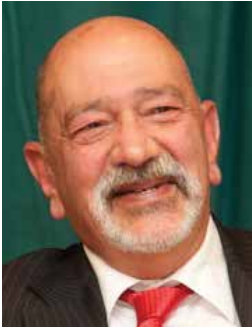


The idea of a University



FRANCIS ANTONIE is the Director of the Helen Suzman Foundation. He is a graduate of Wits, Leicester and Exeter Universities. He was awarded the Helen Suzman Chevening Fellowship by the UK foreign Office in 1994. From 1996 to 2006 he was senior economist at Standard Bank; thereafter he was director of the Graduate School of Public and Development Management at Wits University. He is the founding managing director of Strauss & Co.

*This edition of **Focus** explores issues which currently confront Universities in South Africa. Our starting point is the great tract **The Idea of a University** by John Henry Newman. With his background at Oxford and, later, with his involvement in the establishment of the University of Ireland, he was keenly aware of issues of marginalisation and religious and ethnic differences. Issues which we also face in contemporary South Africa. Nor did questions of finance escape him.*

We begin with **Cheryl de la Rey's** article which addresses the changing idea of a university. She draws on both Newman's work and Wilhelm von Humboldt's principles, and she self-consciously follows the 2000 report by Boulton and Lucas when she poses the question, What are Universities for? She points out that Universities have been shaped by adaptability and flexibility and that 'at pivotal historical moments the very idea of a university is subject to change.'

Adam Habib is especially concerned with the problem of accelerating transformation. Wits University is obviously the focus of his concern, and he spells out in some detail the strategy which Wits has developed in order to accelerate transformation, thus ensuring an inclusive and competitive institution. Eight specific initiatives are identified which no doubt will be contested by different constituencies.

John Laband is concerned with the Humanities within South African Universities. This concern is backgrounded by the problem of toppling statues and book-burnings. Laband is especially concerned about the implications for the Humanities in our Universities with their avowed commitment to multiculturalism, and he raises the question that attacks on one group's cultural patrimony cannot be overlooked. He cautions that this may very well turn the former oppressed into the new oppressors.

Peter Stewart is also concerned with the problem of the Humanities in South Africa's Universities. He extends his concern to consider the problem of censorship and academic freedom. He traces the history of censorship from Apartheid South Africa to the present time and he sketches out why he believes that the ANC government has an appetite for censorship. His critique brings into sharp perspective the amendments to the Film and Publications Board Act and the Protection of State Information Bill. How will these developments impact on Academic Freedom?

Kameel Premhid reflects on the state of the Humanities and Sciences at Universities. He brings a comparative dimension to our discussion and to the

problem of the 'disfiguring of higher education.' He raises the question of assessing the quality of academic research and he urges that an accommodation be forged in which Universities maintain their academic character, while at the same time they be subjected to the positive aspects of market forces.

Elizabeth de Kadt focuses on the challenges of undergraduate education. It is both retrospective and prospective. The challenges which she identifies range from teaching and learning, the high levels of drop-out rates for students, the tension between research and teaching and learning and, crucially, the problem of inadequate funding. She puts forward three recommendations which concern the need to explore the new educational technologies, which will take in distance learning or at least in a distance learning component. She also urges that private higher education institutions could be allocated a greater role. Finally, improving graduate output with a concomitant education in the number of years that the majority of students spend in undergraduate education would thus allow more students to be accommodated.

Belinda Bozzoli argues that that the original design of the quality control system of the curricula of Universities was a guarantor of autonomy as it operated at a distance, thereby protecting the Universities from direct government interference. It is that guarantor of autonomy which has gone and which is worrying, leading government to ever greater interference in the academic life of Universities.

Elias Phaahla who is concerned about transforming the socio-academic space in the University, recounts personal experiences at two former white universities with starkly contrasting cultural heritages.

Anwar Mall provides us with a personal narrative of an educational journey. His focus is also on transformation, but of a particular type. For Mall, education must be transformative for it to have any true value. What he seeks is a revolution of the mind – a fundamental change in consciousness which empowers our learners to function as citizens and not subjects, and which repudiates any claims to ownership of knowledge by any group, be it African or European. John Henry Newman, I suspect, would have been much taken by this observation.

We end with reviews by **Charles Simkins** of Herbst and Mills' *How South Africa Works*, and by **Raphael de Kadt** of RW Johnson's *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*