5 Lesotho

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COUNTRY CONTEXT STATISTICS

Population: 2.2 million (2011)

GDP per capita: US$981 (2010)

Human development index: 0.450 0.450

Unemployment: 25.3% (2008)

Key economic sectors: agriculture and forestry, services, mining, manufacturing

Principal exports: diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, wood products, crude oil, coffee

HIV and AIDS prevalence: 1.6% (2009 est.)

Gross primary enrolment ratio: 94% (2010)

Gross secondary enrolment ratio: 38% (2010)

Gross tertiary enrolment ratio: 6% (2009)

Country context data were obtained from a variety of sources: CIA (2012), UNAIDS (2011), UNDP (2011), UNESCO (2011), Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2012).

Lesotho is a democratic, sovereign and independent country, totally surrounded by its neighbour, the Republic of South Africa. The former Basutoland was renamed the Kingdom of Lesotho upon independence from the UK in 1966. In 1993, after 23 years of military rule, a new constitution was implemented, leaving the King without executive authority and prohibiting him from engaging in national political affairs[4]. In 1998, violent protests and a military mutiny following a contentious election prompted military intervention by Botswana and South Africa. Constitutional reforms have since restored political stability and peaceful parliamentary elections were held in 2002. Lesotho is one of three remaining monarchies in Africa (the other two being Morocco and Swaziland).

Following peaceful, but controversial, parliamentary elections in May 2012, the long-serving Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, resigned from office. Although the new Prime Minister, Thomas Thabane, did not win the election outright, he was able to form a coalition government with the support of opposition parties. This new government is considered historic for three reasons:

- the shift from a majority-party government under the Lesotho Congress Party to a new coalition government
- the formation of alliances between smaller parties to oust the bigger party
- the parliament now consists of a stronger and better represented opposition, as opposed to the former weak opposition under a stronger majority party.

Lesotho's natural resources include water, agricultural and grazing land, and minerals. Lesotho is an exporter of labour to South Africa. Agricultural products include corn, wheat, pulses, sorghum,

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4   http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/841/Lesotho-HIGHER-EDUCATION

barley and livestock. Lesotho's key industries include food, beverages, textiles, clothing, handicrafts, construction and tourism. In 1980, Lesotho introduced its own currency, the Loti (plural Maloti), which is equivalent to the South African Rand. The South African economy has been a major export destination for the textile industry in Lesotho, and with the challenges facing the South African economy in recent years the future of the Lesotho textile industry has been insecure. The government of Lesotho has recently confirmed plans for significant investment in the textile industry (African Development Bank 2009).

Higher education landscape

Brief historical overview of higher education

In the early twentieth century Fort Hare College (which later became the University of Fort Hare) in South Africa provided access to Basotho students. The colonial Lesotho government was required to pay the college an amount of 300 pounds per year for this privilege. Lesotho was also represented on the Fort Hare College Board of Governors at this time. In 1958 this agreement with Lesotho was terminated by the South African government[5].

Meanwhile, in 1945, the Roman Catholic Church founded Pius XII College, a Catholic university college, at a temporary site in Roma, approximately 34 kilometres from the capital city of Maseru. The objective of the college was to provide African Catholic students with post-matriculation and religious education. In 1946 the college moved to its permanent site. The number of students increased rapidly and it was found necessary to increase the facilities. From 1954 to 1964 Pius XII College was an 'associate college' of the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria, a distance education institution that examined the students and offered degrees in arts, science, commerce and education.

In the early 1960s, apartheid legislation in South Africa became more restrictive, and problems arose regarding student residence requirements. As a result, an independent, non-denominational university was established by Royal Charter through the High Commission for Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. After independence in 1966, additional campuses were established in Gaborone (Botswana) and Kwaluseni (Swaziland) and the name of the university changed to University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. The newly independent university offered its first degrees in 1967. These degrees took the form of four-year programmes in science and education, and a law degree which included two years of study at the University of Edinburgh. In October 1975, the Roma campus in Lesotho withdrew to become the National University of Lesotho[6].

National higher education policy context

The current higher education system of Lesotho was formalised through the enactment of the Higher Education Act in 2004. This was followed by the establishment of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) four years later (SAIDE 2011). The council, also established through a parliamentary act, seeks to achieve the following:

- monitor the implementation of the policy on higher education in the country;
- regularly publish information on developments in higher education;
- make higher education accessible to students and perform any functions assigned by the Minister of Education and Training; and
- advise the Minister of Education and Training on relevant aspects of higher education.

The Government of Lesotho focuses on improving and maintaining the higher education system in order to improve the quality of graduates produced, with the aim of providing the high skills and expertise needed for the national economy as well as for the region. As a result, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HEQAC) and the CHE were created and mandated to:

5   http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/844/Lesotho-SUMMARY

6   http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/841/Lesotho-HIGHER-EDUCATION

- ensure that higher education quality assurance is promoted
- accredit programmes and issue certificates of accreditation of higher education
- audit the mechanisms and processes of quality assurance in higher education institutions in Lesotho
- monitor the performance of both academic programmes and higher education institutions on an ongoing basis (SAIDE 2011).

A coherent national higher education policy has been initiated by the council in order to ensure and regulate the system systematically, with the support of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).

The Lesotho Constitution states that education is directed to the wholesome development of citizens, their sense of dignity, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Various policies have been formulated within the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) aimed at regulating the higher education landscape in Lesotho. These include:

- The Higher Education Act 2004, which regulates the provision of higher education by public and private providers. The act further provides for the regulation of higher education (HE), for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council for Higher Education, for the governance and funding of public HE institutions, for the registration of HE private institutions, and for quality assurance.
- The establishment of a Council on Higher Education (CHE), a statutory corporate body established by Section 4 of the Higher Education Act[7]. Its mandate is to regulate the higher education sector and promote quality assurance in Lesotho. It consists of a chairperson, eight members appointed by the Minister of Education and Training, and two principal secretaries. In November 2010 the council published its five-year strategic plan which runs from the 2010/2011 academic year to 2014/2015.

Size and shape of higher education[8]

In addition to the public National University of Lesotho (NUL), the MoET indicates that there are five private higher education institutions in Lesotho: Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Maluti School of Nursing, Paray School of Nursing, Roma School of Nursing and Scott School of Nursing. The largest private provider is Limkokwing University with an enrolment of 3 703 students in the 2010/2011 academic year. Limkokwing University is an international university headquartered in Malaysia with campuses in Bali, Borneo, Botswana, Cambodia, Indonesian, Jakarta, Lesotho, Swaziland and the United Kingdom.

This was a significant development for the country as Limkokwing Lesotho offers a range of associate courses, degree courses and language courses.

Enrolment in the four nursing schools is as follows:

- Maluti School of Nursing: 105 students
- Paray School of Nursing: 96 students
- Roma School of Nursing: 89 students
- Scott School of Nursing: 85 students

Demand for higher education

Information about the size and shape of public higher education in Lesotho was taken from the questionnaire received from NUL, since it is the only public university in the country. In the university's questionnaire response, NUL reported that a total of 4 336 applications were received for undergraduate study, while only 1 735 new students were admitted. At the postgraduate level, 247 applicants applied for postgraduate studies at the university, but only 141 applicants were

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7   www.che.ac.ls/home/

8   The data presented in this section are drawn largely from the questionnaires completed by the Ministry of Education and Training and the National University of Lesotho in 2011/12. Note that the completed questionnaires did not contain any information about staffing.

admitted for the academic year 2010. Demand for university access is greater than the capacity available. Students who are not able to gain a place at NUL are likely to apply to one of the private higher education institutions and relatively large numbers of students travel to South Africa for higher education opportunities.

In an effort to reach larger numbers of students, NUL began to offer provision by distance education from 1994/1995. Distance education provision is co-ordinated by the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies located in Maseru, with various regional centres used as resource centres[9]. NUL has offered part-time courses since 1960 when it instituted in-service courses for teachers, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and a Bachelor of Education (also a postgraduate degree).

Enrolment patterns

For the academic year 2009/2010, the university had a total of 12 339 students, 108 of whom were from other SADC countries and 19 were international students coming from countries outside of the SADC region. The vast majority of students enrolled at NUL (98.2 per cent) are undergraduate students. A total of 116 students are reported to be enrolled in masters degree programmes and 116 in postgraduate programmes below masters level. In 2009/2010 only four students were enrolled for doctoral study, all four of them in the humanities and social sciences. Female students make up 60 per cent of the NUL student population, outnumbering male students in all fields of study except agriculture and science, engineering and technology (see Figure 1).

Identified areas for expansion

The questionnaire response submitted by NUL identified several areas in which expansion is required. At present, there are insufficient facilities to support student numbers. For example, the academic orientation services are relatively poor. Although such services are available, there is insufficient human resource capacity to accommodate all first-year students as well as returning students. There are no academic support services (such as writing centres) to enhance academic writing and study skills. Accommodation facilities for students are limited and reported to be of poor quality. There is no Internet connection in the students' rooms and this limits their ability to do research during non-campus hours.

With respect to student support services, there is currently no office for career guidance within the institution. There are also no psychological counselling services, and sports facilities are reported to be of poor quality as they cannot accommodate all students. Language training is not offered and there is no specific support for international students (possibly because a very small number of international students are enrolled at NUL).

Figure 1: Number of students by gender and major field of study (2009/2010)

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9   http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/841/Lesotho-HIGHER-EDUCATION
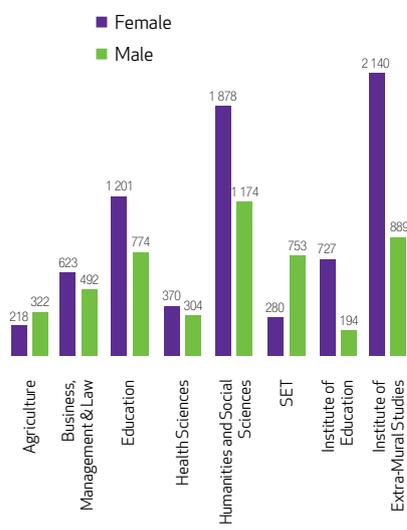
National higher education outputs and alignment with policy imperatives

Graduate patterns

Table 1 shows the number of qualifications awarded by the NUL for 2009/2010 by level of study and major field of study. In total, 186 qualifications were reported to have been awarded. Given that the total enrolment for the academic year was 12 339, the number of qualifications indicates a low throughput rate at the NUL. In particular, graduation from undergraduate programmes (where 98 per cent of the students are enrolled) appears to be a major challenge for NUL. There are relatively low numbers of students graduating in agriculture, health sciences and business, management and law.

Table 1: Number of qualifications awarded per field of study and level of study

Major field of study	Number of qualifications awarded per level of study				
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate (up to but excluding masters)	Masters	Doctoral	Post-doctoral
Agriculture	9	0	3	0	0
Business, management and law	5	4	0	0	0
Education	44	1	2	0	0
Health sciences	5	0	0	0	0
Humanities and social sciences	65	3	7	2	0
Science, engineering and technology	19	6	1	0	0
Institute of Education	1	1	0	0	0
Institute of Extra-Mural Studies	4	4	0	0	0
Total	152	19	13	2	0

Source: SARUA university questionnaire (2011)

Quality assurance

As described above, Lesotho has a Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HEQAC) that operates at a national level. At an institutional level, NUL reported that the university has no internal quality assurance processes, does not track student performance, and does not have a teaching and learning strategy. However, the university makes use of peer review quality assessments, external moderators for examinations and sometimes conducts internal evaluations of its academic programmes. In addition, the university reports that there is training for newly appointed staff members as well as mechanisms for ongoing staff development. The performance of individual teaching staff is evaluated, but on a voluntary basis, so it depends on the willingness of the academic concerned. Student feedback regarding academic matters is collected. At present there is no evaluation of student support services or research activities at the university.

Research output

The total number of articles published in Lesotho between 2001 and 2007, as indexed in the international database ISI, was 75, which means an average output of 7.5 papers per year. The only institution that produces scientific publications is the National University of Lesotho. The university questionnaire focused on the 2009/2010 academic year, and NUL reported the following publications.

Table 2: Research output at National University of Lesotho (2009/2010)

Source title	Record count
African Affairs	6
Theatre Research International	5
Journal of Southern African Studies	4
Bulletin of the World Health Organization	3
General Relativity and Gravitation	2
Pramana - Journal of Physics	2
South African Journal of Wildlife Research	2
Total	24

Source: SARUA university questionnaire (2011)

The National University of Lesotho hosts the Institute of Southern African Studies (ISAS). The main purposes of ISAS are research and the development of information systems and services, focusing on Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Although its main focus is on the Southern African region, it also collaborates with Africa as a whole and with other developing countries. ISAS has also been engaged in regional and sub-regional research projects since the 1980s[10].

Recent developments and debates in higher education

Public higher education in Lesotho has for the past few years been embroiled in controversy, with several strikes at NUL affecting the academic calendar, students and institutional performance. A strong change agenda is unfolding at NUL. This is not without contestation and it appears that various stakeholders are in the process of consultation and engagement with ministerial involvement. Lecturers within the institution were on strike for most of the 2011 academic year due to low salaries, occasionally forcing the university to close. The university's top management proposed a new institutional strategy to restructure the university, which is perceived by many to have affected most of the lecturers in a negative manner, as many lost their jobs (Public Eye 2011).

The university shut down three of its campuses (the Institute of Extra-mural Studies in Mohale's Hoek, Mahobong and Qacha's Nek) at the end of 2011 due to lack of funds. In January 2012, the Dean of the Law Faculty at NUL resigned in protest against the university's restructuring exercise and apparent lack of policy to guide the restructuring process (Tlali 2012a).

In its questionnaire response, the Ministry of Education and Training reported that the country has plans to establish more public universities, but no concrete details or plans are available.

Regionalisation

Commitment to regionalisation at a national level in Lesotho is unclear. In the initial SARUA profiling study (Kotecha 2008), the Lesotho Ministry of Education reported that the SADC Protocol on Education and Training had influenced national higher education policy. However, in the current study, it was reported that the SADC Protocol had not influenced national policy. This seems to suggest a break in discourse between the previous and the current respondents, and the lack of an institutionalised regional agenda.

Student and staff mobility has tended to be inconsistent and ad hoc. In the 2008 SARUA study, very limited collaboration and partnerships were mentioned. No data about enrolment of students from other SADC countries or other international students were provided in the initial SARUA study. In the current study, NUL reported that 108 students from other SADC countries were enrolled and 19 from other (non-SADC) countries. Thus, students from other SADC countries make up only 0.9 per cent of the total NUL student enrolment and NUL appears to have little regional presence. These challenges in the area of regionalisation are likely to have been compounded by the recent instability at NUL.

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10   See www.nul.ls/institutes/isas.htm

Conclusions

Higher education in Lesotho can be considered to be at a crossroads. The higher education sector in the recent past has been plagued by a number of institutional, structural and political challenges. While the Council on Higher Education has been trying to develop policies and establish statutory bodies to govern and accredit higher education institutions, there is a need to harness, nurture and protect the current achievements of the higher education system. The need for a quality assurance framework remains paramount for any higher education system at national and institutional level. The current strikes have affected higher education in general, undermining higher education quality and output.

Being the only public university, the National University of Lesotho has the main responsibility of not only increasing access for students, but also being a knowledge-producing institution. There is an urgent need to identify ways in which to encourage masters and doctoral student enrolment and graduation, and stimulate the production of knowledge in the form of academic publications.

The higher education landscape in Lesotho remains one of many possibilities. However, there is a need to actively build and revitalise the sector in order to realise all the social and economic promises of higher education at both private and public levels.