BRITISH COUNCIL

Environment for Transnational Education Partnerships and UK Qualifications: Challenges and Opportunities

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South Africa and the UK

Findings and recommendations from primary research

Part of Going Global Partnerships

Contents

1. Introduction

This report considers the opportunities and challenges regarding the further development of collaborations between higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK and South Africa. These include the joint provision of programmes from undergraduate to doctoral level. The British Council is keen to encourage greater collaboration that is consistent with South African national policies and plans, and higher education sector aspirations, priorities and goals.

The report aims to provide a better understanding of the environment for transnational education (TNE) partnerships. To this end, a review of government, regulatory and higher education policy documents in the post-apartheid era was undertaken. Media sources and scholarly articles were also reviewed. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted online with higher education stakeholders representing both countries, but all based in South Africa. An additional interview was carried out through email correspondence. The interviewees represented sector agencies, senior academic staff, and partnership managers. Interviews focused on the challenges and barriers to further TNE partnerships. A further three responses to an online survey were received.

A further primary source was TNE data from the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR). Data published in 2022 refers to TNE provision in the academic year 2020-21.

Two case studies are included in this report: a partnership between Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Johannesburg, the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators, and Transnet; and the University of Reading's Henley Business School Africa.

2. The current position

During the apartheid years in South Africa, the country's isolation through international sanctions and the cultural boycott ensured that international higher education partnerships did not develop. This began to change once democracy was established in 1994. The Council on Higher Education and the International Education Association of South Africa were both established in 1997.

South Africa is now perceived, within and beyond Africa, as having the best higher education system in sub-Saharan Africa. But it has a graduate unemployment rate of around 28 per cent and an overall youth unemployment rate of 50 per cent. [1] As in a great many countries, this partly reflects a mismatch between the qualifications produced and the labour market skills required.

The universities in South Africa hosted about 40,700 international students in 2019. [2] Between 2015 and 2020, the percentage of international undergraduates in the student body dropped from 5.9 to 3.1 per cent; for international postgraduates the decline was from 15.8 to 12.9 per cent.[3] Most of these international students are from the other 15 Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (Zimbabwe, 10,800 students; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 3,140; Nigeria, 3,000). Students from the SADC countries are treated as home students for purposes of tuition fees and accommodation.

South Africa hosts the third largest number of students on UK TNE programmes in Africa, after Egypt and Nigeria. The numbers are modest: in 2020-21, South Africa hosted 4,720 students on UK programmes. Dozens of UK universities have some level of TNE engagement in South Africa, but half of these students are enrolled at three universities (Reading, Glasgow Caledonian and the University of London) and one-quarter (1,210) were at the Henley Business School of the University of Reading in Johannesburg in 2020-21. The majority of these are MBA students.

Ninety-four per cent of UK TNE programmes in South Africa are delivered online or through 'distance, flexible and distributed learning', in HESA nomenclature. Numbers for validated programmes (first column below) and franchising (third and fourth columns) are much lower.
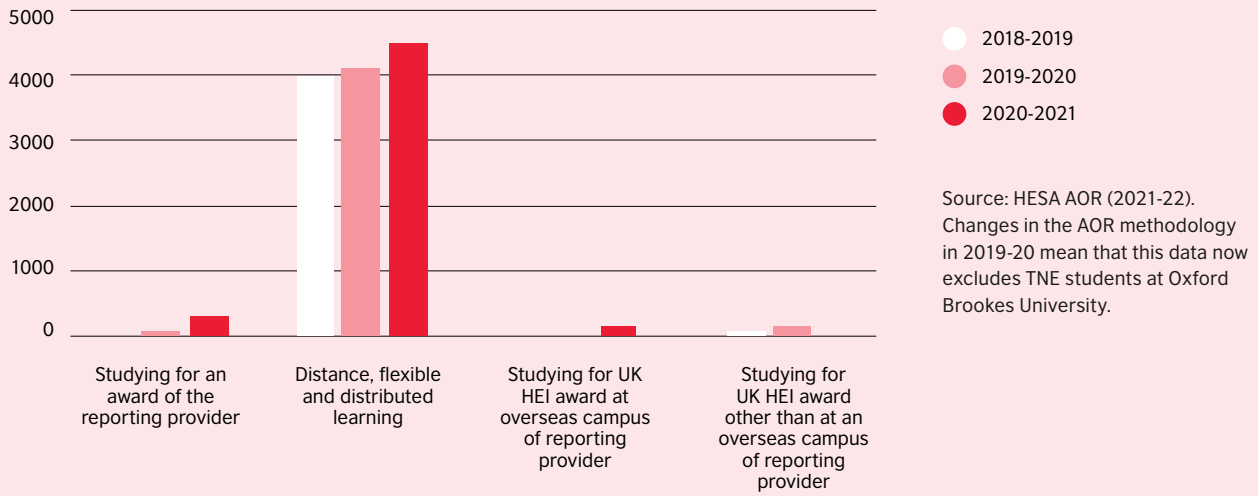
The overall rate of growth of TNE was 5 per cent between 2018-19 and 2019-20 and 9 per cent between 2019-20 and 2020-21. This recent growth in TNE is portrayed in Figure 1.

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1 In the first quarter of 2022, the graduate unemployment rate was 33 per cent for those aged 15 to 24 and 22 per cent for those aged 25 to 34 years. The overall youth unemployment rate was 64 per cent for those aged 15 to 24 and 42 per cent for those aged 25 to 34 years. The overall national rate was 35 per cent. See Stats SA, 'South Africa's youth continues to bear the burden of unemployment', 1 June 2022

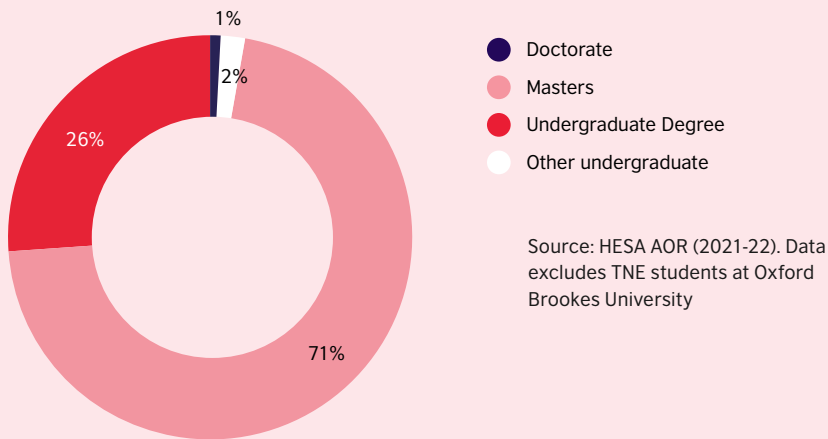2 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Global Flow of Tertiary-Level students'.

3 Department of Higher Education and Training figures, cited in Quinlan, O. and Singh, T. (2022). 'How can internationalisation regain momentum in South Africa?', University World News, 12 May 2022.

Figure 1: Number of UK TNE students in South Africa, 2018-19 to 2020-21

Legend:
- 2018-2019
- 2019-2020
- 2020-2021

Source: HESA AOR (2021-22). Changes in the AOR methodology in 2019-20 mean that this data now excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University.

The great majority (71 per cent) of UK TNE students in South Africa are enrolled in master's level programmes. Those doing bachelor's degrees constitute 26 per cent, and doctorates 2 per cent (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The level of study of TNE students in 2020-21

Legend:
- Doctorate
- Masters
- Undergraduate Degree
- Other undergraduate

Source: HESA AOR (2021-22). Data excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University

3. Value of teaching partnerships and TNE

The rather modest size of the UK TNE sector in South Africa and its concentration in just three or four institutions suggests that its impacts are localised rather than transformational or systemic relative to the overall higher education landscape in South Africa. But the value can be seen through two case studies of UK programmes delivered in South Africa.

Case study: Henley Business School Africa

Henley Business School, part of the University of Reading, became the first quadruple accredited business school in Africa in September 2021 when it was awarded accreditation from the Association of African Business Schools on top of its triple accreditation from AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) and AMBA (Association of MBAs).

HenleyAfrica has shown remarkable growth over the last 11 years. Although the Henley MBA has been in South Africa for 30 years, it is only recently that HenleyAfrica has established itself as a standalone business school and a leading force in African education. Since 2011, HenleyAfrica grew from a small branch office of five people to a full campus employing 100 staff and over 150 associate faculty. Revenue increased by 1,200 per cent without subsidies or external financial investment. HenleyAfrica now accounts for nearly 70 per cent of the University of Reading's MBA students globally, including the UK. The student body was transformed from 30 per cent black to 85 per cent, and from 20 per cent to 55 per cent women. Henley offers what is probably the largest business school scholarship programme in Africa, giving opportunity to people who have committed themselves to fighting corruption, to positive societal change, and to building African prosperity and equal access. HenleyAfrica is the only business school in the southern hemisphere to twice win an European Foundation for Management Development Excellence in Practice award and has been ranked the number one MBA business school in South Africa for five years running.

The secret of Henley's success in Africa is threefold. First, HenleyAfrica's mission – 'We build the people who build the businesses that build Africa' – drives everything, from the experiential nature of its education to its ability to teach effective management skills, to its focus on care, empathy and building confidence. Henley's approach to Africa is to contribute, not to extract or exploit. Secondly, HenleyAfrica's strategy is based on a systems thinking approach that prioritises purpose, community, and high-level skills in the management of complexity. Finally, Henley's staff are given exceptional opportunities, and all employees at HenleyAfrica have access to free education at any level.

Glasgow Caledonian University work-based programmes in Railway Operations Management

Since 2012, the Railway Operations Management programme has been delivered by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators, and Transnet, a state-owned freight rail, ports and pipelines operator, to employees of Transnet. This work-based programme provides employees a route to bespoke GCU awards in railway operations management, from Certificate to MSc level. UJ has responsibility for the delivery and assessment of modules. Over 1,000 have graduated to date. Positive student and partner feedback sees a sustained commitment to this programme from Transnet, benefiting students and the organisation alike; from the first five (of nine) cohorts, more than half of the graduates gained promotion. Further details of the evaluation can be found in Smith et al. (2021).[1]

4 Smith, C.J.M., Choromides, C., Wright, M and Stewart-Knight, F. (2021). 'Operational impact in a transnational, work-based Railway Operations Management programme through a collaborative approach', in Tsiligiris, V, Lawton, W, and Hill, C. (eds.) Importing Transnational Education: Capacity, Sustainability, and Student Experience from the Host Country Perspective. Palgrave Macmillan.

In terms of challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a quick adaptation of the blended-learning delivery mode that varied by study level. For BSc honours and master's students, the May to September modules in 2020 were switched to purely online, with GCU and UJ module leaders and support staff adapting the typical two-day face-to-face session to a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous sessions and materials. Student and Transnet feedback on this was positive, and students were able to continue their studies. For the lower-level programmes, new learning was paused until September 2020. Many students had used company IT equipment and internet access to engage with their studies. When working from home under lockdown, some were less able to progress at the same pace; these students were suspended from their programmes but subsequently re-engaged. For others, guidance to support the use of mobile devices for study was developed and shared with students by GCU learning developers. From September 2020 onwards, when covid restrictions in South Africa were eased, a hybrid form of delivery was used: students were physically together with UJ module tutors while GCU academics connected remotely. The partnership between GCU, UJ and Transnet and its adaptability were essential for this to work and ultimately allowed students to continue their learning.

Students benefit from gaining internationally recognised qualifications, awarded by GCU, that support alumni with their career development. Students who wish to continue studies in South Africa must apply for equivalency of their GCU award through the South African Qualifications Agency; graduates have successfully achieved this by engaging with the agency's required process.

Both of these UK TNE programmes are designed to add value primarily to South Africa at all levels: students, institutions and society.

The Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa recognises these benefits of TNE. The increasing acceptance of the positive role of international higher education in the country led to the 'Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa'. Its rationales and goals are discussed in the next section.

4. Overview of the international collaboration policy landscape

The international collaboration policy landscape in South Africa can best be understood through a landmark document, the 'Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa' of 2019.[5] This document marks the first articulation of a national strategy dedicated to higher education internationalisation in South Africa, and it outlines its rationales and goals.

4.1 Policy overview

Some earlier official documents – for example, from the Council on Higher Education – expressed a highly cautious or even dubious view of foreign providers in the context of trade liberalisation under GATS, which would 'imply a loss of sovereignty and steerability of the national sector by the state and HEIs themselves'. South Africa, in common with some other developing nations, saw itself as at risk of being 'overwhelmed by foreign providers of education'.[6] Transnational education was characterised by the Council on Higher Education in 2004 as 'often motivated by profit'.[7]

Other countries take a similar stand against what is perceived to be the commodification of higher education; among the risks noted by the government of South Africa in 2003 included the potential to undermine the government's efforts to transform higher education, the homogenisation of academic approaches and corrosion of the collective knowledge base, the erosion of the 'public good' mission of higher education, 'ethical and legal problems arising from trade that is not yet mature and therefore may display inadequate preparation, short-term gains and under-investment on the part of transnational providers', and the proliferation of foreign providers of 'dubious quality' whose recruitment strategies aimed at particular student segments would impede equity goals.[8]

5 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2019), 'Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa'. It came into effect in 2020.
6 Council on Higher Education (2004), 'South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy', November 2004, p225.
7 Ibid, p212
8 Ministry of Education (2003), cited in Council on Higher Education (2004), op cit, pp222-3.

The 2019 Policy Framework reflects a changed worldview, which is more welcoming of the internationalisation of higher education (HE) while retaining a clear eye on the potential risks arising from collaborations and their compatibility with the policy agenda of a postcolonial developing country, 'in which internationalisation is still characterised by […] collaboration with the global north' and where the higher education curricula reflect 'the colonial origin of the country's HE system'.[9]

The Policy Framework expresses rationales and goals seen in other countries: enhancing the reputation and quality of higher education at home; international research collaboration to increase knowledge production and innovation; positioning the higher education system to be 'competitive in a globalised world'; attracting the best and brightest to South African universities; enhancing bilateral, multilateral and regional cooperation in higher education; enhancing higher education's contribution to the public good; and addressing global challenges. [10]

The Policy Framework requires that higher education institutions develop their own internationalisation strategies. These must 'bear reference to the rationale and principles set out in the Policy Framework', 'enhance measurable quality benefits', 'take cognisance of national strategies and priorities', and mitigate against risks such as brain drain. They must also set their own targets for internationalisation and include them in Annual Performance Plans for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).[11]

Because TNE involves programme mobility, it is often characterised as responding directly to the concern over brain drain. The two case studies presented here are consistent with that, and in their provision of skills needed in South Africa, they appear to adhere to the spirit and the letter of the Policy Framework. This is in spite of the fact that 'transnational education' does not appear by name in the document. Several delivery modes associated with TNE are addressed, however (see Section 5, Challenges).

9 Jooste, N. and Hagenmeier, C. (2022), 'Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa: A Compass for Comprehensive Internationalisation?', Journal of Studies in International Education, July 2022, p8. .

10 DHET, 'Policy Framework', pp20-2.

11 Ibid., pp28-9.

Interviewees pointed out, however, that many HEIs fail to see and connect their activities to the local context and instead provide students with qualifications relevant for an international career. This is perceived in South Africa as neo-colonial resource extraction that deprives the country of its talent.

This helps to explain why the claim that internationalisation does not automatically benefit the country was stated directly in interviews. The 2019 Policy Framework also reflects this; its assumption is rather that past inequalities must be addressed in formulating policy for a democratic South Africa.

4.2 Next step for the Policy Framework

It is recognised in South Africa that an updated Policy Framework that fully addresses the role of online and distance learning is required. The release of the Policy Framework coincided with the start of the pandemic and, because this onset signalled a global shift to more online and hybrid provision, some interviewees stated that the Policy Framework was out of date as soon as it was released.

Perhaps surprisingly for a country in which almost all TNE is delivered online, the Policy Framework says simply that 'South African higher education institutions offering online programmes will be guided by the relevant policy on online learning'. A similar form of wording in an earlier draft of the Policy Framework was criticised by Universities South Africa as being insufficiently enabling. [12]

A DHET policy document from 2014 on the 'Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities' simply notes that 'university education is a public good whose provision in South Africa by foreign institutions or companies must be regulated in accordance with South African law to ensure that acceptable standards are maintained, students are protected, and the democratic transformation of South African university education is sustained'. [13] What is needed is legislation or at least clear rules specifically to regulate the provision of online education by institutions that do not have a presence in South Africa. [14]

Interviewees acknowledged the British Council's joint commissioning, with the International Education Association of South Africa, of research and data-gathering on the current state of internationalisation across the public universities. This is intended to support DHET and the sector in implementing the Policy Framework. Professor Felix Maringe from the Wits School of Education is the principal investigator. This exercise has been held up by bureaucracy over ethics approvals, at university rather than governmental level (all 26 public universities are required to give the green light and only three had done so by June 2022). Once it is properly under way, however, it seems rational that this research should incorporate an update of the Policy Framework regarding regulations for online and distance learning in the post-covid landscape.

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12 Universities South Africa (2017), 'Submission on the Draft Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa', p8.

13 DHET (2014). 'Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System', No. 535, 7 July 2014, p17.

14 On the various items of relevant regulations, see Ferreira, W.F. and Gold, S.J. (2022). 'Education Goes International - An indispensable guide to online education programs: South Africa', Hogan Lovells, 12 January 2022.

5. Challenges

The clearest hard barrier to TNE partnerships in South Africa is a formal ban on double (or dual) degrees. This restriction is presented, rather than fully explained, in Sections 6.4 to 6.8 of the Policy Framework. This document has been accurately described as a 'hybrid between a framework and a binding policy that contains prescriptive rules'.[15] It places cross-border collaborative programmes into four categories: co-badged; jointly awarded single degrees; consecutive; and double (or dual) degrees. The first three types are permitted; double degrees are perceived differently and in fact are described in the Policy Framework as the 'antithesis' of collaborative qualifications, as demanding less intellectual effort than joint or standalone qualifications, and as undermining the integrity and quality of learning.

Interviewees explained this disapproving view variously as a perception of getting something for nothing or receiving two degrees without meaningful collaboration ('double-dipping'). They expressed a certain bemusement over the restriction, but neither supported nor criticised it. It was noted that a few South African universities had been offering double degrees and were therefore affected by the ban (examples are Wits and Stellenbosch). The possibility of the ban causing difficulties regarding contractual obligations to students on double degrees is noted in a detailed review of the Policy Framework, but the ban is otherwise left without comment.[16]

Other challenges mentioned were a lack of ability to afford fees, academic staff turnover and difficulties in filling positions. A crisis in leadership and management was characterised in one interview as one of the obstacles to transformational change towards appropriate internationalisation in South Africa. Time spent on crisis management is a well-known obstacle to strategic action.

As for bureaucracy, international students are often impacted by delays in the issuing of police clearance certificates, which in turn delay the processing of student visas. In 2022 this held up registration for some students and put their funding at risk.[17]

Partnerships can also be affected by bureaucratic delays in quality assurance processes for cross-border programmes, the verification of qualifications by the South African Qualifications Authority, accreditations, and recognition and equivalence of degrees. On the last point, an interviewee described the importance of the accreditation process of the Council on Higher Education in South Africa, and how graduates of one university left with unrecognised degrees and diplomas because the formal protocols had not been followed by the university. Questions over jurisdiction and authority regarding quality control were also said to be partly responsible for the ban on double degrees.

15 Jooste and Hagenmeier, op cit., p7.
16 Ibid., p15.
17 Quinlan and Singh, op cit.

5.1 Soft barriers

In terms of perceptions, the biggest challenge to TNE delivered locally may be concerns over safety and security in a society with a high level of violent crime. This perception was acknowledged by South African interviewees, although hard evidence is lacking on whether this adversely affects the willingness of foreign institutions to engage more actively in TNE that involves presence on the ground. It was pointed out that perceptions are usually worse than reality in such cases, and that the risk of violence is quite confined geographically.

As for perceptions from elsewhere in Africa, interviewees noted the emergence of xenophobia in South Africa, or 'Afrophobia' directed against incomers from other African countries. This problem appears to have economic (job-related) foundations. Although this was not seen as an actual problem on campuses, it was characterised as a factor that would put Africans off from coming to South Africa to study. One interviewee claimed it is an issue that 'weighs heavily' in the minds of prospective international partners.

The fees protests in 2015-16 led to a pause in international recruitment for undergraduates in at least some universities, but it was noted that the impact of covid was similar in that regard.

Another soft barrier, which is developed more fully in the 'decolonisation' section below, is the perception of the knowledge system of the Global North as powerful, reliable, valid and 'tried and tested' as the basis of a curriculum. Such a perception, it was said, developed over a long period of time, during which 'Global South knowledge systems became peripheralised and almost extinct'. Concrete examples were given – for example, relating to climate predictions. This inequity, in regard to whose knowledge holds validity, can serve as a barrier to international partnerships in the minds of those South Africans who wish to transform the higher education system along decolonised lines.

It was said in an interview that there is no difficulty regarding the recognition of UK degrees in South Africa because they carry prestige. But there is a more subtle difficulty in that UK degrees reflect the 'western canon' and South Africa has not yet reached a stage at which there is a consensus on what to replace it with.

An overarching aspect of the landscape of collaborations in South African higher education is the continuing and implicit tension between the ideals of internationalisation (which may reflect a Eurocentric worldview) and the more Africa-centric ideals of a postcolonial, post-apartheid society. As noted in a recent article, many aspects of internationalisation in South African higher education are influenced by the broader African context, but 'funding for […] international activity, especially mobility and capacity development projects, is largely dominated by North American and European funding sources'.[18] This and other tensions are explored in the discussion of the decolonisation narrative below.

18 Quinlan, O. and Singh, T. (2022). 'How can internationalisation regain momentum in South Africa?', University World News, 12 May 2022.

5.2 The decolonisation discourse in South Africa

Interviewees attested to the highly politicised nature of higher education in South Africa. This is reflected in both policy-making and the public discourse. It was said that South Africa is a 'policy-dense' country: 'there is a policy for everything,' but real epistemic transformation in higher education remains elusive. The 2015-16 fees crisis and protests were seen as a missed opportunity for such a transformation.

What 'real transformation' means is tied closely to the discourse on decolonisation in South Africa. The centrality of decolonisation in shaping the future of higher education in South Africa was a feature of the interviews.

The meaning of decolonisation is itself contested in South Africa [19] – unsurprising for a concept with a breadth of applications. With that caveat, decolonisation can be understood as the process of freeing a people or area from colonial status – i.e., from the status in which a culture (a body of knowledge and practices) was marginalised or displaced by the imposition of another. At the level of cultural discourse, decolonisation is a process of 'unlearning' the disqualification of non-western knowledge and reclaiming it as valid. Decolonisation is achieved through direct action and by prioritising the voices of those people who were marginalised. It is both attitude and practice – 'a tool to address the imbalanced nature of North-South partnerships.'[20]

The discourse has a long reach that touches on, for example, the issue of 'developmental cooperation'. In the decolonisation narrative, this is characterised as being no different from international aid: both are part of an old paradigm that is Northern-led with Northern funding. Decolonisation was characterised in interview as being **intended** to threaten this status quo.

A submission by Universities South Africa on a draft of the Policy Framework 'recognises that there will from time to time be the potential for tension between internationalisation activities and other policy imperatives (such as Africanisation, decolonisation and employment equity)' but also that 'Africanisation is a necessary part of internationalisation'.[21] This echoes the review of the Policy Framework referred to above, which simply asserts that internationalisation can contribute to the decolonisation of universities and that internationalisation and Africanisation are 'complementary processes'. On the other hand, the prioritising of partnerships in Africa was described by one interviewee as a tension between what universities are expected to do in Africa and the fact that knowledge is everywhere.

The main question for our purposes is whether, or to what extent, decolonisation represents a challenge to TNE partnerships in South Africa. One interviewee thought so and said that the pervasiveness of the decolonisation discourse 'may be holding South Africa back'. A more nuanced position was that a policy so specific on geography was not in the spirit of international organisation.

19 Fakunle, O. (2022). 'Internationalisation and Decolonisation'.

20 Chasi, S. (2020), 'Decolonisation – A chance to reimagine North-South partnerships', University World News, 27 August 2020.

21 Universities South Africa, op cit, p1.

6. Recommendations

- **HEIs** should consider the extent to which their activities in South Africa respond directly to the concerns expressed under the broad decolonisation theme. The perception of a North-South power imbalance and a more instrumental approach to higher education may overshadow programme goals. Developmental cooperation is seen in the same light as international aid: they both belong to an old paradigm in which South African interests and knowledge are perceived to hold less utility and value. Partnership training programmes run by Finland and Flanders were identified as being in the vanguard of responding to decolonisation. The implication is that others are seen as being behind this curve. UK HEIs could benefit by considering new approaches that are more explicit in conveying that they are grounded in a desire to respond to decolonisation.

- **HEIs** provide students with laptops and wi-fi access on campus, but accessing the internet from home remains a challenge for many. Access to IT infrastructure is crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goals. HEIs engaging with South African institutions should seek to redress the digital divide in South Africa.

- The web pages of **HEIs and British Council** South Africa should highlight some existing TNE success stories and draw greater attention to how they fill the skills gaps and respond to South Africa's aspirations.

- In their outreach and public diplomacy activities, **HEIs and the British Council** should stress the congruency of various TNE partnership delivery modes with South African national aspirations. TNE is a rational response to brain drain concerns and can support the decolonisation agenda more widely by constantly validating the role of South African partners.

- The **British Council** might determine the extent to which it is able to help shape the revision of the 2019 Policy Framework. It is recognised in South Africa that the Policy Framework should give more attention to online and distance teaching and learning in the post-covid landscape. The research commissioned by the British Council and International Education Association of South Africa, which is currently in an administrative logjam, could directly contribute to this. The British Council could offer expertise on models of such provision in the UK, especially those under the banner of 'collaborative online international learning' (COIL), that may that respond to South Africa's decolonisation agenda. COIL, which seems often to be often cited in South Africa, is a virtual exchange approach that provides students from different cultural backgrounds with international encounters for cross-cultural competence and awareness.

The approach in the Policy Framework is subtle, and the word 'decolonisation' does not appear in the document. It expresses an 'Africa first' agenda: it requires that HE internationalisation activities must give priority to South Africa's interests. It lists the further geographical order of priority as: the SADC states; the rest of the African continent; the BRICS economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa itself); the global South and emerging economies; and the world beyond. This has been described as a set of concentric circles in which 'preference is first given to initiatives that are aimed at strengthening the South African higher education sector'.[22] Europe is clearly in the outermost circle.

The Policy Framework says that academic freedom is respected but that universities are also expected to consider 'national priorities in foreign relations determined by the government of South Africa'. Many governments expect the same of their universities, but the prioritising of African partnerships is clearly stated in South Africa. In practice it may not be easy to respond to both internationalisation and decolonisation imperatives. Higher education institutions are required to internationalise their curricula in order to 'overcome the limitations inherent in international mobility schemes that remain accessible to a minority of students'. But this 'must not negate curriculum transformation imperatives that higher education institutions in South Africa have an obligation to fulfil'.[23]

This is all highly political, but the tension may be more theoretical than practical: an interviewee noted that they would work with 'whoever has the most cutting-edge stuff, wherever they are in the world,' and that no university will stop its academics if they have a great project going, regardless of location. It is more a case of making an effort to engage with the region, and it is widely understood that 'putting Africa first does not mean cutting ties'.

The decolonisation imperative is not inconsistent with TNE partnerships. But it is clearly an imperative that needs to be met head-on. The manner in which such partnerships are perceived matters more in South Africa than in many places.

As stated in an interview, 'the key to success is to create capabilities that advance the people and the economy of South Africa'. In the years ahead, the overarching challenge that subsumes all others, for the TNE partnerships of UK universities, is successfully and constructively navigating South Africa's drive for excellence in higher education in a way that fits the decolonisation imperative. What is needed is a more equitable and inclusive post-pandemic landscape for international partnerships.

22 Chasi, op cit.
23 DHET, 'Policy Framework', p45.

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20