML Sultan Technikon.
 - The incorporation of the Qwa-Qwa branch of the University of the North into the University of the Free State.

- The unbundling of Vista University and the incorporation of its constituent parts into the appropriate institutions within each region.

(d) In Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape, National Institutes for Higher Education will be established based on collaboration between the different institutions that currently offer higher education programmes in the two provinces.

3. FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

(This is a summary of the presentation by Ms Shireen Motala. The full paper is available on request.)

- 3.1. While the policy developed since 1994 focuses on quality, implementing quality education in schools has been a real challenge in the first five years of the post-apartheid government. One of the key challenges has been the inability to apply 'ideal type' frameworks and innovative national policies at provincial level.
- 3.2. International research has highlighted the difficulty of using state policy to change what happens at school. This often fails because it ignores the culture and context of the schools where change is meant to occur. In South Africa the assumption has been that the policy vision will translate into and affect school practice as it percolates to the provincial and district layers. However, the 'quality chain' from national through provincial to district and school level is slow to be put in place.
- 3.3. Educational reform in South Africa has been shaped both by global influences and by local needs. These include a shift in developing countries to less directly interventionist state policies which emphasise education growth in a context of fiscal constraint, a focus on decentralisation and cost-saving, a re-emergence of human capital approaches to economic growth, a shift of financial responsibility for education from public to private resources, and a growth in the notion of partnerships and voluntarism (Asmal, 1999).
- 3.4. In keeping with government policy to prioritise formal basic education, total expenditure on school education increased dramatically by 89% between 1991 and 1998. At the same time the expenditure on Adult Education and Early Childhood Development has declined. Budgetary reform has been crucial to wider educational reform. South Africa's 1997/98 budget for education

amounted to R40,2 billion, increasing to R46,8 billion in 1998/99. Although this is a large sum of money, in real terms the budgetary allocation for education is declining as a percentage of GDP and as a proportion of the state budget. Contributions to education expenditure from sectors outside of the state are becoming increasingly important. In terms of education expenditure by households, an average of R679 per household was recorded in 1995.

- 3.5. The government has shown commitment to safeguarding redress and its reconstruction and development agenda through the Equitable Shares Formula (MTEF, November 1998) which prioritises poorer and rural communities. This formula provides redress through giving priority to the social security component, based on the target population for social security grants – the elderly, the disabled and children. While education occupies a hefty 40% of the overall formula, it is an unconditional allocation to the provinces. This means that provinces do not necessarily spend it on this function. The Poverty and Inequality Report (May 1998) notes that while 60% of all non-interest spending by government is directed to poverty alleviation, many of these programmes – which are well founded in their conception – suffer from problems in their implementation and delivery. The implementation of the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (DOE, 1998) will be an important redress mechanism, directing funding to the poorest schools in South Africa.¹ However, clear mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that capacity exists at provincial level to implement the programme.
- 3.6. By the end of 1998, eight out of nine provinces overspent their budgets to the amount of R6 billion. Personnel costs continue to occupy about 85% of the budget of public ordinary schooling in provinces. The question is increasingly being posed whether such high investment in personnel is providing adequate returns in terms of education outcomes. Matriculation passes (as one indicator of outcomes) starkly highlight this with low pass rates of 59% in 1994 and 53% in 1995 and 1996, and university entrance passes of 18% in 1995 and 15% in 1996 (Department of Education, 1997).
- 3.7. School improvement approaches

The whole school improvement movement attempts to understand quality through reviewing the processes of learning and teaching in the micro context of the school. It challenges the assumption that

¹ According to the revised formula for school funding 40% of the poorest schools will receive 60% of all financial resources allocated for public ordinary schooling (DOE, 1998).

policy change at a macro level necessarily leads to school-level change. The aims of whole school development are, amongst others, to develop strategies to improve teaching and learning, to engage in teacher development, to improve leadership and management capacity, and to assist schools with strategic planning. The challenge remains whether these experiences can be extrapolated and articulated with co-ordinated policy interventions on a larger scale.

- 3.8. One of the most significant gains made in the post-apartheid situation is the achievement of near-universal access at primary school level and increasing secondary school access. Greater equity in per learner expenditure and greater parity in educator qualifications have also been achieved.
- 3.5. The following strategic areas could be targeted for quality improvement:
- The enabling environment
 - Improvement in the equity of conditions
 - Improvement in the quality of learning
 - Teacher development – making teachers change agents and actively identifying relevant in-service training strategies
 - Better monitoring and evaluating systems
 - Policy and implementation coherence.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Participation rates

A concern was raised regarding whether institutions already struggling with high numbers would be able to cope with increased student numbers. Mr Mseleku responded that research in other countries had shown that a small number of students was inefficient.

4.2. Racial categories

A concern was raised regarding the inability to track the SCE results by race, as these statistics were no longer kept.

4.3. Further education and training (FET)

A concern was raised regarding drop-out rates, and what was being done in terms of FET for people who drop out. Ms Motala linked drop-out rates to the need to upgrade teachers. However, she said that there needed to be more research on the causes of drop-outs. Mr Mseleku said that there were initiatives to improve Maths & Science programmes in schools. A report was also due out on FET schools and colleges.

4.4. Language

The issue of language was raised in that the provinces which had done better in the SCE results were those where the majority of pupils come from one language group. It was felt that the issue of language was such a big topic, it should be addressed at a session of its own.

4.5. Incorporation vs merger

The question was raised as to whether one institution would incorporate another, or whether there would be a merger. Mr Mseleku indicated that the primary focus would be on the new institution, for example a veterinary faculty between the university of Pretoria and Medunsa. There would not be a hierarchy, but a differentiation, with niche programme-based funding.

4.6. Attracting new teacher recruits

In response to a question regarding how to ensure school leavers were enthusiastic about going into teaching, Mr Mseleku said that there were plans to put programmes into schools to show how teaching can be a route to other things.

4.7. Ensuring safety in schools

In response to a question, Mr Mseleku said that there was a school safety initiative and that there was close co-operation with the police and security forces. They were also focusing on anti-racism in schools and on core common values.

4.8. Studies on the impact of HIV/AIDS on teacher numbers

Mr Mseleku said that studies had been done, and more information could be obtained from the department. They were reviewing admission policies and recruitment policies in the light of such studies.