

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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ADERSHIP SA Jg. 13 Nr. 3 P. 32 Dat. JUN 1994



THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IS
BLAMED FOR THE PROBLEMS EXPERI-
ENCED BY BLACKS IN COPING WITH THE
DEMANDS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION: AT
THE SAME TIME THE DEMAND IS MADE
FOR MORE BLACK PROFESSIONALS.

A LITTLE LEARNING IS A DANGEROUS THING

education 1. The act
or process of acquiring knowledge
2. The knowledge or training
acquired by this process 3. The
act or process of imparting knowl-
edge

TREFWOORDE

- 1 Samuel
- 2 General
Jukes
Challton
- 3
- 4 Tertiary
Academy
Students
- 5
- 6 Professional
quality
business
Statistics
- 7
- 8
- 9 VID
- 10

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THERE ARE now fewer than three hundred weeks to 1 January 2000 A.D. If we are to match the challenges of the 21st century, that is about as much time as we have to resolve the basic problems of education in South Africa." By linking education to the turn of the millennium, John Samuels, ANC education leader, lends dramatic urgency to the task of the new government. What he leaves unsaid is that the interim government will also have run its course in those three hundred weeks.

It is common knowledge that a cornerstone of apartheid was to deny blacks a full education. Hendrik Verwoerd's rationale was, since the work blacks would be employed to do in white South Africa required a minimal education, that is what they would be given. The legacy of that is now being acutely felt in the small number of blacks who have been admitted into the professions.

The numbers fall pitifully short of reflecting the make-up of the population. And the numbers must be related mainly to the white population historically privileged to require their services. To give some perspective to the bias: in the USA there are 1.6 CPAs per 1 000 population; in South Africa there are 0.35. Egypt has 2.5 lawyers per 1 000 population; our ratio is 0.25 per thousand. And, whereas Britain has about 0.25 consulting engineers per thousand; we have a mere 0.06.

The solution is to use the full capacity of our nation to bring up the numbers. But how?

Samuels explains that if South Africa is to be prepared for the 21st century, it will have to be provided with the dominant skills of that new era: primarily those related to information and technology. The

real problem confronting South African educational policymakers is how to elevate the entire community to a unified and relevant educational standard. This is the realistic significance of those three hundred weeks, because solutions must be found, implemented and results achieved

before the country goes back to the polls for its second democratic election.

It will not be possible to correct the imbalances in such a short period. We have neither the teachers nor the schools, nor the money. Even if we were able to implement such a policy, it is unlikely that our largely deprived society would be able to employ the increased numbers of professionals the system would turn out. So what we have to do is prepare the ground for the demands of the future. The starting point will be at primary and secondary schooling level. The dismal legacy of the Department of Education and Training (for blacks) is the running annual record of producing a mere 1 500 black matriculants with maths and science. Without these subjects they cannot go on to study subjects

TREFWOORDE

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■ What Gerwel calls the "binary" position between universities and technikons must be broken down. He would like to see them becoming part of a single system, both awarding degrees (technikons would award bachelors degrees) and characterised by mobility, the movement of students and graduates between the two.

■ Alternative ways of regulating university entrance should be introduced. UCT already applies entry tests and UOFS has introduced a system of process selection in which candidates undergo a pre-university year of study, including some university work to qualify for entry. There is, claims Gerwel, a growing insistence that people with other forms of competencies (ie work training) should be considered for places at universities.

EXAMINING AUTHORITY

MB

INDIAN AFFAIRS

DTT

at the University of the Witwatersrand
in consultation with the principal of the University of the Witwatersrand

University of the Witwatersrand Vice Chancellor, Prof Bob Charlton, is quite happy with the concept of technikons being upgraded and with the introduction of incremental degree acquisition. "It is important, however," he warns, "to maintain the difference between university and technikon graduates in certain areas, such as engineering, where the technikon graduate would gain credits towards a university degree but would lack certain basic disciplines in mathematics which would require further study."

A point of great contention in recent years has been the impact these changes are having, and will continue to have, on standards of education at universities. Both Wits and UCT experienced the pain of protest and disension in the later months of 1993.

From some quarters the universities are accused of accommodating the changes by dropping standards to help the disadvantaged; in others the demand is made that more should be done. Charlton is in no doubt that the playing fields must be levelled and that account should be taken of previous disadvantage. But while his institution takes strenuous steps to assist those suffering from inferior schooling, he insists that exit qualifications from Wits must remain high.

"The numbers of students at university and university equivalent institutions per 1000 head of population, at 8,36, is less than half of that in the industrialised countries with which we must

HAT EXIT QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD REMAIN HIGH IS WIDELY ACCEPTED.

as accountancy, engineering, architecture and quantity surveying. This, according to Jakes Gerwel, Rector of the University of the Western Cape, is the reason for blacks choosing the humanities as a course of study rather than science. Samuels believes short-term solutions can be found by making high school maths compulsory, using innovative teaching methods, and improving the environment in which the subject is taught.

The impact of this poor output is illustrated in first-year undergraduate performance at Wits University.

This clearly is the root cause of the shortage of blacks in the professions, a situation the ANC finds unacceptable. "I'm not sure," says Samuels, "if we can continue running a country where one group outnumbers another in such a distorted manner."

KES GERWEL MAKES THREE SUGGESTIONS:

The labour federation Cosatu, he suggests, will play an increasingly important role in the development of democratic education because of the emphasis on matric exemption should be down-played. There should be to make alternative tertiary education choice, (such as technical and technikon training) more acceptable. Matric exemption makes university entrance the pinnacle of secondary schooling whereas vocational or career-related education should remain a parallel track.

compete. The quantity must be increased, but not at the expense of quality. It is in nobody's interest for Wits to drop its standards."

For this to happen the country needs more university places, or alternative routes into the professions. Probably both. The decision taken by University of the Western Cape some years ago to remove the matriculation points system in order to admit all applicants with matric exemption could provide a precedent. It had the predictable effect of doubling the student population within a short space of time. But what about the quality of the degrees that these, more accessible universities, confer on their graduates?

Mashudu Romano is credited with bringing back to South Africa, after an absence of 35 years, the British accountancy qualification ACCA (The Chartered Association of Certified Accountants). Romano, who heads his own management consultancy, Romano and Associates, was a member of the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa (ABASA) when they conducted an investigation into what was being done to bring more blacks into the profession. These were their main findings:

■ Degrees from the so-called black universities such as Turfloop were not recognised by the profession. Graduates had to go to a "white" university to supplement their qualifications before they would be accepted for articles or to write the exams of the Public Accountants' and Auditors' Board (PAAAB). "There was no degree mobility and universities would not recognise qualifications from other institutions," says Romano.

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 ■ Holders of the certificate of the Certified Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) were told that they would have to obtain a BCom degree if they wished to become CAs and the same applied to those who had qualified as technical accountants. Romano is very critical of this approach. "Our funds are highly limited in South Africa and we must make maximum use of what we have. It is wasteful not to recognise existing qualifications and experience," he complains. "At least the institutes should subject applicants to some form of test in order for them to slot into university courses, rather than reject them on what appear to be subjective grounds."

■ Accountancy firms fell short in their capacity to train candidate auditors.
 ■ It was claimed that auditing was reserved for the CA (SA) because of the public interest, but this was probably an excuse to entrench existing positions. In defence of this accusation, Lucas van Vuuren, executive director of the PAAAB, explains that the attest function is reserved for persons registered with the board in terms of the Public Accountants' and Auditors' Act. This is because of the judicial nature of the attest function. Persons who satisfy the board's education and training requirements are eligible to register; they need not be CAs.

Most important among these findings was that the quality of degree granted by the "bush" colleges was not up to scratch. Currently, in the auditing profession, this means that their BCom gives them entry into aspects of the profession such as CIMA, but denies them the chance of becoming CA (SA).

This, Romano argues, "is unacceptable. In the light of what it costs to go to university, our people cannot afford it, and their secondary school education does not provide them with adequate entry credits." Romano is quick to make the point that standards must be maintained. "We must just be more flexible at the entry level. They must then rise up to the laid-down standards."

The approach taken by the accountancy profession, probably spurred on by these findings and the re-entry of ACCA as an alternative to the CA, could be instructive for other professions grappling with similar problems. The approach is set out in the recently published draft report on the Future

of Accounting Education in South Africa.

The essence of the proposal is that there will be four tiers to the profession. Entry is possible at any of these levels, which qualifies the holder to do certain accounting work. With practical training and the passing of the examinations of the regulatory body for the next tier, there is mobility between the various levels. It will no longer be essential for entrants to have university degrees – currently it is a graduate profession. If these proposals are accepted there will be five routes into the profession, which Van Vuuren lists as:

- University;
- Technikon;
- Technical College;
- Passing institute examinations; and
- Practical experience.

Not everyone is happy with the implications. Notable among these is Professor Margo Steele, head of the department of accounting at Wits. Her concern is precisely the fact that accountants, who do not have university degrees, will be permitted to conduct the attest function. "This makes me feel very uncomfortable," she says. "The PAAAB think they can evaluate everyone at the end of the line. Right now that's fine because they all have been to university. But," she asks, "how can they conduct appropriate examinations if some of the candidates have not been through a graduate programme? We must protect the value of the qualification."

This debate is not yet over. The struggle is between maintaining standards that will keep the country in global contention and a system that will quickly reduce the disparities in our educational system to allow blacks, and the less privileged, access to the professions. What is encouraging is that there is little disagreement: the real quarrel is how to achieve a workable and acceptable balance. □

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