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# Introduction

*Veerle Dieltiens*

Figuring out the balance between quality of education and access to education is almost something of an economic science. Place too much emphasis on access and the scales tip against quality, put the weight on quality and the scales see-saw against access. Global campaigns, such as Unesco's Education for All (EFA), often start out as pressure to expand learner numbers in schools and then as an after-thought insert a clarion call for quality education – probably in reaction to newspaper images of Kenyan teachers standing bewildered in front of a sea of new entrants. The attempt to find equilibrium between access and quality has spawned, amongst others, economic debates on supply and demand, studies into the most efficient class size and innovative experiments on schooling in low-density areas. The push to expand physical access to schools often whips past questions of why we value schooling and whose agenda is addressed. Does schooling produce good citizens or consumers? Is it driven by notions of equality of opportunity or by the need to stream people into jobs? And what do parents and learners think of schooling? Missing from these economic weightings are considerations about what learners have access to and whether they are able to successfully move through the primary grades.

With the pressure on to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal for universal access to basic education, a priority is searching for solutions to the obstacles learners face when enrolling into schools and successfully transitioning through to the end of basic education. The recent "Investment Choices for Education in Africa" conference (19-21 September 2006, organised by the Development Bank of South Africa, the Human Sciences Research

Council, Wits School of Education and NEPAD) brought together an international forum of distinguished academics and policy makers to grapple with these issues. Martin Carnoy argued that the most efficient route to quality improvement is to increase the number of years learners are at school. While improving teacher training was an expensive (if effective) option, raising student achievement could also be achieved by pacing learning over an extended period. Keith Lewin assessed why chasing universally set EFA targets could be counter-productive. He reminded participants that global campaigns are target-setters not target-getters – and that the goals set were rarely credible across all contexts.

In this Quarterly Review, we reflect on the current debates and statistics in South Africa on the most basic of educational questions – access to schooling. A new research study into these issues is the DfID funded Consortium for Research into Educational Access, Transitions and Equity – or CREATE ([www.create-rpc.org](http://www.create-rpc.org)). Together with partners in the UK, India, Bangladesh and Ghana, the Education Policy Consortium (EPC) in South Africa<sup>1</sup> will be undertaking a three-year long empirical study into entry to and exit from schools. We define access broadly to include regular attendance, progression, meaningful learning and appropriate access to post-primary education. Transition to exclusion is a process (not an event) and so we need to understand the chain of causality in order then to design an intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> The EPC includes the Wits EPU, the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) and Fort Hare Education Policy Unit.

This Quarterly Review begins by questioning Firoz Patel, Deputy Director General: Systems Planning and Monitoring, on the challenges of access as seen by the Department of Education. The DoE's *Plan of Action: Improving Access to Free and Quality Education for All* (2003b) details a number of policy reforms intended to facilitate access to schools. These include regulating the cost of uniforms and books, improving school budgeting systems and researching the effectiveness of scholar transport initiatives.

Most prominent of the strategies addressing access was the signing of legislation in February this year that allows for schools in the lowest quintiles (at the discretion of the Minister of Education) to be declared fee-free. Quintiles will now be determined nationally (not provincially as previously) and the national department is to set the amount that provinces ought to allocate per learner in each quintile. The national department also settles on an 'adequacy benchmark', the minimal amount necessary to provide adequate basic education. In 2006, the adequacy benchmark was R527 – with the poorest quintiles receiving an allocation of R703 per learner and the least poor receiving R117 per learner. Schools which receive 'adequate' funding will be listed as 'no-fee' schools. Where schools receive less than the adequacy benchmark, "a plan will be drawn up to deal with the problem." The removal of fees applies only to grades R-9. The amendments also seek to improve monitoring and enforcement of the exemption policy in schools where fees continue to be paid. Orphans, learners in foster care and children who receive a government grant such as the Child Support Grant are automatically exempted from paying user fees.

The fee-free schools come into affect next year, but already 7687 schools (including approximately 2.5 million learners) have voluntarily set fees aside. So some of the

problems have already been signalled. Definitions of poverty and how the adequacy benchmark is to be calculated are still a little vague, however. Apparent bureaucratic confusion in KwaZulu Natal resulted in 'fee-free' schools levying fees halfway through the year when the department's R595 per learner subsidy had not been received (Mapiloko, 2006).

But fees represent just one cost in getting to school. The suspension of bus services in April and July this year affecting 60,000 Gauteng learners, highlighted the daily gauntlet children run before arriving at school. The *Sowetan* (25 August 2006) reported that children in Vlakfontein were mugged on the walk to school during the period when buses stopped running. Media reports over the last quarter have also highlighted violence within school premises. A Medical Research Council report recorded that 33.5% of injuries in 20 schools in the Western Cape were intentional, and 80% of these were inflicted on the playground. In another study by Free State University, 5% of teachers and 16% of learners in secondary schools believed bullying was *not* a problem and 32% of learners said they had been hit by another learner (Rademeyer, 2006).

But the continuing worry is the number of learners who remain formally enrolled yet are silently excluded if their attendance is sporadic, their achievement so low they cannot follow the curriculum, or if they are discriminated against for socio-cultural reasons. Deputy Director-General: General Education and Training, Palesa Tyobeka's (embarrassing) open letter to principals published in various newspapers (including the *Mail & Guardian* and *Sowetan*, 8 August 2006) admitted that "many children cannot read at all".

The South African Human Rights Commission's report on the right to basic education (2006) highlighted the inequities that divide the education system into a

dysfunctional schooling system for the majority and a privileged sector serving a minority. The report follows public hearings in October last year and records a litany of problems schools face, including lack of resources, low teacher morale, high levels of violence and infrastructure decay. The report recommends that “teachers and principals should be made accountable at district level to explain non-attendance of children in their classrooms.”

In the second paper in this *Quarterly Review*, Paul Kgobe looks at what the statistics say about access to basic education. Naledi Pandor told Parliament in July this year that of the 1,588,591 learners who started school in 1994, just 347,184 had completed matric (Nzapheza, 2006). Most dropouts occur after basic education. Although South Africa’s Gross Enrolment Rate is relatively high in the primary phase – compared with developed countries – the statistical debate is by no means settled. The main variables confusing the statistics are repetition rates and late entry.

In a review of the latest research on the reasons learners fail to enrol or dropout of schools, Veerle Dieltiens finds that there is in general an established routine of going to school that is quite hard to break. Withdrawing learners from school is often a measure of last resort even for households undergoing economic or social shocks. Though international and local evaluation tests indicate that the quality of classroom lessons is substandard, this has not yet affected demand for education.

Finally, Michelle Buchler provides an overview of access issues to higher education. Appallingly high dropout rates in tertiary institutions were revealed to Parliament by Minister Naledi Pandor. A cohort study of students who entered undergraduate programmes in 2000 shows that about half of all students had dropped-out (Macfarlane, 2006). Even if students

manage to complete their degrees, concerns were raised in another study commissioned by the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa) that found graduates had qualifications unsuited to the world of work (Zake, 2006).

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# Q & A with Firoz Patel

*Deputy Director General: Systems Planning and Monitoring*

*National Department of Education*

**Q: Are we likely to achieve universal access to basic education by 2015 (or before)?**

South Africa is very close to achieving universal access to basic education. We have no doubt that we will reach universal access to basic education before 2015.

DoE's official figures indicate that the 2004 GER for the Primary Phase for Grades 1 to 7 is 104%, suggesting a high level of enrolment in this phase of schooling. It also suggests that there are many so-called inappropriately aged learners in the system.

The net enrolment ratio (which accounts for age appropriateness) is also high in South Africa as compared to other countries. The NER for primary education in 2002/2003 was 89% according to the EFA Global Report for 2006. For the whole world, the figure was 84.6% and for developing countries the figure was 83.2%, according to the same report.

Another indicator that is useful to assess access to basic education is the age specific enrolment ratio or ASER. The latest report by Stats SA on its General Household Survey indicates that close to 98% of all 7 to 15 year old children attend education institutions. This figure reflects a slight increase from previous years when 96% and 97% of children in the 7 to 15 year old age group attended schools in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

Universal access to basic education usually refers to access to primary school. EFA

indicators commonly refer to primary school as being Grades 1 to 7.

Grade R is not a compulsory component of schooling in terms of SASA, though government's policy on ECD says that it will become universal by 2010. For now, an assessment of universal access to primary education in South Africa, needs to be analysed separately from that of access to Grade R.

The Stats SA GHS Report also notes that 86% of 6 year olds and 60% of 5 year olds attend education institutions. These figures reflect significant improvements from those of 2002 (when the figures were 70% and 40% respectively), vindicating the DoE's efforts in improving access to Grade R.

**Q: What obstacles do we face in achieving this MDG goal?**

South Africa is generally regarded as having reached the MDG goal of access to universal primary education.

Although there has been remarkable progress in education access over the past decade, the DoE remains concerned about approximately 200,000 children, of 9 million children, in the 7 to 15 year old age group that are not attending education institutions. We believe that factors such as poverty, HIV and AIDS and household responsibilities are key factors that prevent this relatively small group of children from attending school.

**Q: To what extent is non-participation (especially at secondary level) a supply- or demand-side problem?**

Non-participation is generally on the demand side as there is little evidence indicating that teenagers do not attend schools because of lack of availability of education institutions or overcrowding.

The 2005 Stats SA General Household Survey identified no money for fees and working as key reasons for 7 to 24 year olds not attending education institutions (note that this age group includes secondary and potentially tertiary education students).

**Q: Should primary / basic education be free?**

Legally speaking, basic education is already free in the country, as no child is prevented from enrolling in a school if he or she does not pay school fees. In addition, the DoE's policy on no-fee schools ensures that children in schools serving the poorest communities are not forced to pay fees. These are not perfect solutions. We would like to see a move towards at least basic schooling that is fully financed by the state and where school fees are no longer a feature. Currently private inputs into public schools are largely a reflection of the economic inequalities of the country we live in. At this point in time it does not make sense to prevent the rich from making inputs into the system. These resources do serve to enhance public education institutions, and provide the state with fiscal space to concentrate public funding on historically disadvantaged schools.

Right now, government's emphasis is on two things. Firstly, the rolling out of no-fee schooling to as many schools in poor areas as possible, making sure that state funding is adequate to cover the needs of a basic schooling package. Secondly, the protection of learners from poor households who attend

schools where fees are charged, through the proper implementation of the exemptions regulations.

We should remember that the exemptions regulations do work better in non-poor schools than in poor schools. Our research has shown that. And we should bear in mind that the fewer schools there are that charge school fees, with the rollout of no-fee schooling, the easier it becomes for the state to focus on the correct implementation of the fee exemption regulations in the schools that do charge fees.

**Q: What (are the most important) strategies government is pursuing to deal with dropouts? (And is there a strategy to facilitate re-entry of those excluded?)**

The problem of dropouts is not really significant in primary schools. Recent calculations by the DoE indicate that dropout rates are less than 2% in the primary phase of schooling, and less than 9% in the higher grades of schooling. These figures compare very well internationally, and do not suggest that there is a crisis of dropping out in the system.

We should bear in mind that many of the learners dropping out of the primary schooling phase are over-aged learners. This explains why we have dropping out from primary schools, whilst the participation rates for children aged 7 to 15 remain constant at around 98%. We have to view the challenge of dropping out holistically.

We believe that repetition is still too high in out schools, although it has declined over some years. Having learners repeating grades over and over again is one way in which the system unfairly causes learners to give up and drop out. We need to publicise more strongly what the research says about repetition, and this research, from South Africa and other developing countries, is

telling us that only in very extreme cases does forcing a child to repeat a grade serve the interests of the individual learner and the school as a whole. Strategies such as the child support grant should be seen as part of government's drive to bring about full compliance with compulsory education policies.

The rollout of inclusive education and better schooling services for special needs learners, on the basis of White Paper 6, is an important mechanism for ensuring that learners do not drop out, and that those who do, re-enter the system. We know that many of the learners who do drop out are special

needs learners, and that the schooling system is currently under-equipped to deal with these learners.

Finally, the rollout of a national unit record database on learners will provide government with a tool to track individual learners, and this will facilitate the follow-up of learners who dropout of compulsory schooling. The DoE has already begun work on such a database.

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# Mapping the Zones of Educational Exclusion

Paul Kgobe

## Introduction

Access to primary schooling is used in this paper beyond a nominal count of ‘bums on seats’. It includes initial entry and transition through the grades and also begins to probe the question of ‘access to what?’ (where learners have physical access to schools but not epistemic access). The Consortium for Research on Education, Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), to which this paper contributes, is interested in discerning who is excluded from primary education, at which points and why. Exclusion from basic education is understood as a process culminating in an event with multiple causalities. We use the term ‘zones of vulnerability’ to describe the various spaces where children are included, excluded, or are at risk. Initial access has little meaning unless it results in (i) regular attendance (ii) progression (iii) meaningful learning and (iv) appropriate access to post-primary education.

**Zone 1** contains those who have never been to, and are unlikely ever to, attend school.

**Zone 2** includes those who entered primary school, but do not complete it. Pre-cursors to dropping out include repetition, low achievement, poor teaching, degraded facilities, very large classes, household poverty, and poor health and nutrition.

**Zone 3** includes those in school but who are in danger of dropping out.

**Zone 4** contains those who complete primary schooling but fail to go further into secondary schooling. This exclusion is important for EFA since transition rates into secondary affect demand for primary

schooling, primary teacher supply depends on secondary graduates, and gender equity at secondary is an MDG (Lewin, 2005). Access to secondary schooling promotes the social mobility needed to give poor households more access to higher income employment.

This paper begins with an overview of access patterns before turning attention to the statistics of each zone of exclusion.

## Overview of access<sup>2</sup>

### *Demand side factors*

Data from Statistics South Africa shows that there were 9.461 million children in South Africa between the ages of 7 and 15 years (LFS, 2003).

Between 1991 and 2004 school enrolments increased by 16%. Growth in primary enrolments was at 3.5%. Only three grades show an overall decline during this period. Grade 1 enrolment shows the biggest decline (at 13.4%), followed by grade 2 and grade 5 at 2.5% and 2.3% respectively. The high decline recorded in grade 1 is probably as a

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<sup>2</sup> Given the complexity of the transformation processes in South Africa, and the relatively recent development of information systems, which are still evolving, there are often contradictory pictures that emerge from various sources of data. By far the most comprehensive, and to an extent robust databases in relation to education is held by the Department of Education (EMIS Directorate) and Statistics South Africa. Continuing efforts are made to improve these datasets, and in the absence of other reliable sources, they are used extensively although with some caution in some instances.



result of the introduction of age-grade norms and the partial introduction of grade R.

The highest increase was recorded at secondary level, with nearly 50% growth. The numbers peaked in 1998, and gradually declined following the introduction of the age specific enrolment requirements in the late 1990s which led to a number of inappropriately aged children (under-age and overage) being removed from the system.

Internal migration is shifting the demand for education from sending provinces to the growing conurbations in the Western Cape and Gauteng, which between 1996 and 2001 were net recipients of child migrants. Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, on the net losing end lost 20,000 and 46,000 children respectively to out-migration (DoE, 2006a:6). The migration of children would appear to be from under-resourced schooling districts to where the standards of education are better than a 40+ learner to teacher ratio.

The gender differences in South Africa are not as skewed as in other Sub-Saharan countries. According to Bot (2003), girls start out as a slight minority in the early primary grades (48% of enrolment), they constitute 50% of enrolment by grade 6 and 55% of enrolment in grade 12. Using the gender parity index indicator, Bot suggests improvements in the GPI since the mid 1990s. In 1997, a primary GPI of 0.88 was recorded, but this had improved to 0.95 by 2001.

The gender parity indices (GPI) from 2000 to 2004 show some significant improvements in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo and Western Cape, which showed GPI ratios of more than 1.00 for the secondary grades. This indicates that in proportion to the appropriate school-age population, there were more female learners than males in the ordinary school system (DoE, 2005:17).

### *Supply side factors*

Interestingly, the number of schools (primary and secondary) decreased from 27,461 in 1999 to 25,840 in 2003 (-5.9%). All provinces, except Limpopo, recorded a drop in institutional numbers, with the Free State dropping by as much as 26.1%. This is probably due to the closure of small schools, particularly farm schools.

Independent schools increased by 23% in the same period. However, their numbers remain small (between 1,200 and 2,000 institutions in 2005) and their enrolment represents just 3-4% of total learners numbers nationally. Independent schools, therefore, do not act to significantly improve access (Lewin and Sayed, 2005).

Amongst the fairly large number of small schools, 1-4 classrooms (6,137 in total, 25%) indicates that schools are located in areas that are not densely populated minimising distance between home and school. The Eastern Cape has close to 3,200 schools with fewer than nine classrooms and 70% of schools in the Free State are small (Education Foundation, 2006:62).

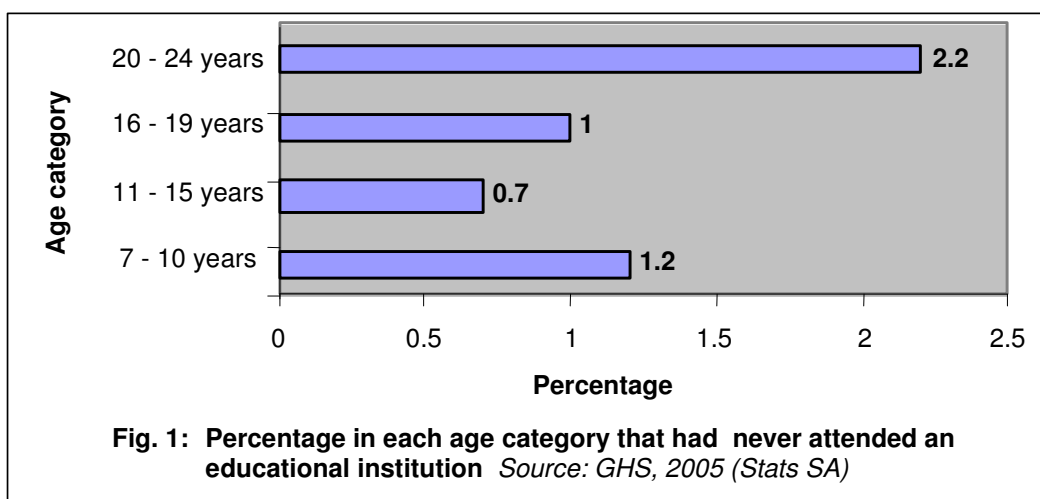
However, national learner : classroom ratios of 38:1 reported in the 2000 School Register of Needs suggest that schools are slightly over-capacity (the target is 34:1 in primary schools and 32:1 in secondary schools (DoE, 2001c). This ratio was well above average in Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo (49:1, 50:1 and 40:1 respectively).

## Zone of exclusion 1

In South Africa, the number of children who have never been to school, and are unlikely ever to attend school, is very small. According to Statistics South Africa (2005) just under 1% of children aged 7 to 19 years had never attended school in 2004. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of people in different age categories that had never attended an education institution in 2004. The numbers confirm that access to

schooling has improved in the post-apartheid decade. The slightly larger number of learners in the 7-10 age group (1.2%) than in the 11-15 age group (0.7%) suggests that over-age learners will still enter the system.

Learners with special educational needs (narrowly defined as those with physical or definite cognitive disability) are likely to account for a significant proportion of children who never enter grade 1.



## Zone of exclusion 2

This zone of exclusion includes those children who enter primary schools but do not complete it.

There is some debate in South Africa on the extent and nature of primary school dropouts. The most pessimistic reports suggest that approximately 65% of children who enrolled at primary level reached grade 5 in 2001 (Human Development Report, 2003:272-273). Statements accompanying such figures have suggested that as much as 35% of children leave school before they can attain basic levels of functional literacy as they do not reach grade 5.

The October Household Survey (Statistics SA, 2000) calculates that a total of 431,000 7-15-year-olds (approximately 4.5%) were not attending any educational institution in 1999 (cf. Bot, 2005).

The most optimistic figures are from the Department of Education, which estimates that there are approximately 280,000 children and youth outside the system (DoE, Directorate Inclusive Education, June 2005: 21).

There are those who argue that the differences between those enrolling and those reaching grade 5 is largely due to high repetition rates, especially at grade 1 level, despite the age-grade norms introduced in

the 1990s (Crouch, 2005). Crouch further indicates that such repetition is not reported as such, especially since there are high over-enrolment rates at grade 1 because of lack of access to early childhood development opportunities in many communities.

A fairly comprehensive picture emerges from recent analysis by Shindler (2005). Based on an analysis of the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), which reflects the number of learners in the system who are appropriately aged for the level of school they are enrolled in, Shindler suggests that as much as 11% of children aged 7 to 15 (appropriate age for the compulsory phase of schooling) were either out of school or enrolled in secondary schools (FET band) in 2001. This situation is shown in the table below:

Whereas the national average shows a NER in the primary phase of 92% and a NER of 89% in the GET band, the table above reveals provincial differences in the NER, with provinces such as the North West and Mpumalanga recording NERs of 86.8% and 87.4% respectively. Shindler suggests that the NER of 102% in the Eastern Cape is a result of problems with the data, and that estimates provided by other analysts of approximately 90% may be more realistic.

Given the difficulties of deducing whether children who are not accounted for in the NER figures captured above (are they out-of-school or in other parts of the system other than that appropriate for their age?) other measurements are required in order to fully grasp the extent of access to education. One of these measures is the age specific enrolment ratio.

Age specific enrolment ratio refers to the proportion of children of a specific age enrolled in school irrespective of the grade or phase they are enrolled in. By doing this, one is able to ascertain the proportion of children of school going age who are not in school. It would also indicate whether underage or over-aged children are enrolled in the inappropriate phase of schooling. The table below shows the proportion of learners according to age group enrolled in school and estimates of those out of school:

**Table 1: Net enrolment ratios (percentage) by level and province, 2001**

<i>Province</i>	<i>Primary (Gr 1-7)</i>	<i>Compulsory (Gr 1-9)</i>	<i>Secondary (Gr 8-12)</i>	<i>Total (Gr 1-12)</i>
Eastern Cape	101.7	96.1	50.3	91.1
Free State	89.0	87.0	61.9	86.6
Gauteng	89.7	87.4	66.0	84.6
KwaZulu-Natal	91.3	88.7	60.2	86.4
Limpopo	90.9	88.1	65.1	87.5
Mpumalanga	87.4	85.7	63.1	84.6
North West	86.8	85.1	61.5	84.7
Northern Cape	94.6	91.8	59.7	87.8
Western Cape	88.4	86.5	64.2	81.7
National	91.9	89.0	60.8	86.5

*Sources: Shindler, 2005. Analysis from Enrolment data from Department of Education, 2004a and 2004b; Population data from Statistics SA, 2003a*

**Table 2: Proportion of children in the population according to age group enrolled in school and out of school, 2001**

Province	7-13 years enrolled	7-13 years out of school	7-15 years enrolled	7-15 years out of school	14-18 years enrolled	14-18 years out of school	7-18 years enrolled	7-18 years out of school
Eastern Cape	102.6	-	98.2	1.8	74.8	25.2	91.3	8.7
Free State	90.6	9.4	90.3	9.7	82.4	17.6	87.1	12.9
Gauteng	91.8	8.2	91.8	8.2	75.3	24.7	84.8	15.2
KwaZulu-Natal	93.9	6.1	92.2	7.8	76.5	23.5	86.7	13.3
Limpopo	95.1	4.9	93.5	6.5	82.3	17.7	89.9	10.1
Mpumalanga	88.9	11.1	88.4	11.6	79.0	21.0	84.8	15.2
North West	87.8	12.2	87.6	12.4	80.1	19.9	84.7	15.3
Northern Cape	95.9	4.1	94.3	5.7	78.1	21.9	88.5	11.5
Western Cape	90.4	9.6	91.6	8.4	71.4	28.6	82.3	17.7
National	94.0	6.0	92.6	7.4	77.3	22.7	87.1	12.9

Sources: Shindler, 2005. Enrolment data from Department of Education, 2004a and 2004b; Population data from Statistics SA, 2003a

Table 2 reflects that 7.4% of children aged 7 to 15 were out of school in 2001. This figure increases to 13% when the age group 7 to 18 is considered. There were provincial differences, with provinces such as Mpumalanga and North West having the most number of children aged 7 to 15 out of school.

Recent data on geographical differences is scarce, but an analysis undertaken by Statistics South Africa based on 1996 data suggests that as much as 66% of children aged 7 in rural areas were attending school, compared to 82% of children in the same age group in urban areas. Amongst 8-year olds, the figure for urban and rural areas was 90% and 76% respectively (Stats SA, 2001a:9). Overall, the gap between urban and rural areas narrowed as age increased, with 95% and 91% of urban and rural 15-year olds respectively attending school.

In sum, then, the vast majority of learners do complete primary education – though repetition and late entry appear as main challenges. The effects of the introduction

of age-grade norms and the policy preventing learners from repeating more than one grade in each phase will need to be carefully explored.

### Exclusion zone 3

The third zone of exclusion refers to those in school but who are in danger of dropping out. Children who remain formally enrolled in school may be silently excluded if their attendance is sporadic, their achievement so low that they cannot follow the curriculum, or if they are discriminated against for socio-cultural reasons.

Recent studies on the performance of South African children in basic numeracy and literacy suggest that while learners may be in schools, they do not perform at levels that are expected for their particular age groups (Moloi, 2005). In 2000, South Africa took part in the second SACMEQ project, which involved testing grade 6 learners in reading

(literacy) and mathematics (numeracy). Moloji analyses the SACMEQ levels of competency in relation to the curriculum and concludes that SACMEQ standards were more or less equivalent with the outcomes identified for learners in South Africa for mathematics. For numeracy, they indicated that the modal level of competence achieved by the majority of South African learners was emergent numeracy, which, according to corresponding assessment standards in (the South African) curriculum, is equivalent to grade 3.

Just over 44% of learners who had been in school for at least six years, could be said to be performing at the level of a child who had been in school for three years. About 24% performed at Basic Numeracy level, which is equivalent to grade 4, nearly 9% performed at Beginning Numeracy level (grade 5) and only 6% performed at the Competent Numeracy level (grade 6). The percentages diminished up the competency ladder and only about one percent achieved at Independent Numeracy level which was considered equivalent to grade 7 or higher (Moloji, 2005:7).

Similar results have emerged from the Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation report (DoE, 2005). Nationally, the maths achievement by grade 6 learners shows that more than 80% of learners recorded a “not achieved” score, with a further 8% recording a partly achieved score. For the languages, the situation is not any better as more than 60% of learners nationally recorded a “not achieved” score.

The provincial differences are more pronounced, with Limpopo being the worst performer in both mathematics and language at 95% and 86% “not achieved” for the respective learning areas.

Figure 2 below shows reported problems experienced in schools as surveyed by the General Household Survey, 2005. Shortage of books and high fees are the leading complaints, although both have steadily declined as a problem since 2002. There was also a decline in the percentage of learners reporting that facilities were bad from 10.5% in 2002 to 7.5% in 2005.

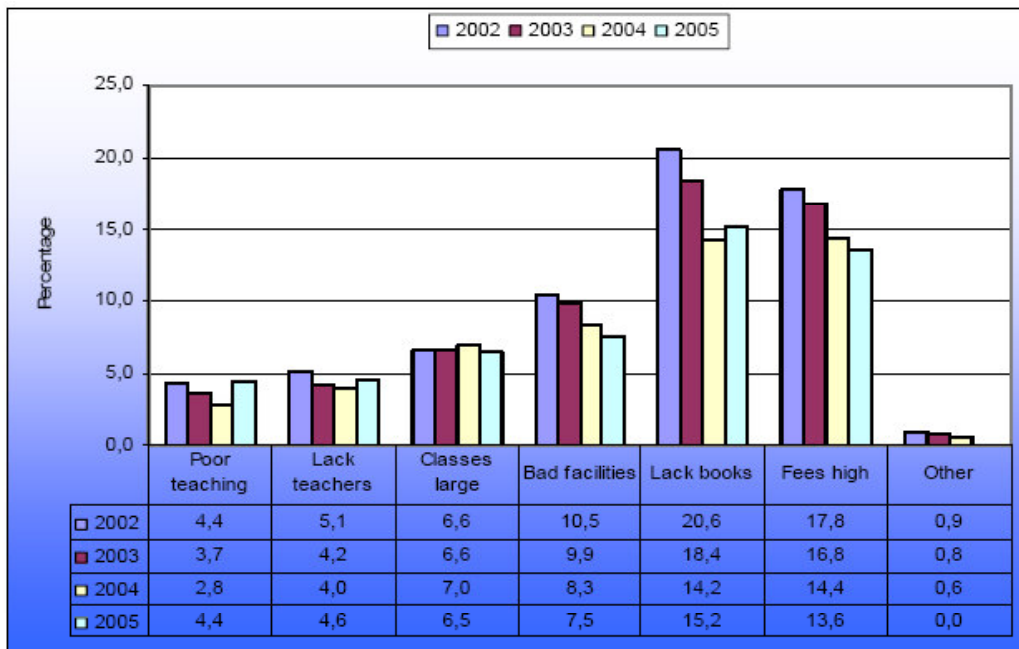


Figure 2: Problems experienced among those attending an educational institution  
Source: GHS, 2005 (Stats SA)

## HIV/AIDS

While it is statistically difficult to assess the extent of learners in Zone 3, the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is likely to contribute significantly to learners 'at risk' of dropping out and attention is therefore drawn here to children affected by the disease.

Table 3 below shows that the number of AIDS orphans has been growing at a fast rate over the 15-year period. This is likely to increase the vulnerability of children in relation to schooling.

A 2000 report on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector (Coombe, 2000) claims that HIV/AIDS will result in higher mortality rates at all ages, and that by 2005 nearly 1 million children will be without one or both parents. Using statistics from Statistics SA, the Department of Education found the trend in the growth of orphans to be more serious – there were approximately 2.5 million single or double orphans by 2003.

The proportion of children who have lost one of their parents grew from 1995 to 2003 by 2% to 17.4 %, and the proportion of double orphans grew from 2 to 3% (DoE, 2006a). This is likely to create increased numbers of vulnerable children, increased pressure on households and children, increased demands on public and private services, increased burden on community, and increased risk that susceptible children will engage in survival activities (including sex) which implies a higher risk of HIV infection. The implications for the continued attendance of these children in schools require careful investigation, so that appropriate responses can be formulated.

In sum, zone 3 is an important zone in South Africa given the poor quality of outcomes in systemic evaluations for a majority of learners.

**Table 3: Estimates of orphans in South Africa, 1990 to 2005**

	1990	1995	2001	2005
No. of children 0 – 14	13,939,000	14,405,000	14,733,000	14,817,000
Total no. of orphans	1,089,000	1,087,000	1,528,000	2,069,000
No. of orphans as % of all children	8%	8%	10%	14%
Total no. of orphans due to AIDS	1,000	61,000	662,000	1,328,000
AIDS orphans as % of total orphans	0.1%	6%	43%	64%

Source: CASE, 2003:11

## Zone of exclusion 4

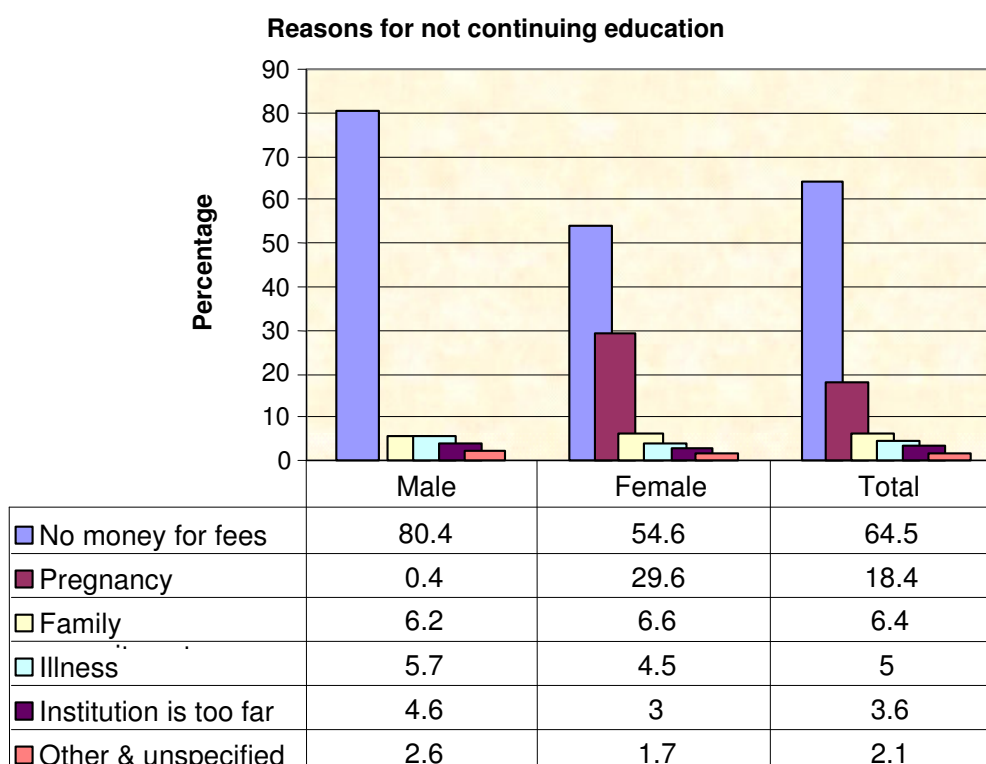
This zone includes those children who complete primary schooling but fail to go further into secondary schooling.

Participation at secondary schooling in South Africa has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. Between 1991 and 2004, participation at secondary level increased by 49%. This may be explained by the fact that in the mid-1990s, the first two grades of secondary schooling (grades 8 and 9) were declared as part of the compulsory schooling system.

However, retention through secondary schools is low. The national NER average was 60.8% in secondary schools in 2001. Some provinces, such as the Eastern Cape are notable for the low NER at secondary level – which was 50.3% in 2001.

According to the Department of Education (2003a) out of every 100 learners in ordinary school, slightly less than 10 were in Grade 1, and just over four were enrolled in Grade 12. The report goes on to suggest that this could be an indication of high dropout rates between Grades 1 and 12, with only 40% of learners continuing to Grade 12.

Figure 3 presents the main reasons preventing 15 to 18 year olds, who are not attending school from continuing their education. It is very clear that the main constraint facing these individuals was a financial one: two-thirds (64.5%) indicated that they did not have enough money to continue their education. Amongst males, the rate was significantly higher at 80.4% compared to 54.6% for females. The second most important reason overall is pregnancy. Nearly three in ten females in this group responded that pregnancy prevented their continued education. By 2003, though,



**Figure 3: Reasons for not continuing education, non-matriculated, 15-18 year olds, 1995** Source: OHS 1995 (Stats SA)

teenage pregnancy had become less of a barrier to education. According to Statistics South Africa, the proportion of school dropouts amongst 16-18 year old girls dropped from almost 20% in 1995 to 7.1% in 2003.

Since 1995, the barrier of fees to education has become lower. The proportion of 16-18 year old highschool dropouts who could not continue their education because they had no money for fees was 41.7% in 2003 (DoE, 2006a). This decrease of over 20% is attributable to the extension of social support grants. From 1995 to 2003, household access to social grants trebled nationally, with access rates in the poorer provinces being higher. Social grants have had a discernible impact for poorer households, therefore.

Households over the same period have also changed. The ratio of dependents (children and elderly) to working-age members of the household (19-64 years) has declined in all South Africa's provinces except for Limpopo. Nationally, the ratio declined from 1.02 to 0.86, implying that the burden for working household members to maintain dependents has generally decreased (DoE, 2006a).

Social grants can offer some security for learners vulnerable to financial exclusion, but other costs associated with education have compounded the burden. One possible increase in the cost associated with

schooling is transport. The overall decline in the number of schools has opened distances for many learners to travel to school (Education Foundation, 2006:131). This barrier is greatest for younger learners. From 1995 to 2003, the proportion of 7-15 year old school dropouts who could not continue their education because of the travel distances involved nearly doubled, (from 2.8% to 5%), while no significant change was registered amongst 16-18 year olds (DoE, 2006a).

## Conclusion

A statistical overview of access issues in South Africa shows that most children enrol and complete primary school though late entry and high repetition rates signal inefficient transition. Poor quality outcomes characterise the system yet this has not compromised access to primary education – though it may partly provide an explanation for the high dropout rate in secondary schools in that learners may be unable to keep up with curriculum demands. Demand for education has not been affected by poor learning outcomes. Positively, this indicates a general culture of school-going, but on the other hand, it may also show that parents are not making purposive choices to send their children to school.

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# Patterns of Exclusion

Veerle Dieltiens

## Introduction

The picture that emerges from a statistical survey of access to schooling in South Africa is one in which most learners enter and complete primary school, but numbers begin to drop quite dramatically in secondary school. Achievement levels are low suggesting that learners are moving through the grades but without necessarily attaining the learning outcomes prescribed by curriculum. The routine of school seems established but with learners increasingly being left behind academically and more and more vulnerable to repetition and dropping-out.

This paper identifies the socio-economic factors in communities and schools that add stress on these vulnerable learners, eventually (and inevitably) leading to their exclusion from school. The information for this chapter is gathered through a review of recent research and is organised around three main themes, beginning with the broader economic questions related to the cost of education. The second theme addresses social issues outside of the school which impact on family decisions to enrol or withdraw young people from schools, including issues related to family structure, gender and HIV/AIDS. The third theme narrows down to the school and to supply side factors as well as whether the ethos of schools encourages or deters access. There is a possible fourth area explaining learner drop-out and those are reasons associated with learners themselves – their cognitive, physical and emotional capacity. This paper, however, does not review the literature on this theme, though learners' motivation to learn and remain in school is a

potentially important area for further study. These categories, of course, overlap and it is usually a result of a combination of factors, rather than a single cause, that learners are absent or eventually dropout of school.

## The economy of schooling

As a barrier to schooling that is unequally imposed on learners, school fees have been the subject of public attention. Money can buy access to better quality schools. Poor learners are excluded from high fee-paying schools mainly as a result of their geographic location but even the low levels of fees charged by the poorest schools can act as hurdle.

A number of cases collected by the Nelson Mandela Foundation's research in rural schools (NMF, 2005:53) tell of learners dropping-out or missing portions of the year when they were unable to pay fees. Often this was a result of the criticism or humiliation brought to bear on learners by teachers and principals. Wearing incorrect uniform, for example, marked learners out as 'poor'. In its *Review of the financing, resourcing and costs of education in public schools* (2003), the Department of Education acknowledged that non-payment of fees did sometimes result in schools acting contrary to human rights obligations: "Poor learners whose parents could not pay school fees have been turned away from school, placed in separate rooms, away from other learners, forced to sit on the floor, named and shamed in school assembly, and so on" (DoE, 2003c:54). Exemption policies are not advertised to parents but even learners officially exempted from payment may experience intimidation in comments made

by the principal or educators (DoE, 2003c:90).

Given that school fees tend to be quite low, especially in the poorer quintiles, the overall cost of education, including transport, uniform, books etc. may more substantively explain the economic barriers to access (Fleisch and Woolman, 2004). A study conducted over two years (1998-1999) of the needs and circumstances of 69 out-of-school and 60 out-of-age children in the Kathorus township cluster east of Johannesburg, found that protracted poverty was the most important explanation for why learners were out-of-school (Porteus *et al*, 2000). The depth of poverty, in terms of its material deprivation, social isolation and psychological consequences, distinguished the children who were not in school with their peers from the same poor community. Transport costs may be the single expense keeping learners – who live beyond a safe walking distance – out-of-school. Uniform costs were the largest initial – and sometimes insurmountable – expense. Although school fees were low (R50/annum) and were less of a practical barrier, they represented the “last straw” when combined with other costs (Porteus *et al*, 2000:43). The out-of-school learners in the study also seemed to lack social support networks and approximately half (47%) had had no contact with intersectoral services of any kind over a period of a year (Porteus *et al*, 2000:44). A final defining characteristic of the deep poverty experienced by out-of-school learners was their sense of powerlessness to negotiate the bureaucracy and procedures for school entry.

The hypothesis that direct and indirect costs contribute to lack of access or late entry into school is supported by a number of studies which gauge the impact of cash transfers to poor families as having a positive effect on enrolment.

Case, Hosegood and Lund (2005) assessing the impact of the Child Support Grant<sup>3</sup> in the Umkhanyakude district in KwaZulu-Natal found that the grant appears to “overcome the impact of poverty on school enrolment” (2005:469). Using data collected from approximately 11,000 African households through the Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies, the study found that children who received the grant (in 2002) were significantly more likely to be enrolled in school in the years following grant receipt than were equally poor children of the same age (Case *et al*, 2005:468). Among 6 year olds, receipt of the grant was associated with an 8.1 percentage point increase in school enrolment, and a 1.8 percentage point increase among 7 year olds. Their older siblings, on the other hand, who were of school going age before the Child Support Grant was implemented, were significantly less likely to be enrolled in school than other children of the same age.

Unexpected economic and social shocks to poor households would seem to suggest a possible disruption to schooling. Hunter and May (2003), however, find that this is not the case. Based on interviews from the study “Transitions to Adulthood”, they find that a substantial proportion (41%) of all households in the sample reported experiencing some type of shock over a 24 month period (prior to September/October 1999). But just three percent of these households that had experienced a ‘shock’ said that they had removed one or more of their children from school (Hunter & May, 2003:17). This suggests that once learners are in school, households choose to keep up attendance even when faced with unexpected pressures. The effect of poverty,

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<sup>3</sup> The Child Support Grant is a non-conditional means-tested cash transfer given to parents or primary caregivers whose monthly income is less than R1100. Initially the grant was targeted at children under the age of 7 but was extended in 2003 to include children younger than 14 years. The grant has steadily increased from R110 per eligible child in 2002 to R190 in 2006.

therefore, is mainly seen at the point of enrolment.

The review so far suggests that the cost of schooling adds stress on household income and in a minority of cases (the most marginalised) will result in dropout, but its biggest impact is in delaying school entry. As the following studies will show, once in schools most children will complete the primary phase – but they do so at a ploddingly slow pace.

While poverty may delay entry into school, it also slows progress through the grades. One of the key findings of the “Transitions to Adulthood in the Context of AIDS in South Africa” (Grant & Hallman, 2004) is that most young people attained at least primary education by age 20, but those of lower socio-economic status are more likely to have had school delays.<sup>4</sup> Among 14 – 15 year olds, more than half of youth in the lowest socio-economic quintiles had had a delay in their schooling, compared to 21% in the highest wealth category. Pregnancy is the most common reason for slow progress among females, followed by own illness, inability to pay fees and child-care responsibilities. For males, inability to pay school fees is the most common reason for school delay, followed by own illness, and having to work.

Anderson (2000) using financial expenditures on schooling for African children reported in the 1995 October Household Survey, finds that children who are behind for their grade have less money spent on their school fees, their transportation and other school expenses. Students who are behind six or more years for their grade have approximately half as much money spent on their schooling as

children who are age appropriate. This result persists in multivariate analyses controlling for such factors as the student’s age, gender, family structure, location, and household socio-economic characteristics. The assumption is that fees are correlated with quality and learners in better schools are less likely to repeat grades.

Reinforcing this, Anderson, Case and Lam show that “African disadvantage in schooling is not primarily the result of students dropping out of school early, but rather driven by a lower rate of grade attainment that begins in early grades (2001:3). Using the 1995 OHS data, they find that while Africans complete about 0.80 grades per year for the ages 10 to 16, for whites the value is 0.94. The impact of high repetition rates is plain in a detailed study of Gugulethu High School, a township school in Cape Town where roughly two-thirds of the students had repeated at least one grade and more than a third had repeated two grades (Anderson *et al*, 2001). The effect of repetition is understudied but as Anderson *et al* argue it is “potentially a self-reinforcing process” (2001:3) with repeaters less likely to fare well in future grades. Indeed, in the Gugulethu High School study each additional year of age resulted in a decrease of between one-half to two percentage points in the matric exam, and with ages ranging between 17 and 30, scores for the older students lagged 10 percentage points behind their 18 year old colleagues.

The reviewed data reflects access patterns from the mid-1990s and earlier. As the later policies on grade-to-age norms and assessment (1998) take effect, the toll of repetition may become less of a factor. Changing repetition patterns is therefore an area for further research.

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<sup>4</sup> A delay is defined as a year of non-advancement either because of either not having enrolled at all during a particular year (but eventually returning to school), withdrawal during the year, or repeating a grade because of poor performance the previous year.

## **Child labour**

One likely consequence of poverty is an increased reliance on child labour<sup>5</sup> – either directly in income-generating activities or in domestic tasks to enable adults more time in employment (or looking for employment). An obvious concern with child labour is its potential disruption to schooling, but there is little evidence in the South African context that this is the case.

The Survey of the Activities of Young People in 1999 by Statistics South Africa suggests that child labour is widespread in the country, but that it does not seem to prevent children from attending school. This may be because opportunities for children to directly contribute income is very rare given the high unemployment rate, together with legislation prohibiting child labour. According to the SAYP data, 93% of children doing economic activities for at least three hours per week were attending school (Stats SA, 2001b:table 7.7). It is only when participation rates of over 36 hours per week (i.e. approximately 5 hours per day) are reached that school attendance drops significantly (Stats SA, 2001b:61). Work, then, is often carried out after school hours but this may nonetheless impact on performance. Results from the survey showed that children engaged in child labour experienced difficulties with finding time to study and in catching up with classwork. In terms of educational achievement, a larger proportion of children who do economic work aged between 10-14 years are not literate (less than 5 years of education) as compared to their peers who do not work (Stats SA, 2001b:65). However, this difference disappears once children reach 14 years, and in fact reverses amongst 17 year olds. For Bray: “the most plausible potential sources of harm to children who spend long hours doing household chores are levels of

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<sup>5</sup> Child labour is defined as work by children younger than 18, which is exploitative, hazardous or otherwise inappropriate for their age, detrimental to their schooling or social, physical, mental, spiritual or moral development.

tiredness that affect school attendance and performance” (2003b:18).

The Statistics South Africa survey also received differing responses from working children as to why they were not attending school. Fewer than 1% of children engaged in economic activity and who miss school cited their involvement in work as their reason for being out-of-school (Stats SA, 2001b:table 7.10). The primary reasons for non-attendance appear to be inability to afford school, health-related (reported illness), family related (pregnancy and child-rearing amongst girls) and the poor quality of schooling (disinterest in schools) (Stats SA, 2001b:64).

## **Social Factors**

The studies reviewed so far indicate that the direct and indirect costs of schooling contribute to haphazard access patterns, but the explanation on its own is insufficient given the large numbers of poor learners who continue in school. Indeed, there is a countervailing view which maintains that since schooling is an important route out of poverty for successful learners, poor families have a vested interest in keeping children enrolled.

There is a growing body of literature which looks at intra-household characteristics influencing enrolment and performance of learners. These are mainly concerned with understanding how family structures effect decisions made with regard to investments in children. Household characteristics which may determine enrolment and transition include its size – where time and resources have to be shared among children – and children’s relationship with co-resident adults.

One possible predictor of children’s enrolment in school is whether they live with both, one or neither of their biological parents – the assumption being that their likelihood of being enrolled in school drops

if they are in single-parent or fostered households. Since the level of fostering is relatively high in South Africa, determining the veracity of this assumption is important. According to the SA Demographic and Health Survey (Department of Health, 1998), 24% of households have foster children (children under the age of 15 who have no biological parents in the household). In urban areas the proportion of households with foster children is 17%, while it is double in non-urban areas (34%) (DoH, 1998:10).

Anderson (2003) uses a sample of 16,338 children from the 1995 OHS to test whether the presence of biological parents in a household predict school enrolment and outcomes. He finds that black and coloured children living with neither parent are most disadvantaged in terms of probability of enrolment, the highest grade completed, the rate of grade attainment and expenditures on school fees. Living with just one parent does not seem to make a difference relative to living with both parents and Anderson explains this suggests “a protective effect of the presence of a parent” (2003:9). Similar conclusions result when using a sample of 11,211 black South African children from the 1995 October Household Survey and the 1995 Income and Expenditure Survey (Anderson, 2005). Anderson finds that relatedness had no effect on children currently being in school, but that children were behind in school for the child’s age (2005:22). While the data suggests that children living with distant relatives may be at a disadvantage, an alternative explanation is that these children have had greater disruptions in their schooling history than children living with their biological parents (2005:24). Anderson’s findings (2003 and 2005) on child fostering support the access patterns presented earlier: delays at point of entry, followed by slow progress through the system.

But Anderson’s findings are slightly at odds with those of Zimmerman (2003) who finds “no Cinderella effect for children fostered to

a close relative” so that South African households treat foster children who they are related to as they do their own children in terms of human capital investment (2003:279). This is true across ages, gender and rural households. Zimmerman’s hypotheses is “that foster children typically move from low-resource families without access to educational opportunities to families with more resources and better access to education” (2003:561). The data used in the study is quite old – collected in 1993 by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), but it shows that “the institution of fostering allows parents to boost their child’s chances of enrolment again by a 2-3 percentage-point increase” (2003:583).

While children may move in order to increase their chances of school entry, migration may also disrupt schooling. Evidence suggests that there is significant migration of people from largely rural areas and provinces to more urbanised areas. According to Statistics South Africa, there is an increasing trend of young adults who move to more industrialised provinces in search of employment opportunities (Stats SA, 2005:23). The exact scale of such migration, as well as its implications for access to services is unclear, but recent data emerging from work of other researchers (for example Wilson, 2003 and Porteus *et al*, 2000) suggest that migration is a significant factor. Porteus *et al* found that out-of-school learners in Kathorus were highly mobile, with 60% having moved homes at least once in the preceding five years. The study identified six “pathways linking high residential mobility to the lack of school attendance”: refusal of mid-year entry to school; lack of documentation; general instability; new medium of instruction; no entry for illegal immigrants; short-term visit becoming long-term stay (Porteus *et al*, 2000, p76).

That young people remain in primary school despite high repetition rates suggests that there is a demand for schooling. Young

people interviewed in the Transitions to Adulthood study noted that the persons they felt closest to within their family would want them to complete school (97%) and 94% said this person would want them to continue studying after high school. Similarly, the Nelson Mandela Foundation study into rural schools found that parents were committed to schooling their children, though their reasoning around the purposes of education differed for boys and girls. For girls education was more strongly linked to marriage and childcare – although a substantial minority of caregiver respondents in the survey (22%, 25% and 40% in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape respectively) felt it would be more difficult for educated women to marry (NMF, 2005:39).

While there is a demand for education, parents and guardians are not always able to provide the necessary epistemic support to their children – and this may at least provide one clue to why learners fail and repeat. The NMF study found that levels of education of adults were low. Amongst female respondents literacy levels were: 69% in Limpopo, 59% in KwaZulu-Natal and 70% in the Eastern Cape. Illiterate and semi-literate parents are unlikely to be able to provide much assistance to learners with their schoolwork. Of the learners interviewed for the NMF research, 65% reported that no one in their households was sufficiently educated to help with homework and a further 44% said they turned to an older sibling for assistance (NMF, 2005:29).

A strong correlation between the educational levels of (co-resident) mothers and that of their children is evident in data gleaned from the 1995 OHS. Anderson *et al* find that there is approximately two full grades differential between African children (at ages 13 and 17) whose mother has 12 years of schooling and those whose mothers have less than 4 years (2001:6). Anderson *et al* suggest that while one explanation linking schooling attainment of parents and children is that educated parents are more likely to

provide support for learning. Additionally, such parents are also more likely to send their children to better schools (Anderson *et al*, 2001).

The safety nets provided by extended families and community networks may prove crucial in the context of HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is having enormous impact on demographic patterns in South Africa and is possibly the most important factor impacting on access questions in the near future: affecting both supply and demand for education.

The media commonly makes links between HIV/AIDS and related morbidity and school dropouts. This intuitive assumption is based on the idea that young people themselves are ill or take on the additional responsibilities of caring for ill parents or siblings. In addition, AIDS related deaths of productive household members are likely to deprive households of cash incomes, therefore leaving less money to pay for education-related expenses. Lack of motivation and trauma as a result of illness and death are also likely to increase absenteeism among affected children. Emerging data suggest that many children who are orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS are “forced to abandon education to care for ill parents or to work in order to supplement family income” (CASE, 2003:11).

The length of time children are absent from school as a result of care-taking responsibilities and whether they are able to reintegrate into schools at a later stage is as yet unclear. A longitudinal study in the Free State found a statistically significant difference between non-attendance in school for older children in households affected by HIV as opposed to their peers in non-affected households. Proportionately fewer children between 7 and 13 years of age are out-of-school compared to adolescents (14 to 18 years) suggesting that older siblings are more likely to take on caring roles or domestic tasks in HIV affected households (Arntz & Booysen, 2002). Bray (2003a)

notes a lack of substantial research investigating the links between HIV/AIDS and children's work responsibilities though her own research in one community in the Western Cape found that caring responsibilities tended to fall on neighbours or kin rather than on children.

Girls may be more likely to be pulled out of school as a result of HIV/AIDS. A survey of households affected by the pandemic in four provinces found that within a total sample of 330 children who were maternal orphans, twice as many girls than boys dropped out of school (Johnson *et al.*, 2002:ii). But their survey also showed that boys under the age of 18 were just as likely to be primary caregivers as girls of the same age (Johnson *et al.*, 2002:iv).

It does appear, however, that withdrawal from school is a measure of last resort. Schools may offer a sense of continuity or routine for families experiencing the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. A survey conducted in Limpopo Province reported that HIV-affected households spent 8.5% of total household expenditure on education (about R259 per month), compared to unaffected households which spent a proportionately higher amount – 15.6% (a mean of R640) (Jordan *et al.*, 2002:53). Yet, the difference in expenditures on housing between affected and unaffected households is greater, suggesting that spending on other basic needs is trimmed before children are pulled out of school (Bray, 2003a:21).

A contributing factor to desultory learner performance, repetition and dropout is poor nutritional status. Kallmann (2005) explains that malnutrition, hunger, parasitic infections and a lack of nutrients in diet (particularly iron and iodine) diminishes children's cognitive development either through physiological changes or by reducing their ability to participate in learning experiences, or both. She points out that children with diminished cognitive abilities and sensory impairments are more likely to repeat grades, drop out of school

and enrol at a later age than healthy children. The problem is serious if one considers the Health Systems Trust's (Barron *et al.*, 1997) estimation that at least 20% of primary school children were stunted and suffered from chronic malnutrition.

Gustafsson's analysis of the 2000 SACMEQ data reveals that 65% of learners in historically disadvantaged schools receive lunch on all days, with 8% going without lunch every day. Gustafsson estimates that "if all learners were to eat three meals a day, we might expect a performance improvement of around 2%" (2005:22).

As with the effect of economic factors on access, the social factors affecting access point to learners staying in school at least until the end of basic education, though there progress is slow. Dropout tends to be a final resort and affects particularly marginalised children.

## Schools

This section moves from looking at the issues affecting access outside the school gate to a review of literature on in-school dynamics that encourage and discourage access. The focus here is on prevailing attitudes within schools, or the institutional ethos, that act either to welcome or discourage learners – especially those who are disadvantaged or have been out-of-school for any length of time.

A consistent observation of the South African education system is that there is differential access to schools. Learning outcomes can often be predicted on the previous racial department the school fell under and its geographic location. Such differentials are evident in statistics collected for the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) which show 60% of rural educators reported teaching classes with more than 46 learners (Brookes *et al.*, 2005). An analysis of the responses of 20,488

educators shows that 58% of African educators are responsible for classes of about 46 learners, while over 60% of white educators teach in classes smaller than 35 (Phurutse, 2005:5-6).

Overcrowded classes, absentee teachers and continuing use of corporal punishment feature in many of the descriptions young people provided of their schools in a study based in KwaZulu Natal: "Transitions to Adulthood in the Context of AIDS in South Africa" (Brown *et al*, 2001 discussed above). Seventy percent of respondents reported that their classrooms are noisy, 45% said they are crowded and 39% said their classes were dirty. One-quarter of those interviewed stated that their teachers were often absent and almost half (48%) said they do not have all required textbooks (Brown *et al*, 2001:26).

Yet despite these often chaotic conditions, young people also had a sense of social connection in their schools, with three-quarters of the 2,415 respondents saying they had many friends at school and 93% thinking that the teachers care about the learners. The majority (86%) felt safe at school, though 27% also reported violence among learners. One-third of all respondents said they would be happier if they attended a different school, with rural and African learners more likely to express this sentiment. (Brown *et al*, 2001:27).

The quality of learning in schools has been of concern for some time. The most recent Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation Report (DoE, 2005) highlights just how serious the problem of education quality is. Learners obtained a national mean score of 38% in Language (LOLT), 27% in Mathematics and 41% in Natural Sciences. Most worrying is that open-ended questions were particularly poorly answered, which may explain why learners did slightly better in the Natural Sciences where 72% of the questions were multiple choice. The worst performing learners came from township, rural and farm schools. Learners whose home language

was the same as the Language of Learning and Teaching scored significantly higher than those who learnt in a language other than their mother-tongue, though LOLT may be a measure of other socio-economic factors. One of the recommendations from the report is that, "particular attention should be paid to ensuring that schools have proper strategies for dealing with punctuality and absenteeism of learners and educators for the maximisation of available learning and teaching time" (DoE, 2005b:118).

Large class sizes, new assessment practices and lack of resources are among the reasons educators give for increased workload. A study of 3,909 educators (Brookes *et al*, 2005) reveals that while educators spend slightly less than the required 43 hours per week on their various activities (41 hours per week), on average only 16 hours per week was spent on teaching (3.2 hours per day). Policy expects educators to teach between 22.5 and 27.5 hours per week, but the study finds administrative tasks crowding out class contact time. Rural educators and those with classes of over 50 learners spend fewer hours on their different activities than those in urban areas where classes are smaller. In addition, "Educators spend progressively less time on teaching and other school related activities as the week progresses, with very little teaching recorded on Fridays in many schools" (Brookes *et al*, 2005).

Analysing the 2000 SACMEQ data set, Gustaffsson (2005:22) identifies that 85% of school principals in the sample regarded latecoming amongst educators as a problem. Removing the latecoming problem would increase test scores by around 15% for the system as a whole.

Unsurprisingly, poor quality of schooling impacts on educational outcomes. The adverse effect of high teacher-learner ratios on enrolment and achievement is captured by Case and Deaton (1999) who combine the 1993 SALSS with data from the Education Atlas of South Africa, which



measures average quality of schooling in a district. They find that even when household background variables are controlled for, high pupil:teacher ratios reduce maths scores. Furthermore Case and Deaton find that school quality has a significant positive effect on the years of completed education. Using data from the 1996 census, Case and Yogo (1999) find that reducing the learner:educator ratio by 10 learners would, all else being equal, increase completed schooling by 0.6 years.

#### *A safe environment to learn*

The level of bullying and violence in schools and its impact on dropout and absenteeism is somewhat under-researched. There have been several initiatives aimed at making South African schools safe places; and importantly corporal punishment was abolished. However, based on the Educator School Survey (Shisana & Simbayi, 2005) the three major forms of violence experienced by educators in schools over a 12 month period were: learners or educators carrying weapons to school (22%), assault (18%) and fights involving weapons (14%).

Concern has also been raised over sexual harassment of girls in schools and the impact this has on their participation in class. The Human Rights Watch's report entitled, "Scared at School – Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools," highlighted that girls regularly encounter violence in school, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and assault by male classmates and teachers. The HRW Report records girls speaking of daily sexual harassment – inappropriate touching and derogatory remarks – as well as the horror of rape by male peers and teachers and a general feeling of being unsafe. Many of the girls told of how their school performance dropped following assault. Others dropped out of school altogether. The culture of silence around sexual violence in schools has made gathering reliable statistics on the extent of the problem extremely difficult. The HRW

Report argues that sexual harassment and violence has become normalised in schools, cases are often concealed, and victims who report abuse talk of further victimisation and stigmatisation.

#### *Inclusion and social justice*

Given apartheid's legacy, the problem of racial integration in schools has received a great deal of media attention – although proportionately multi-racial schools are a minority. The migration of learners has been from former black schools into formerly coloured, Indian and white schools. Research undertaken by Paterson and Kruss concluded that "educational migration patterns are driven either by a lack of local access to educational opportunities, or by the motivation to gain access to educational opportunities that are perceived to be better" (1998:150). This conclusion is confirmed by a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) survey of 79 schools in five provinces in 1999 (Moila, Sekete & Shilubane, 2001), which showed black learners moving to schools perceived to be better resourced or providing better opportunities for success, usually suburban or former Coloured and Indian schools.

While schools may no longer discriminate on the basis of race, a number of exclusionary devices regulate access to ex-Model C schools. The first is geographic area since these schools are located in previously white residential areas. Most black learners have to be transported in, adding to the incurred expense. The second exclusionary mechanism is financial as fees at these schools are relatively high. Thirdly, these schools block out potential learners by presenting themselves as places of privilege where, for example, white cultural norms, traditions and language define the ethos of the school and learners coming in from outside those traditions need to fit into the dominant culture. Such a tendency towards assimilationism was found to be the overriding approach taken by schools in the Education Inclusion and Exclusion in India

and South Africa Project (Inexsa), which investigated processes of integration in 14 schools in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Western Cape (Soudien, 2003). Soudien points to three forms of assimilation: aggressive assimilationism which is “brusque, characterised by high degrees of intolerance and often violence”; assimilationism by stealth in schools with political credentials, such as in former Indian and coloured schools, but where racial issues are left unaddressed, and benign assimilationism, where the school (usually former white English-speaking) presents itself as multicultural but dominant relationships remain untouched (2004:104-105). In sum, these schools mark out learners who are different from the dominant culture – by race or class – and discourage their admission or include them as long as they fit in with predetermined norms. Using findings from the Inexsa Project, Sayed and Soudien (2004) show that the new exclusionary practices invoke discourses around ‘standards’, ‘language’ and school fees. Admission to former white, Indian and coloured schools is controlled at the entry gate as schools attempt to preserve their established ways of doing things and explain their access policies as upholding standards of excellence, or arguing that learners’ inability to speak the language of learning and teaching disqualified them from admission.

## Conclusion

While this paper is not a comprehensive portrait of all factors affecting access to schools it paints an overall picture of access patterns in South Africa and supports much of the findings revealed by the statistical analysis on access. Most learners enrol in and complete primary education, but late entry and relatively high repetition rates slow progress through the system. Those who drop out of primary schools tend to be particularly marginalised, but poverty also accounts for the generally slow transition rate through the grades. There is demand for schooling, despite poor quality of outcomes and parents will foster their children out to improve their chances of accessing school. Withdrawing learners from basic education appears to be a measure of last resort – even in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Given the general culture of school going in South Africa, the poor quality of schools is a haunting worry – especially if demand for education drops – since it contributes both to dropout and to high repetition rates.

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# Access to public higher education

Michelle Buchler

## Introduction

Since 1994, the student profile at South African public higher education institutions has changed significantly in terms of increasing numbers of black, particularly African, students. The policy and legislative support for increasing access/improving equity and widening participation for formerly disadvantaged potential higher education students can be found in the *White Paper 3- A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Department of Education, 1997) and the *National Plan for Higher Education* (DoE, 2001).

Key aspects of the *White Paper* include a commitment to planned expansion of the higher education system, equity in the student body, increased enrolments at masters' and doctoral levels, and improving throughput and output rates (CHE 2004:63).

The *National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE)* (2001:7)<sup>6</sup> states that one of its goals, as set out in *White Paper 3* (DoE, 1997) is to "promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities." In particular, two of the *NPHE's* (2001:14) policy goals and strategic objectives relate to access:

- To provide increased access to higher education to all irrespective of race,

gender, age, creed, class or disability and to produce graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to meet the human resources needs of the country.

- To promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that the staff and student profiles in higher education progressively reflect the demographic realities of South African society.

The *NPHE* (2001) indicates that in order to achieve access/equity and success in relation to the student body, a number of issues need to be addressed, inter alia:

- Increasing the participation rate in higher education from 15% to 20%;
- Developing and maintaining sound academic development programmes in order to remedy the issue of black students being more likely to dropout or fail;
- Changing enrolment patterns by field of study (from a Humanities and Social Sciences:Business/Commerce:Science, Engineering and Technology (HSS:BC:SET) ratio of 49%:26%:25% to 40%:30%:30%), and
- Broadening the social base of students by recruiting non-traditional students including workers, mature learners, women and the disabled.

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<sup>6</sup> The *NPHE* is mostly focused on in this brief article, as it is the policy culmination of a number of processes, including the Green and White papers, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), etc.

## Increased access to higher education post 1994

Since the late 1980s, enrolment numbers at higher education institutions have increased dramatically, particularly those of African students, as can be seen in Table 1.

In terms of gendered enrolment patterns, in 1994 women made up 45.5% of total headcounts (adapted from Table 2.1 in Cooper & Subotsky 2001:14), while this had changed to 54% in 2002 (CHE 2004:67).

The second significant area supporting increased access is that of state administered financial support. As can be seen from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) statistics contained in Table 2, financial support to particularly needy students (based on means testing) has increased substantially from the early 1990s.

According to NSFAS (2006), 90.3% of recipients have been African, 7.2% Coloured and Indian and 2.5% White.

Between gross enrolment/headcount numbers, and financial support for particularly needy African students who have the potential to succeed academically, there has been a vast improvement in the equity profile of the student body in public higher education.

However, notwithstanding these achievements in the 'size' of access, we also need to critically review the 'shape' of access: how is the system doing in terms of graduate output by race and gender, for example; or in terms of masters' and doctoral level enrolment and throughput by race and gender; is the system achieving the NPHE's goal of changed enrolment patterns by field of study, and so on? The remainder of this article will examine some of these

**Table 1: Higher education headcounts by race**

Race	1988	1994	1998	2002
<b>African</b>	42 856 (18%)	235 240 (45%)	308 878 (56.5%)	403 569 (59.7%)
<b>Coloured</b>	13 300 (5.5%)	31 319 (6%)	28 664 (5.2%)	38 968 (5.7%)
<b>Indian</b>	17 749 (7.5%)	34 152 (6.5%)	36 757 (6.7%)	48 717 (7.2%)
<b>White</b>	164 770 (69%)	222 016 (42.5%)	171 866 (31.5%)	182 052 (27%)
<b>Unknown</b>	0	0	448 (0.1%)	1 812 (0.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>238 675 (100%)</b>	<b>522 727 (100%)</b>	<b>546 613 (100%)</b>	<b>675 118 (99.9%)</b>

Sources: 1988-1998: Cooper & Subotsky. 2001: 12  
2002: CHE (2004: 278 & 283)

**Table 2: State administered student financial aid contributions**

Year	Amount awarded	Awards granted
<b>1991</b>	R21m	7 240
<b>1994</b>	R70m	28 260
<b>1998</b>	R394m	75 764
<b>2002</b>	R733m	99 873
<b>2005</b>	R1,200m	120 000

Source: NSFAS 2006

issues, and will reflect on some of the current constraints and systemic level improvements that are being put in place to change the 'shape' of access and equity in public higher education.

## Challenges, constraints and systems-level improvements

Despite the massively increased participation of African students, data is not available to indicate whether this increased access has in fact widened participation beyond race and gender, to significantly include the poor, the working class, the rural and the unemployed/economically marginalised. Recent research by Buchler *et al* (forthcoming) on access of adult learners into public higher education institutions, for example, indicates that while the number of adult learners older than 30 participating in HE is significant (at around 30% in 2002), these adult learners appear to be more urban-based, (emerging) middle class and employed, and could thus be seen as ‘non-traditional’ only in terms of age.

If we examine other aspects of access and equity, it becomes clear that physical and financial access (in terms of the gross enrolment trends presented above) does not necessarily mean ‘quality’ access or quality of inputs, that promote equity and success, into the system.

### *Delving deeper into access, participation and success*

While access to higher education has significantly increased in terms of overall headcount enrolments, particularly for African students, the overall throughput and graduation rates are extremely worrying.

<sup>7</sup> The figures for the category “dropped out” includes 10-11% of students who moved to other institutions.

Two aspects are looked at here: the dropout statistics at undergraduate levels, and graduation trends by race.

It was only from 2004 that it became possible to undertake cohort analyses of higher education throughput rates<sup>8</sup>. What Table 3 below indicates is that the overall pass rates for first time undergraduates, within the first five years of registration, is low, particularly at the distance education institutions.

Table 3: Graduation and throughput for the cohort of 2000

Institution type	First time undergraduates in 2000	Dropped out by 2004	Graduated by 2004	Not completed by 2004 <sup>7</sup>
Universities	38 407	38%	50%	12%
Technikons	43 484	58%	32%	10%
Distance education	37 798	71%	9%	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>119 689</b>			

*Source: Mail & Guardian (September 22-28 2006: 6)*

Reasons for the high dropout rates include financial reasons, lack of accommodation and the poor preparation of students coming out of the schooling system (Mail & Guardian 2006).

In terms of the overall numbers of graduates by race, there is still a high degree of ‘skewedness’, especially in a context where overall participation by African students overtook that of white students from 1994. Statistics presented by the Department of Education in response to a National Assembly query (2006) on graduation rates by race across all higher education institutions between 2001 and 2005 indicate that:

<sup>8</sup> In 1999, the Department introduced its Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). Prior to that, systems level data was inadequate.

- The proportion of undergraduate and Honours level graduates is higher for white students than African;
- The total number of white Masters level graduates is slightly more than double that of African graduates;
- The total number of white Doctoral level graduates is more than double that of African graduates; and
- The racially skewed postgraduate trends are more pronounced at the former technikons.

In terms of graduation by gender and qualification level, we see that while the proportion of female graduates at undergraduate level was 52% and 63% at technikons and universities respectively in 2002, the rate dropped at Masters/M.Tech (45% and 42% respectively) and Doctorate/D.Tech (39% and 29% respectively) levels.

In terms of participation by field of study, in 1993, the HSS:BC:SET enrolment ratio was 57:24:19, changing to 44:30:26 in 2002 (CHE 2004:69). In 2002, the HSS:BC:SET graduation rate was 49:25:26 (CHE 2004:72). Unfortunately, data for HSS:BC:SET participation by race and gender is not readily available.

#### *Linking equity and quality*

The above description of access and success trends indicates that while the proportion of African students, and to a lesser degree that of female students, has increased significantly from the late 80s/early 90s, we see that there are a number of continuing inequities in the system that are, inter alia, influenced by race and gender. The CHE (2004: 90) points out that a major challenge for the system is going to be improving quality in order to address ongoing inequities in the system:

The overall efficiency of the public higher education system has not

improved, but has remained static. This has serious implications not only for the goals of the system, but also for individual HEIs operating in a new funding environment that rewards student success, throughput and graduation rates. In this respect, rigorous attention to balancing equity and quality will be of the essence: equity of opportunity and outcomes will crucially depend on high quality provision in teaching and learning, curriculum innovation, and appropriate academic development and mentoring initiatives.

The issue of quality in education provision is one that underpins the transformation of the entire education and training system in South Africa, and is marked by the establishment of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies overseen by the South African Qualifications Authority. In 2001, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was established as a permanent committee of the CHE to undertake the quality assurance (QA) functions of programme accreditation, institutional audits, and quality promotion and capacity development, in accordance with SAQA policies and requirements.

In a context such as South Africa, where the public higher education landscape is marked by a legacy of systems-level inequalities, the HEQC is approaching its QA responsibilities in a developmental way by “addressing the highly uneven capacities” of higher education institutions “within a consistent transformation framework” (CHE 2004: 149). In this way, the HEQC is striving to balance its improvement, enhancement and accountability functions.

The point of intersection between student access, equity and success issues/improvements and quality assurance lies in the HEQC’s particular emphasis on teaching and learning, and is achieved through its programme accreditation and institutional audit activities. To support improvement in the area of teaching and

learning (thereby ultimately contributing to improved student access and success), the HEQC has implemented an “Improving Teaching and Learning Project” that has seen the development of guides for good practice in the areas of programme development and review, staff and student development, assessment and moderation (CHE 2004: 153).

However, it is probably still too early in the QA process to see improvements at the level of student success, in terms of the aspects outlined earlier in this article.

### *Funding*

Issues of equity and quality are also fundamentally tied to institutional planning and available resources. While this is one aspect that the HEQC addresses as part of the QA process, it is also important to understand systems-level funding issues (and in particular the role played by the national Department of Education), and the relationship between access/equity and success, and the funding of public higher education in South Africa.

Currently, public HEIs receive on average 50% of their funding from the state. It is expected that fees will comprise an income of around 25% and income from other sources of income will make up the balance. The grants from government have three focus areas: institutional restructuring (5%); earmarked funds (6%) which includes items such as teaching (e.g. foundation programmes), research and community development, and QA frameworks; and the balance (87%) is for block grants that link funding to performance by focusing on institutions’ research and teaching outputs. In terms of the latter, the funding formula does make provision for institutions with larger numbers of disadvantaged students (CHE 2004:201-204).

However, the new funding formula does raise some issues that may impact on equity, access and success. For example, the true

potential of the new funding formula to contribute to institutional redress is still unknown, in part because we don’t have accurate measures of socio-economic status of the new student body, and the current definition of ‘disadvantaged’ is still relatively crude. Another issue is that some institutions may have a limited capability to attract funding from other sources (in part due to their particular historical legacy) or their performance is at a level that impacts on their block grants. This, in turn, may place pressure on these institutions to increase their fee income which will place more of a burden on students, especially those from poorer families. Already the issue of increasing fees has drawn a response from the Minister of Education, who has indicated that she may consider the capping of fees and fee increases.

Certainly, there appear to be some tensions and contradictions in the new approach to funding higher education. As the CHE (2004: 154) points out:

The new funding formula does not reward under-capacitated institutions and these HEIs have to find ways of delivering quality despite their disadvantages. The throughput focus of the new funding formula leverages the tension between equity and quality in that it may suggest a trade-off is necessary between standards and throughput. Pressure for throughput poses a challenge, for example, for academic development programmes.

## **Conclusion**

The issues of student equity, access and success as outlined in this article, are taking place in the context of both the systemic restructuring of the higher education system, for example, the process of mergers (which has not been discussed in this article), the implementation of a new funding formula and the implementation of a new quality regime, and the economic, political and social restructuring of society at large. Much of this restructuring and transformation is likely to affect student equity, access and success in ways that we cannot yet completely understand. It will be critical over the next few years to monitor and research the impact of policy implementation on student equity, access and success arising from, inter alia, the new quality improvements and funding formula.

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