

Critical Dilemmas in the Post Colony: A Review of Universities and Change in South Africa

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Professor Ihron Rensburg was Deputy Director General of South Africa's Department of Education, and is widely acknowledged for his policy, strategy, leadership and managerial skills, ably demonstrated during his stewardship of South Africa's post-apartheid education policy, legislation and programmes. Professor Rensburg was an anti-apartheid activist and leader (1976-2004), and during this time spearheaded the creation of local, regional and national teachers' and students' movements. He holds a PhD in International Comparative Education and an MA in Political and Organisational Sociology from Stanford University, and a B. Pharmacy from Rhodes University, South Africa.

Late post-colonial societies face both opportunity and challenge in a "new" human rights trajectory punctuated by competing concerns for egalitarianism and societal progress. Too many policy priorities run into too little resources, and the manner in which early dilemmas are resolved may set the long-term baseline of opportunity and challenge: national reconciliation competes with national reconstruction; infrastructure investment with social investment; social development transfers with investing in young people; and, temporary public works jobs with substantive economic restructuring. Moreover, electoral politics preface the short over the long term.

A similar pattern evolves in higher education. Widened public participation trumps institutional differentiation; quality, at least at face value trumps global excellence; and, a centralising pull through enrolment planning tightly coupled to state funding appears to trump academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

How do universities in the South African late post-colony respond? A feature of this early period is a mix of responses: on the one hand concerns for stature drives collective isomorphism and mission drift, while ambition coupled with historic cultural capital drives the creation of global models of excellence. Finally a new young and ambitious set of institutions draw on their reserves to carve out a new trajectory of global excellence.

12:45–14:00

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All welcome!

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