

Human Resources Development

The New Priority Area (NPA) focusing on Human Resources Development (HRD) was established towards the end of 2000. It resulted partly from the HSRC's scan of user needs over the past year, and partly from the South African Cabinet decision in October 2000 to appoint the HSRC as the primary agency for undertaking and managing the research for its proposed **HRD Strategy**. The NPA's establishment was accelerated by a Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology award to the HSRC of an additional R5 million per annum for three years for specified HRD research.

HRD is seen as a cross-sectoral research area, shaped by and impacting on a multitude of government policy domains such as education and training, the labour market, the macro-economy, and industrial and foreign trade. HRD is accordingly one of the most important components of post-apartheid socio-economic reconstruction and development. Pres. Thabo Mbeki himself has identified a national HRD Strategy as a government priority.

NPA staff members, as part of a task team, assisted the Departments of Education and Labour to formulate the initial HRD Strategy document. At the official launch in April 2001, the government confirmed the HSRC's key research support role in this enterprise.

The Cabinet has identified seven priority areas for HRD Strategy implementation over the next two years: the development of adult basic education and training; learnerships; early childhood skills; public sector skills; scarce skills; small, medium and micro-enterprises, and industry-education partnerships. The HSRC's immediate research role will be to monitor and evaluate the implementation of government policy in these critical areas. (Future NPA activities in this regard are dealt with at the end of this section.)

In 2000/01 NPA researchers also collaborated on other projects at provincial, national and international level. As part of the debate on further education demand and provision in Mpumalanga and the North West province, the NPA participated in a series of situational analyses of **technical colleges** to gain a national overview of the subsector. Partners in the project were the Colleges Collaboration Fund and the national and provincial departments of education. The findings guided the reorganisation of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, as set out in the recent Education Ministry report.

Work on the Technical College Responsiveness Project – commissioned by the Joint Education Trust – began in February 2001. The project investigates the responsiveness of technical colleges to the labour market, builds on earlier HSRC research on this sector in South Africa, and involves a tracer study of N3 engineering graduates. Main project beneficiaries are the FET branch of the Department of Education, the

Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa

Nation at Work for a Better Life for All



The HRD Strategy attempts to ensure that we meet the needs of our economy and our democratic order.

– Kader Asmal, Minister of Education; Membathisi Mdladlana, Minister of Labour

education departments of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, the technical colleges in these three provinces, and large-scale employers of technical college graduates – particularly those based in the provinces selected for the study.

The NPA's ability to service client needs was demonstrated in projects involving large-scale surveys and the construction of databases derived from these surveys. In a project commissioned by the Department of Education the HSRC conducted a national survey of **school libraries**. The resultant database and reports will give learners more equitable access to the library and information resources needed to practise targeted skills in the new curriculum.

A major baseline survey of **industrial training** across a range of economic sectors in South Africa for the Department of Labour was also completed. The survey assessed the impact of the national Skills Development Strategy – specifically the levy grant scheme – on skills development/training in the workplace. The findings will help the department concerned and the National Skills Authority gauge the effectiveness of skills development strategies over time.

Informed decisions on education and training policy, planning and priorities require reliable, accessible and compatible education

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and training **management information systems**. The Department of Education accordingly contracted the HSRC to head a consortium to design software that will ensure uniform reporting of activities among institutions at the FET level.

The NPA's research serves the needs of policy makers at local as well as national level. For example, in the report period, a survey of **learner attendance** aimed at reducing absenteeism rates was conducted for the Gauteng Department of Education.

In the general education and training sector, the NPA was once again involved in a repeat of the TIMSS (the **Third International Mathematics and Science Study**). This study had been undertaken in 1995 by the International Association for Educational Achievement to examine the status of education systems worldwide. The aim of the 1998/99 repeat study (TIMSS-R) was to assess developments in the intervening period. The repeat study, involving 38 countries (including Morocco, Tunisia and South Africa in Africa), focused on Grade 8 learners. In South Africa 8 000 pupils from 200 schools took part in the research.

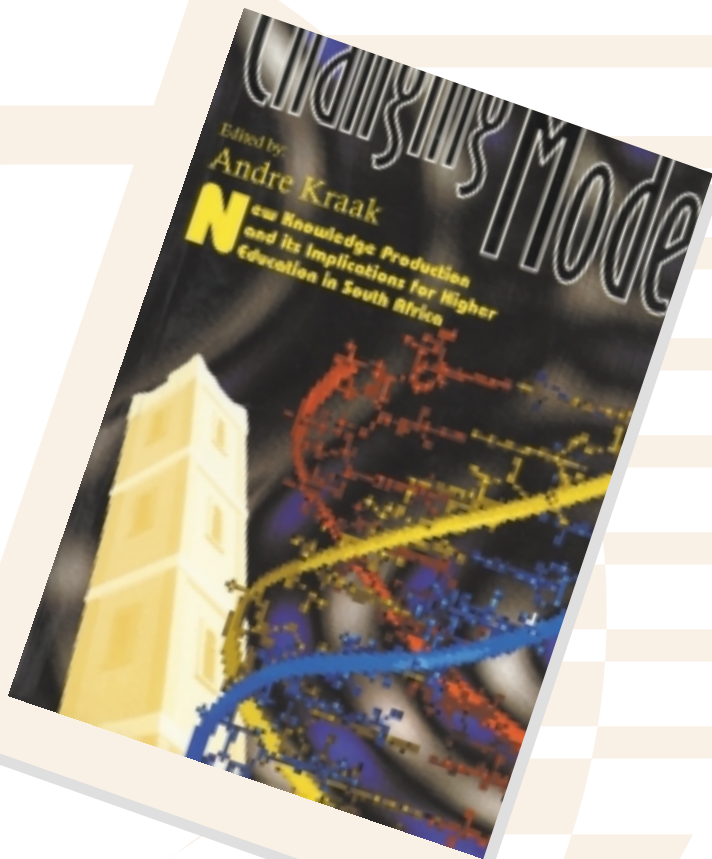
The study ranked South Africa the lowest of all the participating countries in mathematics as well as science. Among other factors, one particularly affecting South Africa may have been that the majority of the learners could not adequately follow the questions or communicate their answers in the languages used for the test (English and Afrikaans – the medium of instruction and the languages currently used for matriculation examinations).

A project on the linked processes of learner migration between schools and the **deracialisation of schools** in South Africa was also completed. The project analysed demographic trends in learner enrolments following the end of formal racial segregation in schools, and paid particular attention to ways in which racially integrated schools respond to issues of race, language, religion and culture.

The USAID-funded District Development and Support Programme (DDSP) reflects a commitment of the South African and USA governments to support the provision of high-quality basic education to all learners. The NPA administered the baseline study for a DDSP project in the Ulundi educational district of KwaZulu-Natal. In the **Mthonjeni** project a consortium of service providers – including the HSRC – will provide training and capacity building to school-based educators and district officials in this region over a period of three years.

The HSRC once again supported the **Expo for Young Scientists** which enables young people to exhibit their work in science technology and mathematics. The Expo thus promotes interest in these fields among the country's youth and also benefits educators and learners in outcomes-based education.

At the invitation of the NPA, Prof. Michael Young (a leading education and training scholar from the University of London) was the keynote speaker at an HSRC **round table discussion** in October 2000. Several South African education policy analysts and senior Education Department officials also took part in an evaluation of the development and implementation of education policy in South Africa over the past decade. The dialogue is encapsulated in a collection of papers due for release in July 2001.



In addition to published research outputs in professional journals and reports, NPA staff members also contributed to the publication of two **books** entitled *Changing modes: New knowledge production and its implications for higher education in South Africa* and *The recognition of prior learning: Power, pedagogy and possibility. Conceptual and implementation guides*.

Regarding **future** plans, numerous research projects are expected to emanate from the HRD Strategy. The NPA will act as a centralised information clearing house for the Strategy, and will in particular add value to Management Information Systems (MIS) already set up in the Departments of Education and Labour, as well as at Statistics South Africa.

The NPA will also undertake various medium to long-term research tasks such as:

- Improving the integration of MIS databases – specifically those dealing with education and training, and with labour market and employment conditions.
- Doing new qualitative and theoretical research on the quantitative MIS data to yield more detailed information on HRD conditions on the macro, meso and micro-levels.
- Producing and disseminating secondary analyses of the accumulated cross-sectoral data.

These activities will give rise to a much larger and intellectually richer HRD research community in South Africa. The HSRC and its research partners, as well as scholars from the higher education sector, will begin to use the new HRD data for ongoing research. Such a facility is currently lacking in the National System of Innovation.

In addition to its HRD research, the NPA is engaged in two further large-scale studies. In the first, the Ford Foundation has commissioned the NPA to research private higher education and training. This will comprise a qualitative study of several institutional "types" operating in a sector about which very little is known.

The second project entails an examination for the Department of Education of the factors affecting the choice behaviour of secondary school learners who consider entering higher education. A survey of Grade 12 learners in 150 schools in all nine South African provinces will be followed up by a second survey the following year on the study choices of the same learners who are registered for higher education programmes.

The Joint Education Trust has requested the NPA to establish the relationship between learner achievement results and socio-economic factors as an extension of the Assessment NPA's Quality Learning Project in all nine provinces in South Africa. This project will involve innovative GIS mapping techniques and the intensive use of national census data and other databases. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to the sociology of education in South Africa.

Finally, through the Second Information Technology in Education Study, the NPA will participate in an international comparative project on information technology in schools.

ENQUIRIES

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