

The Problem of Access, Quality and Equity in South African Higher Education and Strategies for Revitalisation

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ABSTRACT The assumption that higher education (HE) is the engine behind social and economic development as well as an agent for human emancipation has led to massive investment in HE development. Consequently, nation states, policy makers, and educational planners have made the equitable provision and delivery of HE their top agenda and vision. In the South African context, this gave rise to the enactment of a number of policy initiatives at both government and institutional level so as to translate this vision into reality. While significant milestones were achieved in the quantitative aspects of equity as encapsulated in widened access to higher education, there are persistent challenges that threaten the overall quality and performance of the HE system. These include but are not limited to issues such as student funding, student level of unpreparedness, academic development programmes, pedagogy and the language issue. If these and other challenges are not addressed, they may render the equity vision elusive, however well-intentioned. This paper sought to explore critical challenges experienced by HE institutions in South Africa in their efforts to embrace the equity imperative. The focus of the paper transcend mere exploration by articulating strategies that are meant to revitalise the HE system so as to make it more responsive and relevant to a massified student population.