



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

Educational Access in South Africa

Country Analytic Report

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August 2007



**University of the Witwatersrand
Education Policy Unit**



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is a Research Programme Consortium supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Its purpose is to undertake research designed to improve access to basic education in developing countries. It seeks to achieve this through generating new knowledge and encouraging its application through effective communication and dissemination to national and international development agencies, national governments, education and development professionals, non-government organisations and other interested stakeholders.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality.

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CREATE is developing its research collaboratively with partners in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The lead partner of CREATE is the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex. The partners are:

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Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ASER	Age Specific Enrolment Ratio
CSG	Child Support Grant
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DoE	Department of Education (National)
DoF	Department of Finance (National)
DoH	Department of Health (National)
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
ELSEN	Education for Learners with Special Needs
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EPC	Education Policy Consortium
EPU	Education Policy Unit (University of the Witwatersrand)
ERP	Education Rights Project
ESF	Equitable Shares Formula
FET	Further Education and Training
FFC	Financial and Fiscal Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GET	General Education and Training
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
INEXSA	Education Inclusion and Exclusion in India and South Africa project
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
LSM	Learner Support Materials

MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
Model C	Pre-1994 white public school permitted to admit other races
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NEIMS	National Education Infrastructure Management System
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NMF	Nelson Mandela Foundation
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
POS	Public Ordinary Schools
OHS	October Household Survey
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACMEQ	Southern & Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SALSS	Statistics on Living Standards and Development Study
SASA	South African Schools Act
SAYP	Survey of Activities of Young People
SGB	School Governing Body

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Foreword

This review of educational development in South Africa has been developed to explore key issues in access to education, capture recent research, and to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding. It is part of a programme of research developed collaboratively by partners in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the UK within the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE). The research has several purposes and seeks to identify children who are excluded from basic education, establish the causes of their exclusion, and identify ways of ensuring that all children complete a full cycle of basic education successfully.

CREATE conceives of access to basic education in several zones of exclusion – children who never attend, children who enrol in primary school but drop out before completion, children in school but attending irregularly and learning little, and children who fail to transit to secondary school or progress successfully through to the end of the cycle. There are problems in all these zones in South Africa. Though very considerable progress has been made since 1994 and many achievements are impressive much remains to be done to achieve both the spirit and the letter of the commitments reflected in the Millennium Development Goals.

This analysis builds on insights from recent reports and academic papers. It notes that simple access indicators show that the great majority of 5 to 15 year olds in South Africa are enrolled in schools, albeit that significant numbers enter late and repeat grades as they progress. Meaningful access as CREATE defines it includes regular attendance, levels of achievement consistent with curriculum objectives, and completion at or near appropriate age levels. Using these criteria there are concerns that too often schooling is interrupted and learning days are lost, levels of achievement on national assessments and international comparative studies suggest that many learners fall well short of expected outcomes, and over age enrolment and progression remains significant. More needs to be understood about the reasons for these problems and the mechanisms that can ameliorate under achievement and missed opportunities. Different parts of the education system and different geographic regions have widely different characteristics despite actions to equalise public funding and direct subsidies preferentially to those most in need.

The challenge this report takes up is to develop a research agenda which can inform policy and practice in ways that will make a difference to access, equity and the transitions that investment in education seeks to deliver. It identifies several key dimensions that will be explored through fieldwork, secondary data analysis, and policy dialogue. The agenda includes needs to:

- Undertake further analysis of secondary data at and below the national level to explore a disaggregated picture of which sub-populations experience late entry, drop-out and repetition, where they are located geographically.
- Illuminate the explanatory variables that are related to different forms of

exclusion through school and develop community case studies tracking the processes around loss of meaningful access in schools.

- Develop thematic studies on topics that may include
 - age-grade norms, repetition and progression;
 - the introduction of Grade R;
 - the introduction of fee-free schooling; and
 - the exclusion of particular sub-groups of children, such as those who lack access to ECD, those in HIV/AIDS-affected households, those in detention or on the streets, those who live far from schools, those who become pregnant, those who are victims of violence or discrimination, and children of migrants.

This is an ambitious agenda and one that it is very important to pursue. This review has had contributions from many team members and much advice from its reference group. It includes a lot of work in progress and there are needs to refine and confirm its insights. CREATE is appreciative of the efforts made to consolidate analysis and insights from a complex arena of evidence and concerns into this Review. The research offers the possibility of new insights that can improve the lives of those children whose basic right to education is yet to be fully realised.

Professor Keith Lewin
Director of CREATE

Preface

This *Review* of access and participation issues for children in the five to fifteen years age group in South Africa is a product of the inception phase of the five year multi-institution, international research consortium supported by DFID. The age group under consideration corresponds approximately to the primary and early secondary years of education in South Africa. This study is concerned with various aspects of exclusion and participation in primary and secondary schooling. Similar country analyses are being undertaken through the CREATE research programme in Ghana, India and Bangladesh.

Since 1994, South Africa has undertaken the vital task of transforming the inequitable political, economic and social system that characterised the apartheid era into a democratic society which aims to equalise opportunity for all its citizens. Central to this transformation is the establishment of a quality, equitable and democratic education system. A major focus in the post-apartheid period has been on access: both in relation to increased enrolments in schools and in terms of meaningful access to quality education. Much attention has been given in the last ten years to how and whether equity and access have been achieved. It is hoped that this *Review* will contribute to this discussion and body of knowledge, both in a South African and a comparative context.

A cooperative process has been undertaken in the production of this *Review*. Various individuals have contributed, the issues under examination and how they are to be conceptualised have been vigorously debated, and, together with our international partners, we have collectively developed an understanding of a range of educational ‘zones of exclusion’ and their relevance in our country context.

At the country level, the Wits Education Policy Unit, the Education Policy Unit at the University of Fort Hare, the Centre for Education Policy Development and individual academics in the Wits School of Education contributed to the writing of the *Review*. It has been an intense process with many drafts produced. Creating a coherent set of ideas from many disparate documents and sometimes conflicting statistical data sources has been a challenge. A National Reference Group was formed early on to assist the South Africa CREATE research team in various ways. This included determining the scope and focus of the study, considering the methodology and data sources and reviewing the findings and conclusions. The Group, ably chaired by Dr Trevor Coombe, representing senior researchers, academics and the National Department of Education, has at all times supported and encouraged the work and provided intellectual inputs.

The research team and the members of the National Reference Group hope that this *Review* will make a contribution to a better understanding of access and exclusion, and help expand the notion of meaningful access so that the causes of exclusion can be substantively addressed.

Shireen Motala
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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is concerned with understanding educational access for children between the ages of 5 and 15 years in four countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, India and South Africa.

CREATE understands educational access more broadly than simple physical access to school. True access includes equitable access to education that is meaningful.

- Meaningful access to education requires more than full enrolment; it requires high attendance rates, progression through grades with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered.

Education will add more value to people's lives when their freedom to choose is enhanced by meaningful access.

Until most learners are able to progress consistently from grade to grade, without a jolting stop-start journey or frequent repetition, it will remain of the utmost importance to clarify the scale and distribution of exclusion, delayed access, multiple access and chronic absenteeism. Exclusion includes those who are in the vulnerable zone of the silently excluded – those who are physically present in classes but who do not learn anything meaningful or gain the requisite skills. Such lack of epistemic access could be the result of individual learning barriers, lack of concentration because of hunger or because the quality of teaching is poor. This *Review* also considers factors such as negative schooling experiences, HIV/AIDS, sexual harassment, racism and xenophobia as contributing to repetition, absenteeism, low achievement and drop-out.

Educational access is examined in this *Review* in terms of a model that describes seven zones of exclusion. Zone 0 is Grade R, the (as yet non-compulsory) entry point for learners aged 5 years (or turning 5 before the end of June) into the schooling system. Zone 1 includes children who have never gone to school. The second zone includes those who drop out before the end of primary education (Grade 7), and Zone 3 contains learners who are at risk of dropping out in this same period. Zone 4 is the transition between Grades 7 and 8, or between primary and secondary school. Zone 5 contains those learners who drop-out of Grades 8 or 9 and Zone 6 refers to young people of any age who are at risk of exclusion in these two years of lower secondary school.

This *Review* describes and explains patterns of access to schools in South Africa according to these zones of exclusion. It outlines policy and legislation on access to education and provides a statistical analysis of the seven zones of access, vulnerability and exclusion. The quantitative data is supported by a review of research which explains the patterns of access and exclusion. The *Review* also analyses the way in which

educational access is conceptualised, and identifies gaps in these accounts which suggest areas for future research.

The policy context

Under apartheid, significant numbers of children went to school, especially in the primary grades, but Bantu Education also severely limited the quality of education, and the apartheid regime consistently under-resourced black schools. During the 1980s, however, there was considerable expansion of secondary schools for black learners.

- In 1994, South Africa was able to provide near universal access to basic education, but in a system fractured by racial inequality and offering poor quality for the majority of learners.

Following from the 1996 Constitution, compulsory education extended from Grades 1 to 9, or from ages 6 to 15. This period of basic education is also referred to as the General Education and Training (GET) phase and covers seven years of primary school and two years in secondary school. The final three years of secondary school are not compulsory but government is constitutionally obliged to make this Further Education and Training (FET) phase progressively available. Learners can acquire a FET qualification by completing Grade 12 in the schooling system or attaining an equivalent certification from one of 50 public FET colleges or through opportunities offered by the private sector. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) offers an alternative route to both GET and FET qualifications, especially for young people and adults older than the 15-year compulsory age limit.

Responsibility for schooling (GET and FET) is concurrent between national and provincial government. The national Department of Education takes the lead on developing national norms and standards and creates the main policy and legislative frameworks, while provinces take executive responsibility and make the funding decisions. Access differentials can therefore be studied between and within the nine provinces. Provision of schooling is mainly public, with independent schools accommodating under 4% of learners in Grades 1 to 9 in 2004.

Post-apartheid education policy was informed by its commitment to the fundamental right of all citizens to education, equity, redress, and the improvement of quality. New policies were designed to create an inclusive and efficient system. Attention was given to ensuring access of marginalised learners, children infected with HIV/AIDS and learners with special educational needs (LSEN). A progressive outcomes based curriculum was introduced, as well as measures to monitor educational quality. Education governance was devolved to schools, among other things permitting School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to charge fees, with significant implications for educational access (see below). The policy on LSEN emphasizes mainstreaming of learners with mild learning disabilities into ordinary schools. The reception year, Grade R (for children aged 4 turning 5) is being implemented and the target is to reach full coverage of Grade R by

2010. Pro-poor finance policies, school fee exemptions and, most recently, fee-free schools assisted indigent learners into classes. But while policy hoped to net all children in realising their Constitutional right to education, it also aimed to create a more efficient system by regulating repetition and applying age-grade norms in order to minimise under-age and over-age learners.

Financing equitable access to education

Education has consistently enjoyed the largest share of the state budget. Expenditure has increased from R31.1 billion in 1995 to R59.6 billion in 2002, though in real terms it declined as a share of both total government expenditure (from 19.2% in 1996 to 18.8% in 2002) and Gross Domestic Product (from 5.7% in 1996 to 4.9% in 2002). Per capita learner expenditure in post-apartheid education has increased and levelled off between the race groups.

- In 1993, R5500 was spent on each white learner and R1700 on each black learner. By 2005, an average of R4930 was being spent on every learner by the state.

Nevertheless, policy implementation has been constrained by the scale of the historic backlogs inherited from apartheid and the effects of inflation on education costs. Expenditure has also prioritised public ordinary schools, with the effect of crowding out spending on other services like Inclusive Education, Early Childhood Development and Adult Basic Education.

Some headway towards equalization was achieved through efforts at educator redistribution (post-provisioning), where many educators in previously advantaged schools were given the option to teach at previously disadvantaged schools or apply for early retirement. However, this also resulted in large numbers of highly qualified educators leaving the profession.

Partly as a result of the financial pressures, the South African Schools Act (1996) allowed for School Governing Bodies to raise additional capital, among other measures by charging fees. One of the intended outcomes of charging school fees was to encourage children from middle class families to stay in public schools because those schools were able to hire additional educators, and acquire other features that enhanced the provision of quality education. But fees act as a barrier to school access and they allowed for vast differentials to continue between schools because wealthier communities could raise substantially more funds than poor schools.

Equity mechanisms, therefore, sought to redistribute state funding towards the poorest schools. The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF), which took effect on 1 January 2000 (DoE, 1998a), dealt with public funding of schools, exemption of parents who were unable to pay school fees, and subsidies to independent schools. It required each provincial education department to rank all its schools from 'poorest' to 'least poor', and then to allocate funding for non-personnel purposes progressively. The

NNSSF required that 60% of the available funds be allocated to the poorest 40% of schools.

However, this policy has had a marginal impact on schools for two reasons: first, since the poorest schools did not have the financial capacity to handle large sums of money, the provincial Department of Education sent them a paper budget. Poor schools had to requisition their requirements from the provincial Department, which, however, failed to supply these schools yet continued to pay for services (such as electricity, water, photocopying, gardening and scholar transport) to the least poor schools, eventually exhausting the budget. Meanwhile, schools in the least poor quintiles continue to compensate for reduced funding by charging higher school fees, thus maintaining existing differentials.

Technical targeting processes are no doubt important but it became clear that they were not sufficient to eliminate the deep structural disparities in South African education provision. Because of the substantial economic differences among provinces, better off schools in one province could receive more state funding than the poorest schools in another. The resource targeting system was designed to address intra-provincial inequities but could not take account of inequalities among provinces which resulted in different funding allocations to the same quintiles in different provinces. To address these concerns, the NNSSF was completely overhauled in 2006 and a national poverty ranking model was put in place.

Patterns of exclusion

Access to basic education in South Africa is expansive when compared with other developing countries.

- Age-specific school enrolment rates for 6 to 15 year olds in South Africa stand at over 95%.

However, lower Net Enrolment Rates – 87.4% for primary schools in 2004 – suggest that learners are not in the correct grade for their age (most likely they are over-age).

Almost all school-age children enrol in schools, with just under 2% of learners never entering a school. Zone 1 is, therefore, statistically less of a concern than the other zones of exclusion. Most learners stay in school through to the end of primary school, with 88% of learners completing Grade 7 in 2003. This figure does not take into account repetition and drop-out in Zone 2 which is calculated in this *Review* to average 4%.

Zone 4 refers to the transition from primary to secondary school. The 2004 data shows that 90% of learners moved from Grade 7 to Grade 8 for the last two years of compulsory education. The data suggests that there has been significant improvement in the completion rate of basic education between 1997 and 2003, with an increase from 78% in 1997 to 92% in 2003 in Zone 5. Beyond CREATE's zones of exclusion lie the post-

compulsory, final three years of secondary school, which many young people battle to complete.

Zone 3 (Grades 1-7) and Zone 6 (Grades 8 and 9) include learners who are at risk of dropping out. These zones of exclusion are characterised by a range of endogenous and exogenous factors which limit learners' abilities to contend with schooling.

- Exogenous excluding factors include poverty, rates of orphanhood, the environment in which schooling takes place and the impact of HIV/AIDS.
- Endogenous excluding factors include erratic attendance, overage enrolment and repetition.

These zones are also zones of silent exclusion, affecting learners who are present in class but under-achieving.

Zones 3 and 6 are difficult to quantify, though the following statistics reveal the scope of the problem and point to these zones as the most important for further research:

- In the national Department of Education's systemic evaluation of Grade 6 learners obtained a national mean score of 38% in Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), 27% in Mathematics, and 41% in Natural Sciences.
- 32.8% of households received a government grant in 2003 based on poverty.
- 22% of children (aged 0 to 19) eligible to receive the Child Support Grant are not receiving the grant.
- 7% of children are always or often hungry and just over 17% of children are sometimes hungry.
- The impact of HIV/AIDS is evident in the growing number of orphans. In 2003, 17.4% of children had lost one parent and 3% of children had lost both parents (371 000 children).

The causes behind exclusion

South Africa's enrolment rate is high even in circumstances where households have experienced economic or social stress. There is little evidence in the South African context that child labour disrupts enrolment in school (though it may nonetheless impact on performance), despite the fact that child labour is widespread in the country. Neither is there a Cinderella effect on the schooling of fostered children: fostered children are just as likely as the blood-related children of a household to be in school, though they may be behind in terms of their age. HIV/AIDS seems to have a greater impact on the school attendance of older teenagers rather than younger children. There appears to be a routine of school going in South Africa which may even provide a measure of stability for households in times of crisis.

However, while enrolment is high, vulnerability to drop-out or silent exclusion is a major problem (Zones 3 and 6). The quality of education for the majority of learners is still substandard and, pressurised by poverty and illness (which is not limited to HIV/AIDS), many are susceptible to dropping-out. Protracted poverty appears to be the most important reason for learners being out of school. The depth of poverty – in terms of material deprivation, social isolation and their psychological consequences – distinguished the children who were not in school from their peers in the same poor community.

Difficulties in paying school fees should be alleviated as the fee-free school policy is implemented in the poorest schools, but the costs of transport, school uniforms, books and stationery add extra burdens to already-stretched household budgets.

- Among the costs of schooling, transport expenses are the single greatest impediment to educational access for those who do not walk to school.

A number of studies have gauged that cash transfers to poor families, such as the Child Support Grant, have a positive effect on enrolment, especially in ensuring learners begin Grade 1 at the appropriate age.

The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic affects both supply (because teachers are affected) and demand for education. HIV prevalence amongst children aged 2 to 18 years is approximately 5.4%. The safety nets provided by extended families and community networks, as well as the potential support given by schools, may prove crucial in enabling affected children to stay in school.

Schools themselves play a big role in encouraging or discouraging access. Many learners who have structural access to schooling do not have ‘epistemic access’, or access to the content knowledge and skills needed to reach the required levels of achievement and competency.

- All learners in South Africa, and especially those in township and rural schools, are not competitive in comparison with international levels of achievement.
- Learners in Foundation Phase classes are unable to read and write adequately, and their educators are unable to adequately teach how to do so.
- Educators spend too little time at school, and, when at school, spend too much time on administrative tasks.

Racism, sexism, bullying and xenophobia contribute to unwelcoming conditions in schools. Given apartheid’s legacy, the problem of racial integration in schools has received a great deal of attention – although proportionately multi-racial schools are a minority. While schools are no longer allowed to discriminate on the basis of race, a number of exclusionary devices have limited access to comparatively better resourced ex-whites-only schools: their geographic location, far from where most black learners live; their high fees; and their often unwelcoming cultural ethos.

The gender of learners has a direct impact on educational access and performance. Patriarchal male attitudes and behaviour towards schoolgirls is a matter of serious concern, with girls frequently encountering rape, abuse, harassment and assault by male classmates and educators. There are more girls than boys in the system from Grades 6 to 12, and girls are less likely than boys to regard education as irrelevant. Pregnancy is an important factor in schoolgirls dropping out.

Poor performance or silent exclusion may be a result of learning disabilities – though this is likely to affect a small minority of children. While policy emphasises mainstreaming children with learning barriers into ordinary schools, no additional financing has been allocated to support this, so children with learning barriers do not receive the necessary support.

Parents and guardians are not always able to provide the necessary background and knowledge of schooling to support their children – and this may provide at least one clue to why many learners fail and repeat. Correlations between mothers' and children's educational levels are really only significant if mothers have been substantially schooled. Not unexpectedly, educated parents are more likely to provide support for learning and to send their children to better schools.

Individual learners' and parents' assessment of the relevance of education is a key motivating influence in continued attendance at school.

- After fees, the most important reason why learners remain out of school is their perception that it is useless or uninteresting: almost 10% of learners overall, and more boys than girls (13.5% as against 6.5%), hold this depressing view of the value of education.

Researchers appear undecided about how much schooling is required before high rates of return, in the form of expected improved earnings, can be said to be probable, with some suggesting that the economic rewards for completing only basic education are negligible.

Future research

The conclusion to this *Review* of educational access in South Africa suggests several possible areas for future research:

- National averages provide an overall picture of educational access, but the reliability and validity of available statistics is debateable, and their interpretation is made difficult by learners repeating grades, transferring between schools, and enrolling late, by schools inflating numbers, and by regional and local disparities.

Closer scrutiny of the statistics, further analysis of secondary data, and district-scale statistics, would help provide a disaggregated picture of which sub-populations experience high drop-out rates and repetition, where they are located

geographically, and at which points in their school career learners are most likely to drop out.

- The specific relationships between, and the order of priority of, the explanatory variables identified here as hindering access to schools are still unclear. What is the particular mix of factors that eventually result in a learner dropping-out? What are the historical precedents in the process to dropping-out? What factors push learners out of schools, and what factors in the home and community act to pull them out?

More answers to these questions could be provided through community-school surveys, examining the interaction between households and schools, tracking both those learners who are out of school and those who are vulnerable to dropping out because they are over-age or performing poorly or frequently absent. A better understanding of what happens in classrooms – and the impact of learner and educator absenteeism – could also be gleaned.

- Further research on the impact of the following recent policies on access would be useful:
 - Progression, repetition and age-grade norms;
 - The introduction of Grade R;
 - The Department of Education's (2003b) plan of action, *Improving Access to Free and Quality Basic Education for All*, which aims to contain uniform and transport costs; and
 - The introduction of fee-free schooling;
 - Finally, studies need to be undertaken of particular sub-groups of excluded children, such as those who lack access to ECD, those in HIV/AIDS-affected households, those in detention or on the streets, those who live far from schools, immigrants, those who become pregnant and those who are victims of violence or discrimination.

1. Introduction

This *Review* forms part of the broader CREATE programme, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), to investigate access, transitions, and equity in basic education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

CREATE addresses the problem of increasing meaningful access to basic education for children from the ages of 5 to 15. Access in the form of initial enrolment has little meaning unless it results in secure enrolment and regular attendance, progression through grades at appropriate ages, meaningful learning which has utility, and reasonable access to lower secondary education (Lewin, 2007:20). Meaningful access thus implies that all children should not only get access to basic education but, in most if not all cases, complete and go beyond it, having mastered in reasonable time the appropriate range of skills.

Arguing that ‘exclusion from basic education is a process culminating in an event with multiple causalities’ (Lewin, 2007:20), the CREATE project identifies seven ‘zones of exclusion’ containing groups of children who are losing, have lost or never had educational access:

- Zone 0 contains children who have little or no access to organised pre-schooling;
- Zone 1 contains children who are denied access to conventional schools;
- Zone 2 contains children who enter primary school but do not complete it;
- Zone 3 contains children who enter and remain in primary school but who are at risk of dropping out or being silently excluded;
- Zone 4 contains children who complete primary school but are denied access to lower secondary school;
- Zone 5 contains learners who enter lower secondary school but do not complete it; and
- Zone 6 contains children who enter and remain in lower secondary school but who are at risk of dropping out or being silently excluded (Lewin, 2007:21-2).

In South Africa, this focus on increasing access to basic education for children between the ages of 5 and 15 broadly corresponds with the age norms for Grade R to Grade 9:

- Grades 1-9 fall in the General Education and Training (GET) band of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Grade 1 is preceded by an (intended to be, but as yet not, compulsory) Grade R, or reception year, offered in schools and also in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. Grades 1-7 make up primary schooling.
- Grades 10 to 12 fall in the Further Education and Training (FET) band of the NQF and comprise the senior secondary phase of schooling.

In South Africa most learners remain in school from Grades 1 to 9, but the numbers drop dramatically thereafter. Consequently, the South African CREATE research is especially concerned with Zones 3, 5 and 6, the high risk zones of drop out or silent exclusion during basic education. Moreover, the fact that most learners in South Africa are enrolled in and attend Grades 1 to 9 does not mean that problems of access to basic education have been solved. Access implies much more than physical access, which, as the experience of apartheid education makes clear, does not guarantee that learners have equal opportunities or experience an equal quality of education. Most South African learners still struggle to progress successfully through the grades and attain the expected academic outcomes.

Chapter 1 of this *Review* provides an account of the current educational policies and legislation aimed at ensuring access to schools and transforming the educational order in South Africa into one based on human rights, equality and social justice. The constitutional promise of basic education is explored alongside the statutory regulation of access to schools. Albeit highlighting the extent to which apartheid's legacy of racial inequality persists in unequal provision of educational access, the chapter goes well beyond this to discuss post-apartheid interventions intended to promote educational autonomy, increase educational access for the marginalised and the vulnerable, and improve educational quality.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical review of the zones of exclusion in the South African context. Almost all children in South Africa enter school and generally complete basic (primary and lower secondary) education, but there is large-scale drop-out in the senior secondary phase. Moreover, educational performance is poor throughout. After briefly reviewing Zone 0 (which consists of children without access to organised pre-schooling), the chapter devotes particular attention to Zones 3 and 6, and presents the data which underpins educational exclusion in the various forms of poverty, orphanhood, distance from schools, HIV/AIDS and lack of access to meaningful learning.

Chapter 3 reviews research into patterns of access and exclusion. Despite serious pressures, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, inadequately supportive learning environments and low motivation, most learners remain in school until the end of basic education (Grade 9). Nevertheless, learners' achievement levels are exceptionally low, and they are progressively becoming more vulnerable to losing access. The chapter identifies four sets of factors – economic, social, school and personal – which impel children into and out of schools.

Chapter 4 reflects upon the key elements within changing notions of educational access. Under the impact of globalisation, understandings of access have shifted towards rights-based approaches and focus not only on how many learners of school-going age are or are not enrolled, but also on who has access to what kind of schooling, and on what basis. It suggests that visible physical or structural access to education is necessary but insufficient, since it is often characterised by less visible processes of exclusion, and that only meaningful access can truly lead to a more just and equitable experience of

schooling. The chapter also addresses concerns over the accuracy and reliability of statistical data, the implications of pro-poor educational policies, and how socio-economic realities and poor learner and educator preparedness stand in the way of achieving more meaningful access.

Chapter 5 concludes the *Review* by briefly summing up the main findings of the previous chapters and then providing an analysis of gaps in our understanding of educational access in South Africa. It offers substantial suggestions for generating district-level statistics and conducting ‘community-school surveys’. The chapter also points to areas needing further research, and pays particular attention to the areas of drop out, gender differences in access, the impact of recent policies, and thematic studies on particular sub-groups of excluded children.

2. The National Policy Environment

2.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses policy related to educational access in the post-apartheid era. Whereas education policy during apartheid provided for separate and different schooling for various racial groups, the focus of the post-apartheid democratic government has been to ensure equitable educational access in line with the Constitution's Bill of Rights. Policy, post-1994, was therefore developed to redress past inequalities in access and to ensure inclusivity. But while government policies aimed to open up access to education, they were also intended to regulate and monitor it.

Several strands in educational access policies and processes are evident: first, the structure of the education and training landscape was completely transformed, with an emphasis on making education structurally accessible to all those who were previously denied, or had limited, access, in various forms; second, measures were introduced to regulate admission to and progression through schools; third, marginalised or vulnerable groups received particular attention in the form of inclusive education programmes and pro-poor funding policies; fourth, a new curriculum was introduced, and procedures set in place to measure educational quality; fifth, educational governance was decentralised, with significant effects on access patterns; and finally, matters of educational financing were addressed in an effort to make the new framework both more affordable and more economically accessible.

2.2 The legacy of apartheid

The institutionalised racism of apartheid continues to have profound effects on all levels of educational provision and experience in South Africa. Apartheid was structured to reproduce, maintain and perpetuate inequity based on legally-enforced racial and ethnic segregation of educational access. This was ensured and reinforced by white minority control of the legislature and state apparatus and the geo-political segregation of races through 'group areas' and 'homelands' which were central to the architecture and design of apartheid. Over generations white education received a disproportionate share of funds and resources. In 1990, for example, for every R1 spent on a black primary school child R15 was spent on a white primary school child (Nkomo, 1990).

Ironically, black South Africans had significant access to education under apartheid but it was designed to ensure the subordination of black people and the reproduction of capitalism premised on white supremacy and inequality. According to the then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd:

There is no place for him [‘the Bantu’] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however, all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed (Rose & Tunmer, 1975: 266).

In practice educational provision was not only separate for black South Africans but, especially for Africans, it was desperately unequal and many doors to opportunity remained firmly locked and barred. Thus, the experience of apartheid education demonstrates that physical access to education is not enough, and that education is inseparable from other social forces that determine or influence the distribution and quality of education opportunity (Sayed & Soudien, 2003).

2.3. The structure of the post-apartheid education and training system

The main features of the post-apartheid education and training system took shape during the first few years after liberation in 1994 and ever since have been under continuous review and improvement (for more background on this section, see DoE, 2006a). The 1996 Constitution determined that the three (national, provincial and local) spheres of government, ‘distinctive, interdependent and interrelated’, should function together co-operatively; and since South Africa has no tradition of municipal responsibility for education, the Constitution provides that the national sphere has exclusive legislative responsibility for tertiary education and shares concurrent responsibility with the provincial spheres for all other education.

In practice, the national government, working with the provinces, sets the political agenda, creates the main policy and legislative frameworks for the development of education, establishes national norms and standards for the system and monitors developments. The nine provincial governments make funding decisions and exercise executive responsibility for all education from Grade R through to the end of secondary school in Grade 12, as well as formal adult education and further education and training. Public school education and the regulation of independent schools are provided for under the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Similar provision for adult education falls under the Adult Education Act, 2000. The Further Education and Training Act, 1998, which regulated post-compulsory pre-higher education learning, will be superseded in 2007 by a new Act, in terms of which the 50 public FET colleges will provide intermediate and high level skills training to post-compulsory school leavers and adults.

The national Ministry of Education co-operates with the Ministry of Social Development in implementing the inter-sectoral provision of early childhood development from ages 0 to 9. The latter Ministry has the lead responsibility, in terms of the Children’s Act, 2005, for children under school-going age. The National Education Policy Act of 1996 established the Council of Education Ministers and the Heads of Education Departments Committee, which bodies ensure the coordination of policy and executive action across the system. Quality assurance for all non-higher education, that is, for the General Education (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) bands of the National Qualifications Framework, is undertaken by the statutory body, Umalusi.

South Africa's 23 universities (which include universities of technology and six comprehensive universities) and two institutes of higher education are guaranteed academic freedom under the Constitution and institutional autonomy under the Higher Education Act, 1997, subject to their public accountability.

Skills development is the responsibility of the national Ministry of Labour which administers a statutory National Skills Authority and 24 statutory stakeholder-representative Sector Education and Training Authorities covering all aspects of the economy, private and public.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which is accountable to the Minister of Education in association with the Minister of Labour, develops and implements the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The South African NQF links formal educational, skills and professional qualifications in a comprehensive ten-level framework that covers general, further and higher education and training. SAQA oversees standards development and quality assurance throughout the system.

Although public school educators (who accounted for 95% of all South African educators in 2006) are employed by provincial education departments, their terms and conditions of employment are governed under the national Employment of Educators Act, 1998. National collective bargaining is undertaken in the Education Labour Relations Council between all departments of education and nationally recognised teachers' unions in terms of the Labour Relations Act, 1995. The professional registration and development of educators and the setting, maintenance and protection of ethical and professional standards is the responsibility of the South African Council for Educators under its own Act of 2000.

2.4. Post-apartheid policy on educational access

With the adoption of the Interim Constitution in 1993, equal education became for the first time a fundamental human right for all South Africans. The Bill of Rights of the final Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) provides that:

29. (1) Everyone has the right –
 - (a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and
 - (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.
- (2) Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions taking into account –
 - (a) equity;
 - (b) practicability; and

- (c) the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.

Unlike other socio-economic rights, such as access to housing and health care, the right to basic education is unqualified and may be interpreted as enjoying ‘a higher normative status as an immediately enforceable right’ (Veriava, 2005: 3). The State has a positive duty to provide basic education, but in order to assess whether the State has met its obligation it is necessary to ‘define the content of the right to basic education and to measure the actual level of achievement against the standard set by the right’ (Veriava, 2005: 3). This entails taking into account international law as well as the South African social and historical context. A primary requirement is that education is both physically and economically accessible to those who were previously denied access. In addition, the quality of education should ensure that ‘learners are able to develop to their full potential and to compete on equal terms with each other for jobs and for access to institutions of higher learning’ (Veriava, 2005: 3).

Since 1994, South Africa has ratified all international and African conventions on the rights of the child (including the prohibition of child labour), the right to education and the prohibition of discrimination. A battery of statutory legislation, regulations and policy directives has created the legal, administrative and pedagogical framework to ensure that children get into schools and that, once they are there, the environment is learner friendly. National Curriculum Statements and assessment protocols are based on progressive pedagogical principles designed to encourage active learning and to recognise success. No child may be turned away from a school on grounds of poverty. Corporal punishment is banned in educational institutions. The rights of learners with HIV/AIDS are protected, as are those of pregnant learners. Policies are in place to address crime, violence, drug use and drug dealing in schools.

Access to school education was given legal form in the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Regulations and policy in accordance with the National Education Policy Act of 1996 govern admission to public and independent schools. Enrolment is compulsory for all learners from the beginning of the year in which they turn six to the end of the year in which they turn 15, or the end of Grade 9, whichever comes sooner. Parents are legally liable to ensure that their children are enrolled during the compulsory period. Compulsory education (also known as basic education) therefore extends from Grade 1 to 9, comprising seven years of primary school and the first two of the five years of secondary school. The Reception year (Grade R) is not compulsory but the policy of the Ministry of Education is to make it universally accessible, either in public schools or Early Childhood Development centres.

Age-grade norms for school education are clearly defined. The admission age of learners to a public school is

- 5 years turning 6 in the year of admission to Grade R or Grade 0;
- 6 years turning 7 in the year of admission to Grade 1.

After a legal challenge by the Independent Schools Association, the legislation was amended by a clause placing the onus on parents to show that younger learners are ready to be admitted to school. However, parents may choose to send their children to school one year later than the norm in each case. The law also makes provision for compulsory attendance for learners until the age of 15 years or the ninth grade, whichever occurs first.

In order to improve flow-through rates and overall efficiency in the school system, the Department of Education's assessment policy requires that learners progress with their age cohort. No learner may repeat more than once in each phase (Foundation, Intermediate and Senior) without approval from the head of the provincial Department of Education. The policy also states that 'If a learner needs more time to achieve particular outcomes, he or she need not be retained in a grade for a whole year' (DoE, 1998b: para. 32). Learners over the age of 16 who have never attended school or who have not made sufficient progress with their peer group are referred to Adult Basic Education Centres (DoE, 1998b, para. 29).

The Admission Policy for Public Ordinary Schools (DoE, 1998b) sets out the regulations and procedures for entry into school. Parents are responsible for making an initial application to a school for access, but once this has been done, it is the responsibility of the school and the head of the provincial Department of Education to ensure that the learner is admitted into the system. A parent who does not apply for admission at the appropriate age of the child is liable and can be prosecuted under the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

The only documentation required for entry to schools is a birth certificate and proof of immunisation (and, if the learner is transferring from another school, a transfer or report card). If a parent is unable to supply a birth certificate, the learner must be conditionally admitted until a copy is obtained from the Department of Home Affairs (within three months). Similarly, a child who has not been immunised must be admitted by the school, and parents advised on how to get the child immunised. Persons classified as 'illegal aliens' must show evidence that they have applied to the Department of Home Affairs to legalise their stay in South Africa.

Provincial Departments of Education arrange for parents to register their children for admission in the following year. This is an efficiency measure and does not preclude late admissions. Schools must inform parents in writing if their child has not been admitted, and inform them that the child is on a waiting list.

Learners may seek admission to any public school they choose. However, heads of provincial Departments of Education may, in consultation with School Governing Bodies (SGBs), establish feeder zones for public schools (which need not be geographically adjacent to the schools). First preference must be given to those who live in the school's feeder zone, and second preference to those whose parents work in the zone. Once all learners within the feeder zone have been accommodated, schools have some discretion

in selecting learners from outside their geographic area. This constraint on access exerted by the geography of feeder zones is most relevant for schools in high demand due to their good facilities, such as schools in the former white system (formerly known as ‘Model C’ schools), which make up about 10% of all schools.

In public schools, SGBs include elected representatives of parents, educators, non-educator staff (and, in secondary schools, learners). SGBs are responsible for drafting school-based admission policies which must be consistent with national and provincial law and policies. In particular, ‘a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way’ (Republic of South Africa, 1996a, Section 5(1)). Admission tests (including HIV screening) may not be administered and no student may be refused entrance because their parents are unable to pay, or have not paid school fees, do not subscribe to the school’s mission statement, or refuse to waive their right to claim for damages from the school. Pregnant girls may not be expelled from school.

The responsibility of determining the language policy of schools also rests with SGBs, subject to national and provincial policy. A learner has a right to choose the language of learning and teaching when they apply for admission in a school. If no school in the school district offers teaching and learning in a language chosen by a learner, they may request the provincial Department of Education to make provision for instruction in the chosen language. Where fewer than 40 learners in Grades 1 to 6, and fewer than 35 in Grades 7 to 12, request learning and teaching in a language which is not offered by a school in a school district, the provincial Department of Education will determine how the needs of these learners will be met. Parents may apply to have their children educated at home, but the Head of the relevant provincial Department of Education must be satisfied that this is in the interests of the child and will meet the province’s educational requirements.

In sum, legislation and policy regulates and standardises admission to public schools. Learners are required to begin school at admission age and to progress systematically through the grades, thereby eliminating the prevalence of over- and under-aged learners that characterised the apartheid system. Parents are required to make initial application, provide documentation and ensure their children’s attendance during the compulsory period, but the responsibility to ensure that all learners find a place in a school lies with the government. The latter has learned from the experience of apartheid education that improving educational opportunity is less a matter of increasing physical access to education, and more about *what* people have access to, on *what basis* and *why*.

2.5. Opening up access to marginalised groups

Hence, besides standardising access practices across ordinary public schools, policy has also made provision to increase and improve access by marginalised, disadvantaged or especially vulnerable groups, particularly learners infected with HIV/AIDS, those with

special education needs, girl learners, pre-school children, and the poorest learners. In this section we look at how policy affects these five groups, and also consider recent policy discussions on ‘Improving Access to Free and Quality Basic Education’ (DoE, 2003b) and some of the legislation that has flowed from this.

2.5.1 HIV and AIDS

In 1999, the Department of Education established a National Policy on HIV and AIDS for learners and educators in public schools and FET institutions. The main purpose of the policy was to prevent discrimination against learners and educators infected with HIV, maintain confidentiality and create a safe school environment. It emphasised preventive strategies and the raising of awareness through formal and non-formal education programmes, and compelled SGBs to draw up HIV and AIDS policies for their schools so as to operationalise national policy. The policy called for the dismissal of educators who refuse to work with infected learners and educators or to participate in teaching HIV and AIDS education.

The Department of Education overhauled its response to HIV and AIDS during 2005/6 to cover all health barriers to education. A new policy framework on health and wellness is being drafted, using insights from a major study on educators’ health undertaken by the HSRC on behalf of the Education Labour Relations Council (Shisana *et al.*, 2005; DoE, 2006a). Learners’ and educators’ most common health risks and appropriate interventions have been identified. The provincial Departments of Education work with the health authorities to enable health workers to visit schools to promote a healthy lifestyle among educators and learners. The Life Skills learning programme in schools focuses on HIV and AIDS and a peer education programme is implemented in all provinces. Guides for SGBs, management teams and parents have been distributed to help them understand and respond constructively to the impact of the epidemic on schools (DoE, 2006b).

2.5.2 Inclusive education

During the apartheid era, learners with special education needs – particularly those from disadvantaged communities – had problems gaining access to schools because of the scarcity of special schools. The post-apartheid government aims to implement inclusive education at all levels of the system by 2020. The White Paper on *Inclusive Education* (DoE, 2001b) recognised special needs education as that which addresses a range of barriers which leads to the exclusion of learners. Apart from disability, these barriers can include socio-economic deprivation which may require additional support services. Learners with disabilities in need of mild or moderate levels of support were to be progressively accommodated in the ordinary school system, in their local communities. The White Paper estimated that 280,000 children of compulsory school age who were not in school would thus be brought into the system. Special schools would be reserved for learners with disabilities in need of high level support, and equipped to serve as resource centres providing information, staff and materials to their local areas.

The new policy is being rolled out in 30 nodal areas for which baseline data is currently being collected and analysed. Project teams have been appointed in all nine provinces and plans are being finalised to begin the construction work on the upgrading and equipping of the 30 designated full service schools. Norms and standards for the funding of inclusive education are also being finalised. An advocacy campaign by the Department of Education is informing stakeholders and community bodies of the implications of the roll-out, and a strategy is being developed for the mobilisation of out-of-school disabled children in these areas. All documents are available in large print and Braille, and staff members are being trained.

Integrated inter-departmental programmes are being developed and some are being piloted for other vulnerable youth and children: those who are in conflict with the law, street children, children in need of care, and child-workers (DoE, 2006a, 2006b).

2.5.3 Gender equity

Gender equality in the form of equal formal access to education does not ensure gender equity or address deeply embedded and often culturally reinforced discriminatory gender practices. Enrolment figures for girls may be high while discrimination persists, as South Africa's experience attests. Gender-based differences in learning attainment are common but are not well understood and have not yet been systematically tackled. The phenomenon of adolescent boys leaving school after the compulsory phase in greater numbers than girls is a case in point.

The Directorate: Gender Equity in Education has worked to advance equity in appointments, access and performance. It has overseen the appointment of 'gender focal persons' in districts and provinces. Gender initiatives have included the launch of the Girls' Education Movement (GEM) and Boys' Education Movement (BEM), the establishment of GEM and BEM Clubs in public schools (working with local NGOs and UNICEF), workshops on gender-based violence and the preparation of a training manual, *Opening our Eyes*. A policy document on schoolgirl pregnancy is under consideration by the Council of Education Ministers. Despite these and other interventions, the education system's work on gender equity has lacked focus. Most recently, a ministerial committee was appointed to advise on the matter, and a national plan of action on gender equity will follow during 2007 (DoE, 2006a).

2.5.4 Early childhood development

The Department of Education's strategic objective is to extend quality integrated early childhood development services, including the reception year (Grade R), to the most marginalised communities. Cabinet has approved a National Integrated Plan on Early Childhood Development. An Inter-departmental Committee comprising officials from the Departments of Education, Social Development and Health have, together with the South African Broadcasting Corporation, developed a multi-media ECD strategy. Early stimulation programmes for children from birth to four years will be introduced as part of the national integrated ECD plan in 2007.

Grade R (for children aged 4 turning 5) is being implemented through programmes at public primary schools and community based sites as well as through independent provision. The target is to reach full coverage of Grade R by 2010 with 85% of provision located in public primary schools and 15% at community sites. The 2005 General Household Survey reported a significant recent increase in the enrolment of five year olds, from 40% of the age group in 2002 to almost 60% in 2005. However, much work still needs to be done: much Grade R provision depends on fee payments, many practitioners are poorly paid and have no professional training, and the quality of provision has not yet reached the desired standard. Hence, national norms and standards for Grade R funding have been prepared, and unit standards at levels 1-4 of the National Qualifications Framework have been developed for the training of ECD practitioners. Training materials and learnerships will follow.

2.5.5 Pro-poor educational access

There is much debate on whether education policies in themselves reinforce inequalities and increase the gap between rich and poor schools (Motala, 2003, 2006a), whether school fees on their own lead to exclusion from schooling (Fleisch & Woolman, 2004), and whether the indicators of poverty are adequate (Harsch, 2000; Ramadiro, 2003). These issues will be discussed in more detail later in this *Review*. In addition, some have argued that the macro-economic policy frameworks have had adverse consequences for schools by increasing privatisation and reducing government responsibility for social welfare provision (Motala & Pampallis, 2005; Motala, 2004). Others contend that poor parents and learners are disadvantaged by laws and policies such as SASA and the school funding norms because they are not unequivocally pro-poor (Carrim and Sayed, 1997; Fleisch & Woolman, 2004; Motala, 2006a).

Because fees obviously hinder access to schools by the poor, the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) (DoE, 1998a) provided that parents whose combined gross annual income was less than 10 times the annual fees per learner were exempted from paying school fees. If the combined annual gross income of parents was less than 30 times (but greater than 10 times) the annual school fee, then partial exemptions could be applied (DoE, 1998a). However, the exemption process was cumbersome for SGBs to manage, and its bureaucratic procedures were daunting and time-consuming for parents, who risked the indignity of being means-tested. No blanket exemption was provided for, and if parents failed to apply to the SGB for exemption, and did not pay the full school fee, the SGB could take legal action to recover the fees (although under no circumstances could they exclude the learners from school). Given also that schools were never compensated for fees not paid by those exempted, many did not advertise the possibility of exemption.

Following a Departmental review of the costs of education (DoE, 2003a), a plan of action, *Improving Access to Free and Quality Basic Education for All* (DoE, 2003b), was developed, detailed a number of reforms intended to facilitate access to schools. These

included regulating the cost of uniforms and books, improving school budgeting systems, taking over school nutrition schemes from the Department of Health, and facilitating better transport facilities so that the poor, especially in rural areas, have easier access to schools (DoE, 2003b). Most importantly, the Education Laws Amendment Bill of 2004 and changes to the Norms and Standards for School Funding (DoE, 2004) subsequently paved the way for fee-free schools in the lowest two quintiles (40% of schools). Quintiles are now determined nationally (not provincially, as previously), and the national Department determines the amount that provinces ought to allocate per learner in each quintile. The national department also sets an ‘adequacy benchmark’ (a minimum amount considered necessary for schools to provide adequate basic education) which was R527 in 2006 for non-salary expenditure, with the poorest quintiles receiving R703 per learner and the least poor R117 per learner. Schools which receive ‘adequate’ funding will be listed as ‘no-fee’ schools. This applies only to Grade R to Grade 9.

Additional changes to the Norms and Standards aimed to improve monitoring and enforcement of the exemption policy in schools where fees continued to be paid. Orphans, learners in foster care, and children who received a government grant (such as the Child Support Grant) are automatically exempted from paying user fees. The regulations are now more rigorous (but at the same time more onerous), with specific Departmental forms to be filled in by parents and the SGB. The new formula takes into account parents with more than one learner in a public school, and also clarifies the ‘discount’ parents are entitled to if the school fees range between 3.5% and 9.5% of their annual income. (The previous policy left the amounts for these partial exemptions to the discretion of the SGB.)

Nevertheless, from the outset these reforms fall short – even in their promise to provide free schooling for 40% of the poorest learners in the country (Motala, 2003; Veriava, 2005; Spreen and Vally, 2006). The system is bureaucratically complicated and hinges on determining poverty levels of particular communities. Quintiles are determined annually, leaving schools and parents on the margins uncertain from year to year whether fees will be levied or not. Constraints on social spending make it unlikely that adequate benchmark funding will stretch to include all schools in quintiles 1 and 2, and the number of schools in these quintiles may be reduced as schools previously in the lowest quintiles in the richer provinces are pushed up the quintile ladder (Veriava, 2005). Moreover, the fee-free schools could put pressure on the middle-level (quintile 3) schools, which may be most financially vulnerable if state funding to them decreases, as they are less able to rely on adequate levels of user fees.

Undoubtedly, the government is keen to meet its obligation to provide educational access to all by 2015, in terms of the Dakar 2000 EFA Framework for Action. Given that educational access is a human right, the denial thereof could lead to litigation, an outcome which any government would want to avoid; in addition, the provision of educational access is constructed within a global political and economic framework, which places additional pressure on government to increase access (see Carrim & Keet, 2005). Notwithstanding these difficulties in making education increasingly accessible for

the marginalised, the government's policies and principles do, in spirit, encourage inclusive access, and this is perhaps most clearly to be seen in its curricular and other efforts to provide not merely structural but also meaningful educational access.

2.6. Providing meaningful access to quality education

Improving and expanding educational provision for all, especially the poor and those hitherto discriminated against or otherwise disadvantaged, and overcoming barriers to existing access, are vitally important; but they are not enough. Increased access to education does not automatically translate into better quality education, not least because broader social factors both in and outside the schools often prevent children from taking advantage of opportunities on offer. This section first examines efforts to introduce a curriculum and then discusses the need to measure and monitor educational quality.¹

2.6.1 Changing the curriculum

The school curriculum under apartheid was used as an instrument of division and inequality and a vehicle for propaganda and indoctrination. Urgent action had to be taken by the new government after 1994 to introduce a new curriculum framework which would be true to the values of the Constitution, appropriate for a progressive 21st century African nation and dedicated to raising the quality of learning in all communities.

The introduction of a new curriculum in 1997 based on Outcomes Based Education (OBE) principles immediately and inevitably led to controversy and debate. On the one hand, it was seen as a welcome negation of all that had characterised apartheid methods. On the other hand, it was criticised as too complicated and over-ambitious, in that it involved new and unnecessarily complex terminology, and depended for its implementation on poorly trained and already overworked educators. Despite the appearance of many of the problems predicted by the critics, the national Department began to address these, starting with a Ministerial Review Committee which reported in 2000, and to date the new curriculum is still being phased in on an annual basis and in a more measured and judicious fashion.

This revised approach, of which educators in the main are highly supportive (DoE, 2006a), has since spawned a National Curriculum Statement (NCS), which, written in plain language, gives more emphasis to basic skills, content knowledge and a logical progression from one grade to the next. It combines a learner-centred curriculum requiring critical thought and emphasising the democratic values embedded in the Constitution, with an appreciation of the importance of content and support for educators. Other curriculum initiatives addressed special priority areas: there are now over 400

¹ Subsections 6.1 and 6.2 below, on changing the curriculum and measuring and monitoring educational quality, draw heavily on the DoE (2006b) report entitled *The 16th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers*, South Africa Country Paper. Pretoria: Department of Education.

designated Dinaledi ('stars') schools that are being groomed as centres of excellence in mathematics and science; the Research Strategy on Racial Integration in Schools has been produced and distributed to schools; and e-learning initiatives are gathering pace in partnership with the private sector. Not least, the QIDS UP Programme is a new strategy for improving quality: providing educator and district development support to 5000 low performing primary schools, it seeks to improve children's learning, especially their literacy and numeracy skills, and will cost R12.5 billion over the first five years (DoE, 2006b).

2.6.2 Measuring and monitoring educational quality

The depth and context of South Africa's learning problem is revealed in the Department's 'systemic evaluation' reports (DoE, 2005b). These are national assessments of learning achievement, for Grades 3, 6 and, in future, 9, in mathematics, natural science and the language of teaching and learning. The Grade 3 survey was conducted in 2001 and the Grade 6 report appeared in December 2005. Like South African learners' performance in the National Systemic Evaluation, SACMEQ and TIMSS assessments, the results so far, said the Director-General of Education, Duncan Hindle, are 'clearly unpalatable to any educationist'.

The Grade 3 survey revealed how serious were the problems of literacy and numeracy teaching in the majority of foundation phase classrooms. The evidence from the Grade 6 survey of 34 000 learners in a representative sample of 1 000 mainstream public schools shows that more than half our children are not achieving the expected learning outcomes (i.e., scoring 50% or better) in natural sciences, six out of ten are not achieving in the language of learning and eight out of ten are not achieving in mathematics. Girls and boys scored about the same in all three assessment tasks, but in other respects learners' performance showed great variation. It is clear, judging by the Grade 6 learners' scores, that the chances of learning successfully are very unequally spread across the country. On some assessment tasks learners scored half as well on average in some provinces than in others. Learners in provinces that inherited large rural homelands, where families are very poor and schools still poorly resourced, fared worse by far; they scored best in town schools and less well (in descending order) in township, farm schools, rural and remote rural schools (where some learners scored almost three times worse than urban learners). 'Learner participation' was the in-school factor most clearly associated with better performance, which indicates the importance of children's communication skills and access to the language of learning and teaching. Grade 6 children performed better in all three learning areas when they learnt in the home language, whereas children who had learnt in a language other than their own tended to score less well. This confirms extensive research findings on the importance of mother tongue education, but there are other contributing factors at work: low-scoring learners who were not learning in their mother tongue also tend to live in poor circumstances in remote and rural areas. In Grade 6, it is only learners with English or Afrikaans as a home language who enjoy fully-fledged home language instruction. All maths textbooks, for instance, are in English or

Afrikaans. The matter is less one of a mismatch between language of instruction and home language, than the inability of the system to deal effectively with the transition from an African language to (nearly always) English in the Intermediate phase. This disadvantages all African language speakers. An alternative view is that the problem lies in the inability of the system to offer African languages formally as a medium of instruction beyond Grade 3.

Quality in the South African context is directly connected to equitable access and the conditions under which learning takes place. The findings of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (DoE, 2003d) endorse this:

Submissions placed much more emphasis on issues of equity, access and human rights than on curriculum, learning and teaching. The single most powerful recommendation to emerge from the submissions was the need to improve and equalise facilities and resources. With rural schools being deficient in every indicator of material provision – e.g. physical space and amenities such as electricity and running water, libraries, textbooks, the safety of learners – it appears as if curriculum issues are almost completely overshadowed by the more immediate and pressing need for resources to enable effective teaching and learning to take place.

These findings confront us with an important corrective to any one-sided arguments that structural access to education – the resources needed to facilitate teaching, which here include equity and human rights – can simply be discounted in favour of ensuring meaningful access, such as through curriculum innovation. Instead, a multi-pronged strategy seems required; and for this, it is also important to consider issues of education governance and education finance. The next section explores the way in which the decision to decentralise governance to SGBs has impacted on access patterns. This will be followed by an investigation of whether education financing supports the government's plans for increased resourcing and access (DoE, 2006b).

2.7. Regulating access

In this section we turn to ways in which policies have effectively regulated access. Detailed attention is given to governance provisions and policies in education financing. First, the ambiguity of policy has provided opportunities for different interpretations which have affected equitable access (Fleisch & Woolman, 2004; Motala, 2006b). Second, while policy shifts have been significant in terms of the overall distribution of resources, public expenditure on education is yet to reach sufficiently pro-poor levels and continues to marginally 'favour the rich' (Gustafsson & Patel, 2006).

2.7.1 Governance

Decentralising authority to School Governing Bodies is, in part, justified as a strategy to democratise schools by encouraging stakeholder participation in decision making. SGBs comprise the school principal and representatives of educators, parents and non-teaching staff (and, in secondary schools, learners), with parent representatives holding the

majority. However, the inherited geographic apartheid that still defines the make-up of many school communities often results in governance structures that reflect particular cultural, class or racial characteristics. It has been argued that ambiguity in the language of SASA has allowed SGBs to regulate access in favour of their particular race or class interests. As Soudien and Sayed (2004) point out:

[SASA] invests in schools the power to define their community or corporate identities. Whereas schools in the old apartheid order very definitely took their identities from their relationship to the state ... the new Act gives parents the right to define and protect 'their' linguistic and value orientations. In the new order, as juristic persons capable of entering contracts in their own name and capable of branding themselves, schools have the power to establish identities independent of the state. They can invoke 'race', for example, without ever having to name it. This has emerged out of the responsibility school governing bodies have taken of 'promoting the best interests of the schools' and achieving 'quality education' (2004:108).

Soudien and Sayed (2004) also contend that the decentralised school governance system is a policy outcome of the post-apartheid political settlement between the African National Congress and the National Party. In other words, the model of school governance adopted was one of compromise, with central government relinquishing some of its powers to parents, thereby allowing ex-Model C (former white) schools to retain a measure of control over their activities, while extending the same responsibilities to former black schools.

The result is a public-private model of school funding. The amount is determined by SGBs (with parents consenting at annual general meetings). SGBs are expected to 'take all reasonable measures within [their] means to supplement the resources provided by the state' (Republic of South Africa, 1996a: Section 36). The responsibility of SGBs to close the gap between state subsidisation and the financial requirements of the school has become increasingly central to the functioning of locally elected SGBs (Motala & Tshoane, 2004; Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). The funding model was influenced by the findings of the Hunter Committee (DoE, 1995), the body established by the first Minister of Education to advise on the organisation, governance and funding of schools after apartheid. The Hunter committee advocated a partnership funding approach to achieve four key principles: attaining equity, advancing quality, redressing imbalances, and improving efficiency. The partnership was to be between the government (which would provide for a minimal level of funding on a sliding scale related to socio-economic indicators) and parents (who would supplement state funding). The rationale was that the government could not fund all education at the high levels enjoyed by some of the previous (racial) education departments, yet it wanted to equalise internal resource allocation. It also wanted to put the onus on parents to determine the financial needs of the school and the size of the supplement they were prepared to raise if the state subsidy fell short of their needs.

Since the proposed funding mechanism was sharply progressive, schools in wealthier communities would receive from the government much smaller non-salary recurrent cost allocations than schools in poorer communities, which would increase the incentive to charge fees at the rate the parent community could bear. Moreover, allowing these former Model C (formerly white) schools to charge fees would free up additional public funds that could be used to address backlogs in schools that served the former disadvantaged communities (Motala, 2003; Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Nzimande, 2001). One of the outcomes of charging school fees was to encourage children from middle class families to stay in public schools, because those schools were able to hire additional educators and acquire other features that enhanced the provision of quality education. As Fiske and Ladd explain:

Permitting the former white schools to charge fees headed off the temptation to seek equity by destroying the islands of educational excellence that existed under apartheid (2004:81).

South Africa needed all the trained workers and citizens it could muster, and it made little sense to undermine the quality of the ‘good’ schools, especially at a time when the constituency of those schools was being widened to include all races.

Fees, then, regulated effective demand and choice of schools. They enabled a layer of schools to be maintained which generally catered for middle-class parents who could afford relatively high fees – and created a barrier for poorer learners wanting to enter such schools, despite the provision for fee exemption and the prohibition against excluding learners on grounds of inability to pay. Fees charged in the poorest schools tended to be very low, though the extent to which even these nominal amounts have acted as a barrier has been a point of debate (see Vally, 2001; Motala, 2003; Fleisch & Woolman, 2004; Motala, S. & Pampallis, 2005).

This chapter will now describe the financing of educational access – and assess whether sufficient resources have been made available to implement the promises made in policy.

2.7.2 Macro-economic and fiscal policies influencing education financing

With the establishment of a democratic government in 1994, it was expected that the funding of schooling for previously disadvantaged groups would be substantially increased (Wildeman, 2002; Motala, 2003; Van der Berg, 2004). The new policies did indeed aim to increase the access of children to public schools, but implementation was constrained by three important factors: first, the scale of the historical backlogs inherited from apartheid; second, the effects of growing inflation on education costs; and third, the difficulties of redistributing funds from personnel to non-personnel expenditure. These factors combined to depress provincial education spending, and particularly the level of redress funding for schools serving the poor. Reviewing trends in education spending from 1999, Fiske and Ladd (2004: 35) noted that inflation adjusted spending of provinces on ordinary public schools has increased, though that increase has been small.

Education expenditure increased from R31.1 billion in 1995 to R59.6 billion in 2002 to R105 billion in the 2006/07 budget and projected to increase to R127 billion by 2010 (National Treasury, 2007). Over the same period in real terms education spending is 19.9% of consolidated national and provincial expenditures. Expenditure on national education represents 5.4% of GDP in 2006/2007. In 2009/2010 national and provincial expenditure will represent 19.8% of consolidated national and provincial government expenditures at 5.3% of GDP. The national education budget is projected to grow by 7% in 2007/2008 while sustaining a real average growth of 5.9%.

The government's macro-economic and fiscal policies after 1994 impacted on the state resources available to education (Nicolau, 2001; Vally & Tleane, 2001). The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had been conceptualised prior to the 1994 elections and a new government version was issued as a White Paper in November 1994 (ANC, 1994; Ministry in the Office of the President, 1994). The RDP was a policy framework rather than a plan. It envisaged balanced economic growth and fiscal prudence but, taking into account the human cost of the racist past, proposed massive human resource development as one of the key components driving the nation's economic reconstruction. Despite its grand aims, the government struggled with the machinery of RDP delivery in the early years while the total reorganisation of apartheid state structures was being undertaken and foreign external assistance was being marshalled and rationalised.

In 1996, the government committed itself to a new macro-economic policy framework, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, which was aimed at stabilising the economy and securing greater state resources for redistribution to social services (Nicolau, 2001). GEAR was based on an export-led growth strategy with reduced tariff barriers to attract foreign investment and stimulate growth. Fiscal discipline, reduction of the government deficit, and lower inflation were essential elements of the programme. GEAR targeted economic growth of 6% per annum in order to deliver higher employment and higher state revenues.

In the first five years of GEAR the government's deficit and inflation reduction targets were exceeded but inward foreign investment and economic growth rates were far below its expectations. As a result unemployment and poverty increased substantially. An IDASA briefing document acknowledges the programme's success in fiscal stabilisation but is unsparing about the developmental costs:

According to Cosatu and a range of commentators Gear clearly failed. It had promised to reduce the legacies of inequality and poverty left by apartheid but did not do so. It failed even to meet its growth, employment and private investment targets. Instead, it subverted development progress to the goal of pursuing an orthodox macroeconomic policy demanded by the international investment community.

There is no doubt that the poor development performance flowed largely from the Gear macroeconomic policy. This is for two reasons. First, because empirical studies testing the relative contribution of external factors and domestic policy in poor growth

performance in recent years say so. And, second, because economic theory on what will happen to investment, growth and employment in the wake of implementing austere fiscal and monetary policy tell us this (IDASA, 2001:7).

Poor economic growth rates meant reduced state revenues. Additional redress funding for education was not available. In any case, the Financial and Fiscal Commission, a constitutional body that advises Parliament, provincial legislatures and organs of state, argued that the overall level of public spending on education as a percentage of total state spending and GDP was higher than that of other developing countries and still higher spending on education could not be justified (FFC, 1998; see also CEPD, 2002, and Bhorat, 2004). The FFC advised that additional funding for education could be raised by requiring schools to charge fees, redistributing state resources through the government's Equitable Shares Formula (inter-provincial equity), and resource targeting of poor schools (intra-provincial equity).

An important shift in strategy emanated from the national Department of Finance in the late 1990s. This shift strongly suggested that the constrained education budget did not merely reflect a limited fiscus, but indicated government's response to the essentially inefficient system of education management and delivery by provincial education departments. The Department of Finance considered that state education funding was more than adequate in relation to performance and that redress should be addressed by improving system efficiencies (DoF, 1998). The 1998 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) review accordingly revolved around issues of access to schooling, classroom backlogs, infrastructural deficiencies and inefficient procurement processes (DoF, 1998:11). In 1999, the MTEF review focused on flow-through rates, pass rates, over-enrolment and under-enrolment (particularly in relation to over-age and under-age learners).

While there is no disagreement that the inherited and post-apartheid education system was deeply inefficient, there is wide debate about the relative benefits of increased education resources versus a more efficient use of existing resources (Motala, 1995, 2003; DoF, 1998; Fedderke *et al*, 2000; Motala & Porteus, 2001; Van der Berg, 2002; Bhorat, 2004). Analysts have argued that the reduction of inefficiencies itself required up-front investment in the short term, thereby releasing resources for systemic redistribution in the medium term (Motala & Porteus, 2001; Porteus, 2001), and have expressed doubt whether cost containment of the more privileged sector of the public education system is possible (Karlsson *et al.*, 2001; Wildeman, 2000). The overall level of the education budget has also been considered. Several scholars have argued that GEAR, while promoting prudent and sound fiscal policy, has constrained state expenditure through excessive fiscal discipline, and compounded social backlogs, particularly in education and inhibited social redress (Nicolau, 2001; Motala, 2003; Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Reschovsky, 2005). The relative stagnation of education and health budgets were due to the rapid expansion of the system of social grants and increased expenditure on social welfare. Gustaffson (2007) has argued that one needs to look at the

system holistically and understand how the improvement of child support grants indirectly assists the education process.

What follows is a discussion of the policies and mechanisms introduced after 1994 to improve the level of resource allocation to public schooling and the distribution of this allocation, matters that impact directly on equitable access to schools.

2.7.2.1 Equitable Shares Formula (ESF) and inter-provincial equity

The post-apartheid government has attempted to direct greater levels of resources to provinces that were historically disadvantaged. The 1996 Constitution gives the national government and the nine newly-established provinces joint responsibility for the provision of major social services, including education, health and welfare services. In consultation with the provincial governments, the national government sets national norms and standards for school funding, which the provinces are required to implement. Provincial governments have limited authority to raise their own revenue and rely overwhelmingly on revenue-sharing grants from the national government. Central to the design of the new system of co-operative government is the constitutional requirement that each province must receive an 'equitable share' of national revenue so it can provide the public services for which it is responsible. This is the main lever for inter-provincial equity.

Since 1997, the national government has transferred a single annual unconditional grant to each province to be spent on education, health, welfare and other miscellaneous services. These equitable shares are based on a weighted average of demographically-driven formulae that apply to each major functional area, with the weights reflecting the proportion of spending allocated to each expenditure category. The funding goal for education, implicit in the calculation of the equitable shares, is to assure distributional equity across provinces. Equity is defined in terms of the opportunity for each province, regardless of its wealth, to spend an equitable amount on education per learner.

Equity between provinces in respect of revenue for education is calculated on the basis of a formula constructed by the National Treasury. The Equitable Shares Formula (ESF) reflects several provincial variables, including the size of the school age population, the number of learners enrolled in public ordinary schools, the distribution of capital needs in education and hospital facilities, the size of the rural population in each province and the size of the target population for social security grants weighted by a poverty index (DoE, 2001b).

The equitable-share calculations are currently based on a 41% share for education. That does not translate into 41% being spent on education in each province, however, because the education share of a province's total allocation depends on demographic characteristics, i.e., age-specific learner population for compulsory education as the main driver in the equitable share formula.

Because responsibility for funding and managing school education is a provincial matter, provincial legislatures make their own decisions about spending tradeoffs between education and other categories such as health and welfare. This means that the actual per capita expenditure on education differs from province to province.

The ESF was phased in over a period of four years, 1996 to 2000, to ensure that provinces which were projected to receive real cuts in their budgetary allocations were given sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments, either to their expenditures or to their own revenues. Already in 1995/96 the education budget showed a shift in priorities from advantaged to disadvantaged provinces. KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo were given sizeable increases to meet their educational obligations at the expense of more advantaged provinces like Gauteng and Western Cape. By the 2005/06 financial year another important shift had taken place in the ESF, which would no longer weight the number of school-going children differently from other children in the province. This followed a recommendation of the Financial and Fiscal Commission that the double weighting of school going children disadvantaged poor provinces which had large numbers of out-of-school children (National Treasury, 2005: 148).

The ESF influences the division of revenue to ensure adequate spending by provincial governments, but it does not determine the provincial allocations for education or any other service. Provincial government bids are negotiated with National Treasury, Cabinet makes the final decision on provincial grants (subject to Parliamentary approval), and it is then up to provincial governments to allocate the available funds to their departments in the provincial budget, subject to approval in provincial legislatures. High demand for other provincial services (including health, welfare, agriculture, roads and transport) invariably put pressure on provincial allocations to education, which are usually the largest. The national and provincial Departments of Education consult regularly with the provincial treasuries and National Treasury in order to review performance and needs in the sector, but the national Department has no power to prescribe what provinces spend on education (DoE, 2003a).

2.7.2.2 Funding norms, personnel costs and intra-provincial equity

The second key equity driver of policy and legislation is the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996, which states:

The state must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and redress of past inequalities in education provision (Republic of South Africa, 1996a: Section 34.1).

One of the early effects of SASA was to redistribute the non-personnel budget through a mechanism that would retain a credible public school sector, and distribute available resources to schools on the basis of need and poverty. A programme for the allocation of non-personnel funds among learners within each province, based on poverty quintiles – the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) – took effect on 1 January 2000 (DoE, 1998a). The NNSF dealt with public funding of schools, exemption of parents who were unable to pay school fees, and subsidies to independent schools. It

required each provincial education department to rank all its schools from poorest to least poor, and then to allocate funding for non-personnel purposes progressively. The NNSSF required that 60% of the available funds be allocated to the poorest 40% of schools. In ranking its schools, each provincial Department was required to give a 50% weighting to the poverty of the school community and a 50% weighting to the poverty of the school itself, as measured by specified criteria.

Thus, a larger resource allocation was made to the poorest public schools and those in bad physical condition, and a smaller allocation to the relatively advantaged schools (Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis, 2001). While the NNSSF appears to have been successfully implemented on the whole, there remain critical issues about its overall effectiveness as a model for redress (Wildeman, 2001; Patel, 2002).

The NNSSF deals only with non-personnel expenditure and therefore does not redress personnel costs in favour of poor schools. As in all education systems, personnel costs make up the bulk of education budgets, but in many provinces, especially in the early years after 1994, during a period of high volatility in the management of personnel, the non-personnel budget was as low as 10% of the total (Dieltiens & Motimele, 2003). The Department of Education set a target ratio of 85:15 in order to protect essential services (like school books) from being intolerably under-funded.

The cost of educators' salaries dominates the personnel budgets of provincial education departments. After 1994 the Ministry of Education brought the employment of educators under a single Act of Parliament and established collective bargaining for their salaries and conditions of service in the Education Labour Relations Council. The lopsided, racially hierarchical provision of educators in the former apartheid education departments had to be corrected in the era of non-racialism. A bruising process of rationalisation was painstakingly negotiated and implemented with union support over several years. A new post provisioning system was also negotiated, based on standard learner-educator ratios related to curriculum requirements. The upshot was a radical alteration in the distribution of educators to schools, based on equitable principles. Schools formerly under the more privileged racial departments had to adjust to a substantially smaller staff complement. Learner-educator ratios in schools of the former black departments became more favourable. The establishment of promotion posts for educators in schools was put on the same basis throughout the system.

However, this intentionally neutral system of educator allocation inadvertently favoured schools with the most diverse curricula, which were overwhelmingly the formerly white Model C schools. Post-provisioning ratios favoured well-established mathematics, science and technology programmes, where the formerly white schools also held the advantage (Vally & Tleane, 2001; Oldfield, 2001).

The Department of Education and the ELRC have taken this situation into account by researching a new post provisioning model that gives priority to the equitable distribution of educators in schools to meet the needs of the new national curriculum framework

(Deweese *et al.*, 2005). The government has indicated its intention to ensure that poor schools will receive favourable consideration for both teaching and non-teaching personnel. However, since the implementation of the South African Schools Act in 1996 and the introduction of elected school governing bodies with legal status, SGBs in richer communities have used their fee-charging capability to employ additional educators and thereby maintain low learner-educator ratios and highly diverse curricula. In some former Model C schools the number of 'SGB educators' is almost as great as the number of educators on the provincial Department payroll. Thus inequity persists, but these days it is primarily class-based and not achieved at public expense.

Technical targeting processes are no doubt important but it has become clear that they will not be sufficient to eliminate the deep structural disparities in South African education provision. Schools have an unequal capacity to spend money, and even where additional funds are allocated to poor schools many may not be able to use them effectively (Simkins, 2002). Moreover, flaws in the poverty ranking system itself might undo the good work of provincial Departments of Education in implementing the funding norms and standards (Wildeman, 2000). If 60% of a province's population are poor, distinctions between grades of poverty in the bottom three quintiles are bound to be invidious and unjust. Analyses by Statistics South Africa and others make clear that poverty is not spatially homogenous. Rather, there are different levels of income and hardship amongst those who are considered 'poorest' and 'least poor'. The school fee exemption policy was put in place to overcome this.

In fact, public schools which were classified as less poor, or which were in the middle of the resource targeting table, experienced problems with their reduced state allocation, and concern has been expressed about their future financial viability (Wildeman, 2001:76). While the development of the resource targeting system was an important step towards attaining equity, it became apparent to policy makers from 2003 onwards that radical changes were necessary to address anomalies in the system. The wide prevalence of poverty meant that the distinctions between the bottom quintiles were arbitrary and unjust (National Treasury, 2003). Moreover, because of the substantial economic differences among provinces better off schools in one province could receive more state funding than the poorest schools in another. The resource targeting system was designed to address intra-provincial inequities but could not take account of inequalities among provinces which resulted in different funding allocations to the same quintiles in different provinces. To address these concerns, the Norms and Standards for School Funding have been completely overhauled and a national poverty ranking model has been put in place.

Since 2001, economic expansion and growth has meant that more funds have been available for redistribution. Education budget allocations have outpaced inflation significantly, and this has opened the possibility for greater redress for poor learners.

2.7.2.3 The education budget: priorities and choices

In order to understand the level of resources available for equitable access, we consider three issues below. First, we show how expenditure on ordinary school education has

tended to crowd out expenditure on other services like Inclusive Education, Early Childhood Development and Adult Basic Education; second, we illustrate the changes in per learner expenditure by province and show that while important shifts have taken place, poorer provinces continue to have lower per capita allocations; and third, we illustrate the rigidity of the ratios of personnel to non-personnel expenditure, despite policy intent. The last point is particularly significant for poor schools which are in dire need of improved and additional infrastructure and learning resources, essential for ensuring equity of access to public schooling.

Budget prioritisation and expenditure

Public Ordinary Schooling (POS) is the major recipient of programme funding for obvious and necessary reasons. In recent years POS has received improvements in non-personnel expenditure, capital and infrastructure spending, new conditional grants, and increased expenditure on educators with scarce skills. The progressive containment of personnel expenditure has enabled better funding for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Further Education and Training (FET), though both remain small. Special Needs Education (ELSEN) and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) have fallen behind in funding and in spending priorities. As outlined in other parts of this *Review*, appropriate resource allocations to the areas of ECD and ABET are critical for ensuring that children are prepared as they enter school, and for parents to support their children once they are in school.

Per capita expenditure

There has been a substantial increase in per capita learner expenditure in post-apartheid education. Moreover, the gaps in expenditure between the poorest and the least poor provinces have been reduced. Between the fiscal years 1996 to 2004, per capita learner expenditure rose by 140% in the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces. As Reschovsky (2005) notes, in the same period per learner expenditures grew by 40%-80% in Gauteng, Northern Cape and Western Cape, which are the relatively high spending provinces per capita mainly on account of their generally higher educator qualifications. Van der Berg (2001) notes that between 1993 and 1997, when the equalisation of personnel across the former racially divided education departments took hold, public school spending per white learner was reduced from 3.5% to 1.5% (R5 500 to R3 800) and per black learner increased from R1700 to R2 700.

Table 1 below shows the shift towards a more equitable distribution of expenditure across provinces, with the biggest increases taking place in Limpopo Province, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State. However, the disparities in spending on education between provinces continue to be stark, reflecting the disparities in unit personnel costs, among other factors. The lowest per learner expenditure figures were in the poorer provinces of Limpopo, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, while the wealthier provinces spent relatively more per learner. KwaZulu-Natal in particular was very poorly off. The National Treasury (2004: 54) observed: ‘Despite having the biggest education budget of R10.4 billion and

notwithstanding the highest growth in total spending of 12.4% a year between 1999-2000 and 2002-2003, KwaZulu-Natal still has the lowest per learner expenditure’.

Table 1 Per capita learner expenditure by province

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Eastern Cape	4173	4553	4718
Free State	4564	5277	5734
Gauteng	4265	4853	5062
KwaZulu-Natal	3619	4096	4603
Limpopo	3871	4333	4816
Mpumalanga	4111	4712	4933
Northern Cape	5231	5757	6039
North West	4403	4916	5155
Western Cape	4552	4951	5171
National average	4105	4600	4930

Source: National Treasury, 2006; DoE, 2005d.

This table includes all schools that receive an allocation for school expenditure.

While per learner expenditure is an important measure for comparing the nine provinces, it is advisable to use this category with other indicators which reflect provincial differences. Some provinces are required by circumstances to spend more on transport and hostel accommodation, while others have higher average salaries because they have larger proportions of better qualified educators.

Personnel expenditure

Personnel expenditure consumed 90.9% of education spending in the 1999-2000 financial year, but as Table 2 below shows, substantial improvements have been made in the proportion of non-personnel expenditure.

Table 2 Provincial Education Personnel and Non-personnel Expenditure (% of total)

Province	2002-03		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07	
	Personnel	Non-personnel	Personnel	Non-personnel	Personnel	Non-personnel	Personnel	Non-personnel
Eastern Cape	88.6	11.4	89.3	10.7	89.3	10.7	84.8	15.2
Free State	86.6	13.4	86.7	13.3	89.6	10.4	89.6	10.4
Gauteng	81.8	18.2	82	18	83.4	16.6	81.7	18.3
KwaZulu-Natal	88.9	11.1	85.3	14.7	85.2	14.8	85.5	14.5
Limpopo	89.7	10.3	82.6	17.4	84.8	15.2	85.5	14.5
Mpumalanga	83.1	16.9	81.2	18.8	79.2	20.8	76.8	23.2
Northern Cape	81	19	90.2	9.8	86.9	13.1	86.9	13.1
North West	89.6	10.4	86.9	13.1	84.6	15.4	86.1	13.9
Western Cape	83.8	16.2	83.8	16.2	85.1	14.9	84.7	15.3
National	86.7	13.3	85.8	14.2	85.3	14.7	84.4	15.6

Source: DoE, 2007

Personnel expenditure as a proportion of the total was lowest in wealthier provinces, with the exception of Mpumalanga, and highest in the poor provinces of the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, North West and KwaZulu, Natal. In 2003, the share of the budget allocated to personnel in these last four provinces is above the national average of 86.7% notwithstanding lower-than-average educator salaries. By 2006/2007 the Northern Cape, North West, Free State and KwaZulu, Natal continue to have higher than average personnel expenditure (84.7%). These provinces have the greatest backlogs in terms of infrastructure, facilities and equipment.

Non-personnel expenditure

Non-personnel spending includes vital items like learner support materials (LSM) such as text books and stationery, school maintenance and capital expenditure on major renovations or replacement of dilapidated schools, new school building and the provision of essential water, sanitation, electricity and telephone services. During the post-apartheid period, rising educator costs had the effect of crowding out expenditure on LSMs and other non-personnel items. Between 2000 and 2004 the tide turned decisively, as provincial government support for LSMs increased from R870 million to R2.2 billion. However, the Department of Education (DoE, 2006a) reached the conclusion that ‘despite dramatic increases in the value of the school allocation of LSM funds in certain provinces the monetary value of the school allocation is still too low’. The amendments to the NNESSF (DoE, 2004) attempt to address this shortage by setting national government target allocations for learner support materials for the various poverty quintiles in order to meet an agreed adequacy benchmark.

As with LSMs, capital expenditure is on an upward curve, though needs still well exceed budgetary allocations and (in some provinces) capacity to spend. Provincial education

departments have given priority to the elimination of 'learning under trees', and have set annual targets to provide the basic water sanitation, electricity and telephonic services. In the early post-apartheid years the education departments used successive national School Register of Needs surveys (DoE/HSRC, 1996; DoE, 2000) to appreciate the scope of the divergences and backlogs in the provision of school facilities. These were groundbreaking studies that used Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to map all public schools in the country for the first time and assess their condition. However the simple measures used to assess the state of infrastructure have proved inadequate for detailed evaluation and planning purposes. The Department of Education has therefore commissioned service providers to undertake a full-scale technical infrastructure audit and design a National Education Information Management System (NEMIS) and Basic Minimum Package (BMP) for infrastructure and basic services. When these go on line the national and provincial Treasuries and Departments of Education will have powerful tools to redress the backlogs in school facilities and services (DoE, 2006a). It remains to be seen whether budgetary allocations and provincial planning and management capacity will be equal to the task.

With regard to provincial non-personnel expenditure trends, Table 2 above indicates improvements towards the policy benchmark ratio of 85:15 for personnel to non-personnel expenditure. Some provinces have come close to or exceeded the benchmark but a few remain well below. Policy makers and policy analysts agree that non-personnel resources are crucial to access and quality learning and deserve concentrated policy attention. Moreover it is suggested that the effectiveness of non-personnel inputs should be measured against education outputs such as learner performance (Patel, 2006; Reschovsky, 2005; Motala, 2006b).

It is apparent that, after a decade of democracy, South Africa has moved from an explicitly race-based and unequal system of public education to a national system intended to provide all South Africans with equal access to educational opportunities. Despite improvements in funding equity, many learners, especially in the rural areas, continue to lack access to proper infrastructure and have to manage with limited text books, badly stocked school libraries and poorly trained educators. It is clear that many South African children do not have access to a constitutionally mandated basic education of good quality. The relationship between increased inputs and education outputs and outcomes in South Africa requires much more systematic research. Evidence thus far indicates that educating children from poor families requires more resources than educating children from better off families (Van der Berg, 2006). The depth of institutional and social deprivation and the scale of the disparities between South African schools in the era of democracy have been vividly expressed by Jansen and Amsterdam (2006: 6; see also Moll, 2000):

Consider an elite *public* high school (School A) with expansive grounds, high technology facilities, highly qualified teachers and school fees in excess of R10 000 per annum in an urban centre like Cape Town or Pretoria (several come to mind as we write) and a recognised public 'school' in which some of the classes

