

12 South Africa

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COUNTRY CONTEXT STATISTICS	
	<p>Population: 50.6 million (2011) GDP per capita: US\$10 973 Human development index: 0.619 Unemployment: 24.9% (2011) Key economic sectors: services, tourism, mining, manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and fishing, utilities Principal exports: metals, gold, diamonds, machinery, transport equipment HIV and AIDS prevalence: 17.5% (2009) Gross primary enrolment ratio: 107% (2002) Gross secondary enrolment ratio: 90% (2002) Gross tertiary enrolment ratio: 15% (2006)</p>
<small>Country context data were obtained from a variety of sources: CIA (2012), SADC (2007), UNAIDS (2011), UNDP (2011), UNESCO (2011).</small>	

South Africa is widely considered the economic powerhouse of the SADC region and the African continent at large. With a total population of over 50 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) exceeding US\$10 000, South Africa has been a major economic destination for other African and international job seekers. Although Seychelles, Botswana and Mauritius boast a better per capita GDP in the region (CIA 2012) when compared to the large population of South Africa, South Africa contributes (in nominal terms) 30 per cent to the continent's GDP²¹. Notwithstanding such economic strength and recent promising trends, the levels of unemployment in South Africa remain very high – between 25 and 50 per cent, with an average of 25.3 per cent (Statistics South Africa 2010).

At the social level, South Africa continues to suffer from high levels of poverty and inequality in spite of its strong economic position in the region and the continent. The country has high crime levels, which have taken a toll on the economy by heightening a sense of investment insecurity and thus contributing to unemployment and under-employment (Stone 2008). The current socio-economic situation in South Africa is also a product of the inherited legacy of injustice, and radical and sustainable policies are required to redress socio-economic conditions.

This social and economic position is indicated in the country's low HDI ranking, more than 40 places lower than its GDP world rankings, and reflects a society plagued by low life expectancy, acute and chronic poverty and high levels of inequality (Bailey et al. 2011). The high HIV/AIDS and TB prevalence in South Africa – respectively the fourth and fifth highest in the world (CIA 2012) – is a product of some of the social and health challenges facing the country.

In political terms, South Africa is considered one of the most advanced democracies on the continent. The relatively smooth transition from the previous apartheid era to the current

²¹ See editorial 'Africa's Largest Economies – Top 20 Economies in Africa', available online at www.theRichest.org/business/largest-economies-in-africa/.

democratic dispensation has provided evidence of a strong and growing democracy. In spite of the historic divides and remaining inequalities, South Africa has made significant strides in bridging the racial gap for the overall development of institutions and the country. Recent evidence has been the successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup™ in 2010. The ruling party, the African National Congress, celebrated its centenary anniversary in 2012, albeit with suggestions of serious rifts within the party.

In conclusion, besides a relatively stable political landscape and a growing economy, South Africa is faced with huge socio-economic challenges which urgently need to be addressed. These include a divided society, failing public service delivery systems, a high disease rate and poor education levels (National Planning Commission 2011).

Higher education landscape

South Africa has a much larger, more diverse and advanced higher education landscape than most of the systems in the region (and even on the continent). This section does not provide a detailed review of the system, but highlights key policies and aspects, recent developments, statutory bodies and offers a broad representation of its size and shape. Detailed studies are well covered in the literature, and the focus here is on the more recent developments and institutional issues relating to regionalisation in the country.

Brief historical overview of higher education

South Africa is one of the countries in Africa with the longest higher education history. This is partially due to the socio-political and historical path followed by the country, which is very different from most countries south of the Sahara. The first higher education institutions came into being in 1918 through the transformation of the South African College and Victoria College into the University of Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch respectively. A key aspect of early higher education was the close link between higher education and the socio-political landscape of the country. Higher education was used by the former political regime as a tool to enforce its ideologies. Universities were separated on a racial basis, and access for students to funds, resources and infrastructure depended significantly on racial background. Since 1994, higher education in post-apartheid South Africa has primarily aimed at transforming the inherited legacy of racial division (CHE 2004, Sehoole 2006).

Significant emphasis has been placed on providing access to previously disadvantaged groups, including the black population²² and women. At the economic level, higher education seeks to redress the skills divide that has resulted from the fragmented higher education system. Articulated through the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs) were expected to make a more significant contribution in the production of skills in science, engineering and technology, as was being done by the previously white universities. Funding allocations also needed attention and redress. Transformation in the higher education system has been an ongoing process, aimed at achieving a more balanced, responsive and integrated system in support of national development (MoE 2001, Cloete and Muller 1998).

In the midst of increasing debates on the transformation of higher education in South Africa, it has been argued that the process has often been conceived as largely a 'managerial, bureaucratic or quantitative exercise with the primary concern of ensuring that adequate numbers of female and black students and staff find places in the universities' (Nongxa in Weinberg and Kistner 2007). This approach has had an impact on quality, and is reflected in the relatively poor throughput and success rates seen across the sector.

National higher education policy context

The South African higher education sector falls under the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The DHET was formed when the then National Department of Education (DoE)

²² Black in this context refers to the African, Coloured and Indian population groups.

was split into the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the DHET. The task of the DHET is to co-ordinate the training of all post-secondary education, including universities, further education and training (FET) colleges, adult education and sector education and training, with the aim of achieving Outcome 5 of government's 12 performance outcomes, namely to develop 'a skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path' (HESA 2011²³, DHET 2010).

South Africa has a plethora of policies and legislation governing higher education. In the period immediately following the 1994 elections there was an extensive, participatory drive to formulate new policies that explicitly broke with the apartheid past. This process culminated in the report of the National Planning Commission on higher education in 1996 (Cloete 2002). The next phases involved the development of the 1997 White Paper 3 (A Programme for Higher Education Transformation) which was legally formalised in the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. The act provided the basis from which to work towards a unified and nationally planned higher education system, and underpinned the establishment of the statutory body, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which advises the minister and promotes quality assurance within the higher education sector.

The 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) took the legislative process one step further by outlining the framework and mechanisms through which the policy goals and transformation imperatives of the White Paper and the Higher Education Act could be implemented. The NPHE thus guides the higher education transformation process aimed at attaining a higher education reflecting institutional and programme equity measured in the following aspects:

- student equity targets in higher education institutions;
- staff equity targets at academic and support levels; and
- institutional and academic diversity in all institutions.

More recently, the DHET released a Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training which sets out to provide a vision for the post-schooling system in the country. Amongst other things, the green paper focuses on the lack of coherence of the sector and the importance of the country moving towards a single co-ordinated system for the provision of differentiated post-school education (DHET 2012). At the time of writing, a White Paper is in preparation.

Besides the DHET as the body responsible for higher education in South Africa, there are other statutory institutions with various responsibilities, all of which aim to improve the higher education system and report in one way or another to the DHET. These include:

- The Council on Higher Education (CHE): As already mentioned, the CHE advises the minister on the state of higher education policy formulation, and enhances the development of higher education through scholarly engagement at various levels. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE conducts audits of universities against a range of institutional criteria and external peer review. The HEQC also governs the process of course accreditation with the help of the national qualifications framework (SAQA).
- Higher Education South Africa (HESA): HESA is the leadership body that represents the 23 public higher education institutions. Led by the vice-chancellors of the universities, HESA acts to support and advance the higher education sector in South Africa.
- The South Africa Qualification Authority (SAQA): SAQA was established via SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995. Under this act, SAQA seeks to uphold the underlying regulations ensuring access, quality and redress for all learners as stipulated in the National Qualifications Framework, through an integrated national framework responsible for credit accumulation and transfer. This framework seeks to break down the barriers to credit transfer that have hitherto existed between universities and technikons (now known as universities of technology).

Other bodies worth mentioning here are the further education and training (FET) colleges, responsible for post-school education in non-university institutions, and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), responsible for student loans and grants.

23 www.hesa.org.za/partnersandlinks/department-higher-education-training-dhet

Size and shape of higher education

The current South African higher education and training system is composed of four types of institutions: traditional universities; universities of technology (formerly technikons); privately-funded universities, colleges of further education and training; and colleges for professional training (which include nursing, agriculture and the police force). These institutions are also classified by their funding system: except for the private universities and colleges, all the other higher education institutions are publicly funded.

Demand for higher education

In post-apartheid South Africa, higher education has witnessed different stages of transformation, differentiation and restructuring. One manifestation of the restructuring process was observed in the merger process in which the 36 universities were merged to form 23 public higher education institutions at the start of the new millennium. These 23 universities have been classified into three broad categories: eleven traditional universities inherited from the pre-1994 era, six comprehensive universities resulting from mergers of previous universities and technikons, and six universities of technology – upgrades of former technikons. The public universities provide access to more than 800 000 students across a wide range of fields. About a quarter of these students study via distance education, offered mainly by the University of South Africa (UNISA). Recent estimates indicate that there are over 89 private higher education institutions accredited by the DHET and another 29 private institutions operating with provisional accreditation (DoE 2012). According to Pillay (2010), about 35 000 students (approximately 5 per cent of all enrolments) are served by private institutions. International institutions are also present, with Monash University being the most prominent. Another key stakeholder in post-secondary education provision in South Africa are the FET institutions, which offer places for more than 124 000 students across various disciplines.

Demand for higher education in South Africa clearly outstrips supply. The stampede for places at the University of Johannesburg in early 2012, during which the mother of a prospective student lost her life, is perhaps the most dramatic example of the fierce competition for available places. Based on empirical data from eleven South African universities that provided data for this study, only about 20.7 per cent of all the students who applied to these universities (including UNISA) were placed in 2010. One of the responses of government to this challenge is the establishment of two new universities, one in the Northern Cape and one in Mpumalanga, which are due to begin enrolling students in 2014.

Student profile

In recent years there has been a high demand for higher education in South Africa. According to the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA), student numbers have nearly doubled between 1993 and 2008, from 473 000 to about 799 658. According to the 2010 HEMIS data, enrolment figures have increased from the previous year to about 892 936. However, while the IEASA statistics do not provide a breakdown between national and international students, HEMIS (2010) data reveal that South African students make up about 73 per cent of all enrolments. Looking at students aged between 18 and 24 years, the gross enrolment ratio is slowly approaching the 20 per cent national target. However, like many other issues in the country, this enrolment ratio differs significantly along racial lines, with little more than 11 per cent of African students having access to higher education, while more than half of the eligible Indians and about 60 per cent of eligible whites enter university. The Coloured community constitutes the least enrolled, at about 7 per cent of those in the prescribed age group. While poverty and lack of opportunities can account for this, it is also believed that a low quality of primary and secondary education contribute to these trends (IEASA n.d.²⁴).

The majority of students (about 80 per cent) study via contact education. Most of the distance education provision in the country is done by South Africa's largest university, UNISA. However, in recent years the traditionally residential universities have increasingly offered selected

programmes using distance methodologies. Unlike many of the other countries in the SADC region, a large proportion of students in higher education are female (57.4 per cent) compared to male (42.6 per cent). Figure 1 shows the number of students enrolled in major fields of study by gender.

Figure 1 shows that, despite female students making up a larger proportion of the total student body, clear gender patterns are still evident with respect to where in the sector these female students find themselves. While female students account for 74 per cent of the education enrolments, 69 per cent of health sciences students and 65 per cent of humanities and social science enrolments, they account for only 38 per cent of enrolments in science, engineering and technology (SET). Given the strong government focus on building science and technology in the interests of national development, as well as the channelling of research funding towards SET fields, the implications of this gender imbalance are clear.

With respect to overall enrolment by field of study, in 2010 the largest enrolment (36.5 per cent) was seen in the fields of business, management and law, followed by SET (20.9 per cent), humanities and social sciences (19.1 per cent), education (16.3 per cent), health sciences (5.7 per cent) and agriculture (1.6 per cent).

Despite a national focus on increasing the number of doctoral students in the country, enrolment at the doctoral level still accounted for only 1.3 per cent of all enrolments in 2010. The vast majority of students in the South African public university sector are enrolled at the undergraduate level (63.2 per cent), while 23.8 per cent are enrolled for postgraduate programmes below masters level, and 11.7 per cent are enrolled for a masters degree. The pipeline from undergraduate to doctoral level study is thus problematic, since so many students are lost from the system following the completion of their undergraduate qualifications. This issue is addressed further in the section below that focuses on graduation patterns.

Staff profile

The table below presents the distribution of academic and administrative staff across public universities in South Africa.

Table 1: Staff profile in South African universities

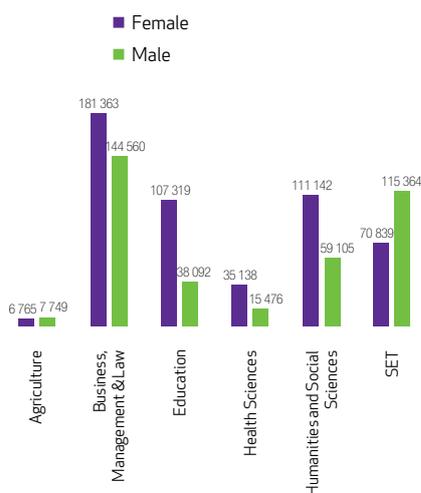
Staffing categories	Nationality	Number of staff
Academic and research staff	National citizens	41 410
	SADC citizens	1 391
	Other international staff	2 562
	No information	1 006
Management and administrative staff	National citizens	68 009
	SADC citizens	2 050
	Other international staff	4 377
	No information	1 385

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

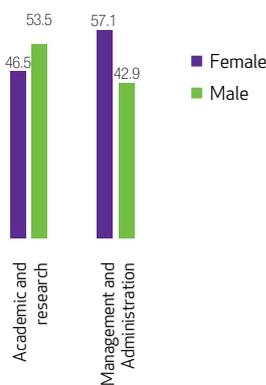
In total, female staff members account for 53 per cent of the staffing component at South African universities. However, they only account for 46.5 per cent of the academic workforce and make up 57.1 per cent of the administrative workforce. As such, gender divides are still evident (see Figure 2). In addition, female staff members in both the academic and administrative domains account for larger percentages of temporary contracts than their male colleagues.

The HEMIS data do not include headcount staffing data by major field of study. However, data on full-time equivalent (FTE) staff are available and provide an indication of the proportional staffing available for the different fields of study. Focusing on academic and research staff members specifically, Figure 3 shows that the largest numbers of staff are employed in the SET fields of study.

No HEMIS data were available on staff qualifications.

Figure 1: Enrolment in major field of study by gender

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

Figure 2: Type of employment by gender

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

National higher education outputs and alignment with policy

The sections above present the national policy context as well as the current size and shape of public higher education in South Africa. In this section, the focus is on the outputs of the higher education system, including the commonly-cited statistics about numbers of graduates and research output.

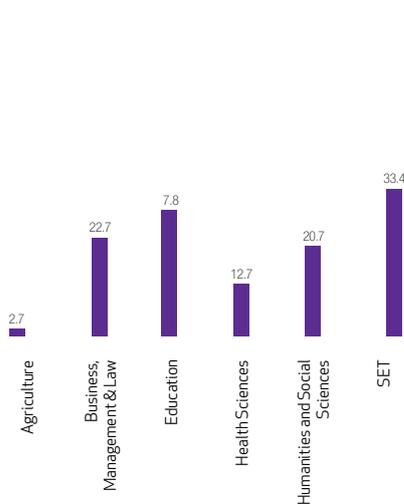
Graduate patterns

The graduation patterns follow the enrolment patterns, with the largest number of graduates seen in business, management and law, followed by science, engineering and technology. The relative smaller proportions of enrolments for postgraduate study were noted earlier. The effects of this are shown in Figure 4, with worryingly low numbers of graduates at postgraduate level – especially at masters and doctoral levels. While enrolment at masters and doctoral degree levels represented 11.7 per cent and 1.3 per cent of enrolment respectively, only 5.6 per cent of graduates are masters graduates, and 0.9 per cent are doctoral graduates. Given South Africa's focus on building the human capacity needed to compete in the global knowledge economy, these numbers are very low. Another area of concern is in the health sciences, where graduation figures remain low compared to enrolments. In the health sciences there are currently fewer than 12 000 graduates at all levels of study, with the majority of graduates being at the undergraduate level. Considering that health challenges facing the country (and the region as the whole) are one of the factors limiting socio-economic development, South Africa (and SADC) will have to increase the graduation rate in the health-related fields in order to address the needs of the country (and the region).

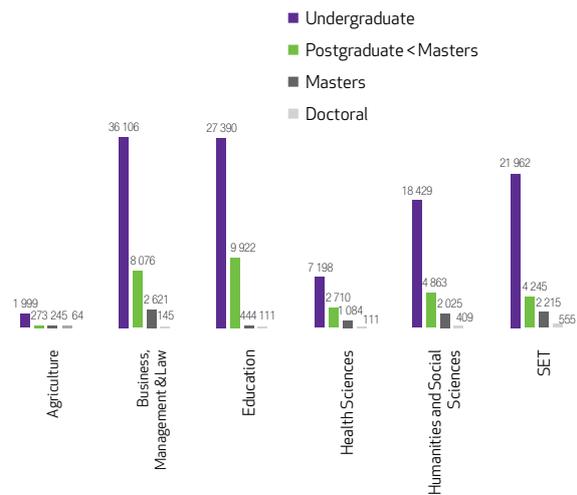
Quality assurance

In the broad context of higher education quality in South Africa, the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the White Paper on Higher Education of the same year provide the national policy on quality assurance. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE is responsible for the implementation of quality assurance nationally. The HEQC's functions include:

- promoting quality in higher education;
- auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions; and
- accrediting programmes of higher education.

Figure 3: FTE staff per major field of study

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

Figure 4: Graduation patterns by major field of study

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

Between October 2004 and April 2011, all 23 public universities participated in quality audits done by the HEQC. The focus of these audits was on assessing the quality assurance processes that universities had in place. A new round of audits – now called reviews – is due to commence in 2013. At present, the HEQC has a draft framework for the second round of quality audits available for comment. Although the final framework is still to be released, the focus of the second round of audits (or reviews) will be on undergraduate teaching and learning²⁵.

At institutional level, all the universities that submitted responses to the SARUA survey confirmed that they have internal quality assurance systems in place. All responding universities have a quality assurance framework, and processes for allocating budget for quality-related activities. Key issues integrated in the institutional quality frameworks include teaching, research, community service, student performance monitoring, administrative processes, entrepreneurship, staff training and development, and external relations and partnerships. There is also evidence from the data of the presence of research offices and teaching and learning strategies, as well as offices dedicated to tracking students' performance to ensure maximum student throughput.

All responding universities indicated the presence of staff development and orientation activities for newly-appointed staff. In their bid to align with quality standards, institutions have put in place mechanisms for evaluating individual teaching, staff, student support and research activities, all aimed at increasing and ensuring quality at all institutional levels. All universities reported having an external examinations moderation process. Overall, the responses provide evidence of an active and rigorous effort at national and institutional levels to maintain a high quality of higher education management and output. Nonetheless, as noted above, South African higher education still shows high levels of dropout and generally low levels of throughput and success.

Student support and infrastructure

Analysis of the data indicates that there is a relatively high level of student support. Using generally accepted indicators – such as student orientation, academic mentoring and support, presence of university facilitated accommodation (such as on-campus residences), career guidance for first and second-year students, and the presence of infrastructure (such as libraries, sport facilities, laboratories, computers and internet for students) – universities in South Africa provide average to good academic support to students. When asked about the availability of support facilities, responses from the universities show that, on a scale of zero to three, the mean score is above 2.5, which can be interpreted as a good score. For the quality of these support services, on a scale of

25 For more information see www.che.org.za.

zero to five, findings show a mean score of more than 3.8, indicating a fairly good quality of services available for students.

Table 2: Student support services and activities

Student support indicator	Description	Mean response from sampled universities
Academic orientation	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.75
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	3.91
Academic support	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.66
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	4.25
Career guidance	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.50
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	4.25
Sport facilities	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.41
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	3.81

Sources: SARUA university questionnaires (2011)

Looking into other aspects of infrastructure, the table below supports earlier arguments that there is a significantly high level of student academic support, as evidenced by the availability and quality of infrastructural facilities to support academic output and throughput in South African universities.

Table 3: Student infrastructure development

Infrastructure items	Description	Mean response from sampled universities
Science laboratories	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.5
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	3.75
Libraries and services	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.9
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	4.1
Digital library materials	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.8
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	4.1
Computer laboratories	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.5
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	4.0
Lecture venues	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.4
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	3.8
Accommodation	Availability (rating scale from 1 to 3)	2.16
	Quality (rating scale from 1 to 5)	3.72

Sources: SARUA university questionnaires (2011)

From the data above it can be observed that accommodation for students remains a major challenge facing South African universities. The inadequate quality of student accommodation has been the source of much media attention in recent months, with reports of students at some universities living in squalid conditions.

Research output

Comparing research output between universities in the SADC region, South Africa ranks relatively highly. However, closer analysis of the national data shows that much of the research output is produced by a small number of top-performing universities. Except for a few exceptions, the majority of South African universities report that the bulk of their research funding comes from government subsidies and grants. There is a need to strengthen the third-stream income generation capacity of universities as this funding is critical to building strong research universities.

Table 4: Research output of South African universities

Category of research output	2008	2009
Peer-reviewed journal articles	7 638	8 257
Peer-reviewed books and book chapters	266	377
Patents	no data	no data
Other: proceedings	449	476

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

Responses from universities indicate that most universities have both a research office and an institutional research plan or strategy, which aims to monitor and improve research output from the institution. In addition, 75 per cent of the South African universities that submitted a questionnaire response indicated having a higher education research centre or unit that focuses its research on issues around higher education (policy, management, transformation and development). Such research centres play an important role in the ongoing project of building an effective, efficient and high-quality higher education system.

Recent developments and debates in higher education

With higher education facing new and changing challenges across the globe, the higher education landscape in South Africa has increasingly sought to keep pace, while also striving to improve both its size and quality. This necessitates being at the forefront of cutting-edge research and translating this research into relevant policy. With the emerging role of knowledge in development planning, higher education, research and government institutions seem to be coming together to forge a knowledge-integrated development pathway. There has been a steady increase in higher education funding as a percentage of national GDP in the past five years (Financial and Fiscal Commission 2012).

Following the 2012 State of the Nation Address and the subsequent budget speech, key developments and debates relevant to South Africa's higher education landscape have emerged. First was the President's announcement of the creation of two new universities in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces, and second was the introduction of an additional R850 million allocated to improve university infrastructure. Furthermore, a donor funding allocation totalling R60 million will be made available for the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic years through general budget support, to develop a national career guidance system that will provide access to information on occupations, economic indicators and directed learning opportunities for various careers.

Another key aspect in the South African higher education debate has been the production of adequate skills relevant for an economy seeking to transform into a knowledge economy. While a number of policies have been put in place to that end, there has been little output in the number of skills produced in the areas of engineering, natural sciences, human and animal health and in teacher education (which directly affects the readiness of school leavers entering the higher education system). The Minister of Higher Education and Training recently stated that 'we are engaging with higher education South Africa, and deans of relevant faculties to accelerate especially black and women graduate output in these areas' (The Sowetan 2012) to provide the relevant and needed skills for a knowledge economy.

Regionalisation

South Africa is a major role-player in higher education in the SADC region, as evidenced by the number of students from the region registered in South African universities (46 204 in 2010). While there are students hailing from all over SADC, the largest proportions come from Zimbabwe (41.8 per cent), Namibia (14.9 per cent), Botswana (9.3 per cent) and Lesotho (9.0 per cent). Mobility of staff and students has been perceived as a key aspect of enhancing the regionalisation process. There has been teaching and research collaboration between South African universities and universities in the region, and partnerships have formed. This has resulted in the exchange and mobility of students and staff across national boundaries within the region. Table 5 shows the number of students from SADC countries enrolled at South African universities in 2010.

Table 5: Students from SADC countries enrolled at South African universities

SADC country	Number of students enrolled at South African universities	Percentage of all SADC students at South African universities
Angola	1 179	2.6
Botswana	4 287	9.3
DRC	2 066	4.5
Lesotho	4 143	9.0
Madagascar	13	0.0
Malawi	850	1.8
Mauritius	893	1.9
Mozambique	756	1.6
Namibia	6 897	14.9
Seychelles	51	0.1
Swaziland	3 532	7.6
Tanzania	601	1.3
Zambia	1 642	3.6
Zimbabwe	19 294	41.8
Total	46 204	100

Source: HEMIS data (2010)

Although, compared to the other SADC countries, South Africa has many more staff members coming from the SADC region, SADC staff members still make up a small proportion of the total number of staff employed at South African universities. For academic and research staff, a total of 1 391 people (3.0 per cent) were reported to come from other SADC countries in 2010, while for administrative and management staff a total of 2 050 (2.7 per cent) came from SADC countries.

South Africa has taken regional imperatives and policy into account in the formulation of its higher education policy environment. A recent example is the 2010/2011–2014/2015 Strategic Plan of the Department of Higher Education and Training, which makes an explicit link between the objectives of the DHET and those of the SADC community (as expressed in the SADC protocol). Under the sub-programme on international relations, the DHET commits itself to ‘participate in SADC meetings and conferences, support and monitor the implementation of the SADC Protocol on Education, contribute to the harmonisation of policies and strategies in the SADC, and disseminate information to internal role-players participating in relevant workshops and meetings’ (DHET 2010). This objective and list of activities is backed by a significant budget to ensure its achievement. There thus appears to be evidence of a clear alignment of the SADC protocol and DHET objectives.

In June 2012 the South African Minister of Higher Education and Training convened an extraordinary summit of SADC ministers of education to discuss higher education matters in the region. At this summit it was noted that ‘South Africa is providing the platform for the gathering in order to reflect on some of the major challenges affecting higher education in the region’. Although concerns have been raised within South Africa, for example by the trade union movement, that the number of international students should be limited given that the national demand for higher education cannot be met, the Deputy Minister asserted that, while it is important to bring all perspectives to the discussion table, ‘our position is really to encourage students to freely move around between higher education institutes in the SADC region. We see this as a huge opportunity for all of us, as research capabilities, support networks and skills development and knowledge will be increased’ (Webb 2012). Thus, it appears that, at the level of management and policy, South African higher education emphasises the need for regional collaboration, partnership and the establishment of a regional network for academic and knowledge exchange.

Despite this commitment to regionalisation, challenges remain. While South Africa has been recognised as the main exporter of higher education to the region, there have also been a number of challenges at institutional, systemic and national level which have hampered regionalisation in South Africa in various ways. One of these has been the perception by many South Africans that students and staff originating from neighbouring countries and beyond come to the country and take admission and working opportunities which would otherwise have been allocated to South

Africans. These perceptions have also been seen in the xenophobic violence witnessed in South Africa in recent years.

Another challenge has been the lack of a harmonised education system, which undermines admission into universities across national borders, and recognition of credits. Policies will be needed to harmonise educational qualifications across the region so that they are recognised by a wide range of higher education institutions, facilitating the process of application and admission. This will require a harmonised quality assurance framework, and a governing body responsible for ensuring quality at educational institutions.

Conclusions

Higher education in South Africa has sought to follow a process of transformation similar to that of the country post-1994, with the aim of ensuring equality, equity and the redress of limitations of the past. However, with the changing global landscape of higher education, which includes both globalisation and regionalisation, higher education in South Africa is faced with a double transformation challenge. In trying to meet the challenge, numerous policies and initiatives continue to be designed and implemented. Notable have been the university mergers and the government's attempts to ensure fair distribution in access, academic and support staff, and output by universities – especially for disadvantaged groups.

Like many other countries, South Africa's higher education system faces a number of challenges, including funding, access, the percentage of academic staff with doctoral degrees, and output (which includes student graduation rates and research publications). Some initiatives to address these include the establishment of two new universities (an initiative that is not without its critics), increased funding opportunities, and the availability of student support services on campuses.

At the regional level, South Africa has been one of the active members in the establishment and implementation of the SADC protocol, and continues to work towards its implementation at national and institutional levels. Numerous institutions have designed policies to implement the SADC protocol, and partnerships with regional institutions have been forged and sustained. However, the regionalisation process has not been without its challenges, ranging from systemic issues relating to student study permits to institutional issues such as preferential treatment.

South African higher education remains one of the biggest and most advanced systems in the region. It is home to many students and staff members from the SADC region, the continent and beyond. However, while a number of policies have been established to ensure that higher education in South Africa responds to its local (national) context whilst striving for global competitiveness, appropriate and high-quality national and institutional mechanisms for the implementation of such policies remain critical in order for higher education in South Africa to sustain its national and regional relevance.