



Internationalisation in South Africa

The internationalisation of higher education began in earnest in the 1990s, after political reform was announced and especially once peaceful democratic elections were held in 1994, ending apartheid and enabling the country's re-entry into the world community. In those heady days, South Africa transformed from being a pariah state into an internationally admired rights respecting nation and a model for democracy in Africa.

Higher education scholars, long isolated by an academic boycott, were eager to establish contacts and links with colleagues around the world, to attend international conferences, to participate in collaborative research, to have their research published internationally and to contribute to global knowledge production. Universities were quick to realise the many benefits of internationalisation, ranging from opportunities to attract fee paying foreign students and seek wider recognition for South Africa's qualifications, to securing research and development funding from international organisations and forging relationships with African and international researchers so as to bring greater expertise to bear on the many challenges faced by South Africa and Africa.

International offices in universities were created or expanded to manage a flurry of activity involving students, academics and institutions from around the world. The offices began marketing university courses and supporting a rapidly growing flow of foreign students, creating study abroad programmes, and managing international exchanges and linkages. Internationalisation has transformed campuses, with nearly one in 10 students today coming from beyond South Africa's borders and bringing with them new ideas, experiences and cultures. In return, international students experience a sound higher education experience in a diverse and interesting environment for a fraction of the cost of studying in OECD countries.

But internationalisation is about more than numbers of foreign students. It is also about integrating internationalisation into university strategies, activities and management, promoting international cooperation in higher education, supporting students and academics to respond to and be part of a changing world, and including an international dimension into what is taught - 'internationalisation at home'. Today, South African universities and academics have thousands of links, partnerships and exchanges with institutions around the world and across the continent. But much work is still to be done to embed internationalisation into every aspect of university activity, and this is considered to be the next phase of internationalisation in South Africa. Several universities are, however, actively pursuing internationalisation policies beyond the areas of international students and research partnerships.

In line with the autonomy of institutions, the Department of Education has historically been supportive of internationalisation initiatives and has not yet seen fit to regulate this process via policies on internationalisation. However, with the establishment of a new education ministry and the new prioritisation of international activities – specifically in terms of deepening our relations with Africa – it is anticipated that the higher education's internationalisation agenda will be brought far more into focus in future discussions between the sector and the Education Department.



Positioning South African Higher Education for Africa

In 2008, Higher Education South Africa conducted a desktop survey to explore the ways that South African universities are presently connecting with the rest of Africa. The survey covered 12 of the 23 public institutions and provided a fascinating insight into the extent of our involvement on the continent. Much of this material mirrors IEASA's data (see below), but these are some of the interesting highlights.

There are 58 Memoranda of Understanding or similar agreements between the 12 universities and those in Africa. These agreements range from general staff and student exchanges through to the organisation of conferences and workshops, access to scientific and analytical facilities and to direct interventions, like the University of Pretoria's efforts to assist the University of Botswana to build both a medical school as well as future capacity within that university for the fight against the HIV pandemic.

The universities surveyed showed a growing sense of their place within Africa and this is increasingly reflected in what is taught. There appears to be two distinct responses in this regard. The first is to understand involvement in terms of projects confined to a particular discipline within the university. Areas like history and cultural studies lend themselves to a distinct African focus. The second trend is to understand 'Africanisation' as a process that will increasingly impact on every part of the university's functioning.

An example of the latter is evident in the University of Cape Town's approach. In 2007 approximately 16% of the University of Cape Town's total student body (undergraduate and postgraduate) were international students from SADC countries. The presence of such a high percentage of SADC students in the classes means that UCT is developing ways of adapting its curricula to accommodate an increasingly diverse audience. This is also apparent at Rhodes University where there are nine initiatives arising from various departments and which are often infused throughout the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The University of Pretoria has 33 courses that deal specifically with Africa and a further 21 modules on Africa covering a range of courses from cultural history to theology.

In the area of research collaborations within Africa, the universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria stand out. According to the information received, they have focused extensively on African research networks and together have 175 research collaborations with fellow institutions on the continent.

Over 75% of the institutions surveyed are involved in the training of professionals (academics, diplomats etc.) from Africa. Rhodes University, for example, indicates that it is currently involved in 32 training programmes with African counterparts. These take the form of short courses to the running of workshops in other countries. There are also some 13 initiatives where study modules have been jointly developed

between South African and African universities. The curricula of these have been jointly fashioned by the partner universities or they have embarked on a short-term project around a specific need. For example, Rhodes has recently spearheaded the Translate@thon at Makerere University with the occasion of an ICT For Development Conference in Kampala, Uganda. Three hundred students and staff from various departments translated the Mozilla FireFox Web Browser (an open-source equivalent of Internet explorer) into Luganda, one of the local languages.

The richness of these collaborations is not adequately captured in the quantitative data but rather in the countless stories of Africans working together for the improvement of the continent. From the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Master's in Higher Education Management and Leadership in Africa to the Durban University of Technology's work in Uganda on HIV awareness, ethnography and creativity. These are the stories that often pass unnoticed but are still quietly shaping and developing the future of Africa.





International Student Landscape

The number of international students studying in South Africa has grown dramatically since 1994. From 12,600 to more than 64,000 in 2008, nearly 8% of a total of 800,000 students at South Africa's 23 public universities.

International students are represented at every South African university. The country has long been a preferred destination for students from other countries in Southern Africa. This is due to the fact that South Africa is the country, in the region, with the largest, and strongest, higher education system offering a full range of courses and qualifications not always available in nations with smaller university sectors. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training was signed in Malawi in 1997. Article 7 A1 of the Protocol states that "Member States agree to recommend to universities and other tertiary institutions in their countries to reserve at least 5% of admission, for students from SADC nations, other than their own". South Africa reached that target in 2003 and in 2008, 5.7% of the country's student cohort came from the SADC region.

The number of international students has grown dramatically since 1994: from 12,600 to more than 64,000 in 2008, nearly 8% of a total of 800,000 students at South Africa's 23 public universities - according to provisional Department of Education figures. About a quarter of these international students are postgraduates. The choice by a steadily growing number of international students, of South Africa as a place to study, confirms the quality of the country's universities and the international standing of their academics and qualifications.

The country has become the most popular place to study in Africa, and is one of the world's top 20 host nations for American students.

Figure 1 - Increase in student numbers

YEAR	1994	1997	2000	2003	2006	2008
SADC	6,209	7,822	21,318	36,207	35,917	45,718
NON-SADC AFRICA TOTAL	1,521	2,079	4,263	6,664	8,569	9,505
REST OF THE WORLD	4,827	5,268	5,568	7,108	7,673	6,731
NO INFORMATION			14,228	1,447	1,574	1,991
GRAND TOTAL			591,161	717,793	741,383	799,698
%Non South African			7.68	7.16	7.25	8.00

Source: Department of Education (2009). These figures are provisional.

Research hub

South Africa also attracts international postgraduate students and academics, who engage in highly relevant research in their fields, often in collaboration with local scholars with global reputations in their areas of expertise.

The country's setting and leading role in Africa, its strong research universities and its relatively advanced stage of development make it an ideal base for studies aimed at understanding the challenges of developing countries and Africa.

Many factors drive the choices of international students, who numbered 2.9 million in 2006 - a 59% increase over the 2000 figure of 1.7 million global students, according to an OECD report. The factors include geographic region, historical connections between countries, language, the perceived quality of a country's education and its accessibility, affordability and the 'employability' of qualifications obtained.



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Why South Africa?

South Africa is close geographically to most sub-Saharan African countries, and uses English as the primary language of instruction, charges lower fees than many developed nations and has a lower cost of living. It also boasts a large higher education sector that is accessible and offers internationally recognised qualifications.

It is not surprising, therefore, that 71% of international students are from neighbouring SADC countries where English is commonly spoken – 45,718 in 2008, against 15% from the rest of Africa, and 11% from outside the continent.

Zimbabwe is the major 'source' country, sending 39% of all international students – up from 27% in 2006.

The rapid rise in the number of Zimbabwean students accounts for much of the increase in numbers from 2006 to 2008, and has been fuelled by the political and economic crises in the country. The next biggest sending countries are Namibia, with more than 8,000 students in South Africa; Botswana with over 5,000; followed by Lesotho, Swaziland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Mauritius, and Angola. Over 9,500 students from non-SADC African countries studied in South Africa during 2008, slightly less than the

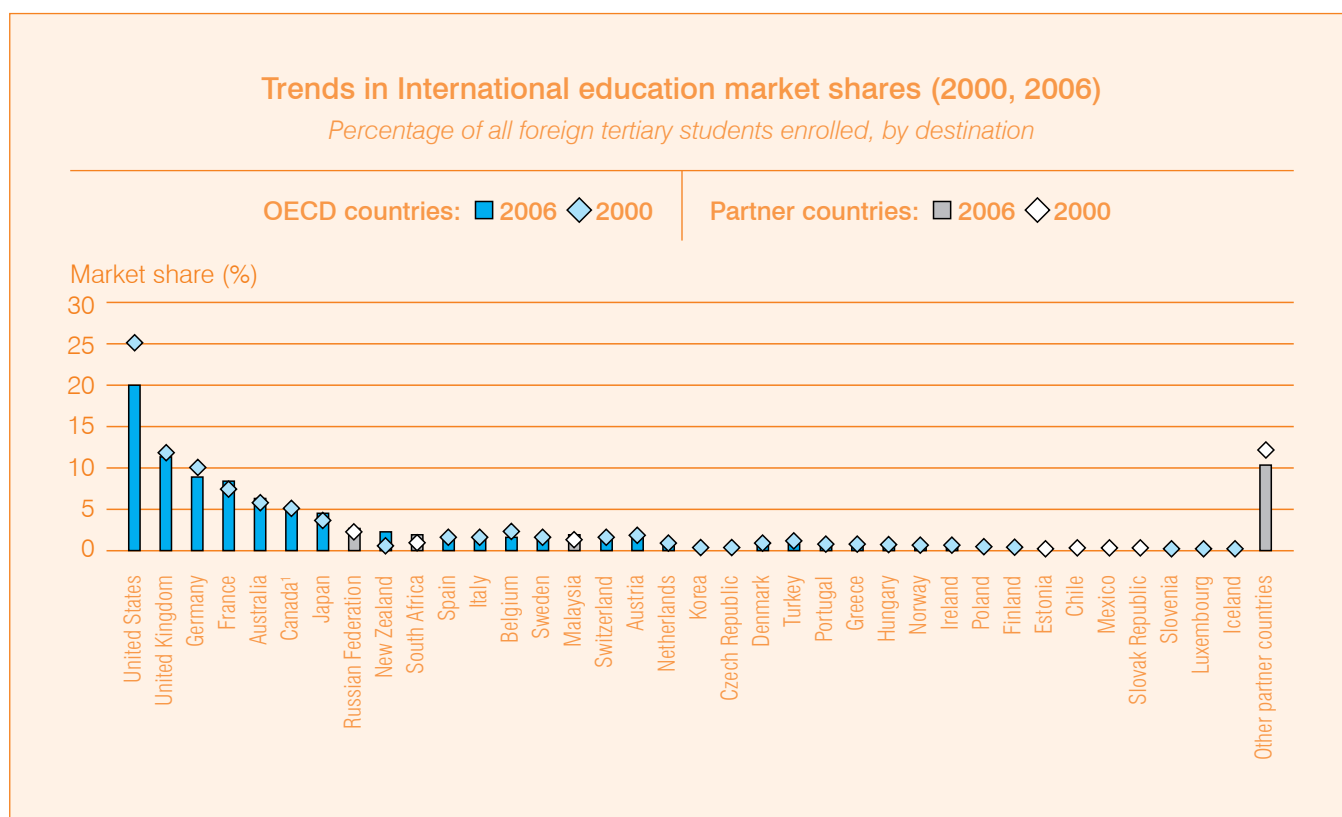
7,000 from the rest of the world. Most these non-African students in South African universities were from Europe, followed by Asia and North America.

In the latest OECD Report 2008 it is also significant to note that South Africa ranks 10th in the world as a preferred destination for international students and is the only African country that features.

As mentioned above, part of the draw factor for South Africa is that English is the predominant language of instruction and that, comparatively, South Africa is still an inexpensive study destination.

Provisional statistics from the Department of Education for 2008 showed that around 40% of international students were enrolled in distance education courses through the University of South Africa (UNISA), a proportion in line with other destination countries, for instance in Europe. The North-West University had the highest number of foreign students at a 'contact' institution, closely followed by the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria. Rhodes University had the highest proportion (22%) from outside South Africa along with UCT at almost 20% of the student population. More than one in 10 students were foreigners at the Universities of Fort Hare, Wits and UNISA.

Figure 2 – Trends in international market shares (2000, 2006) Source: OECD Report 2008

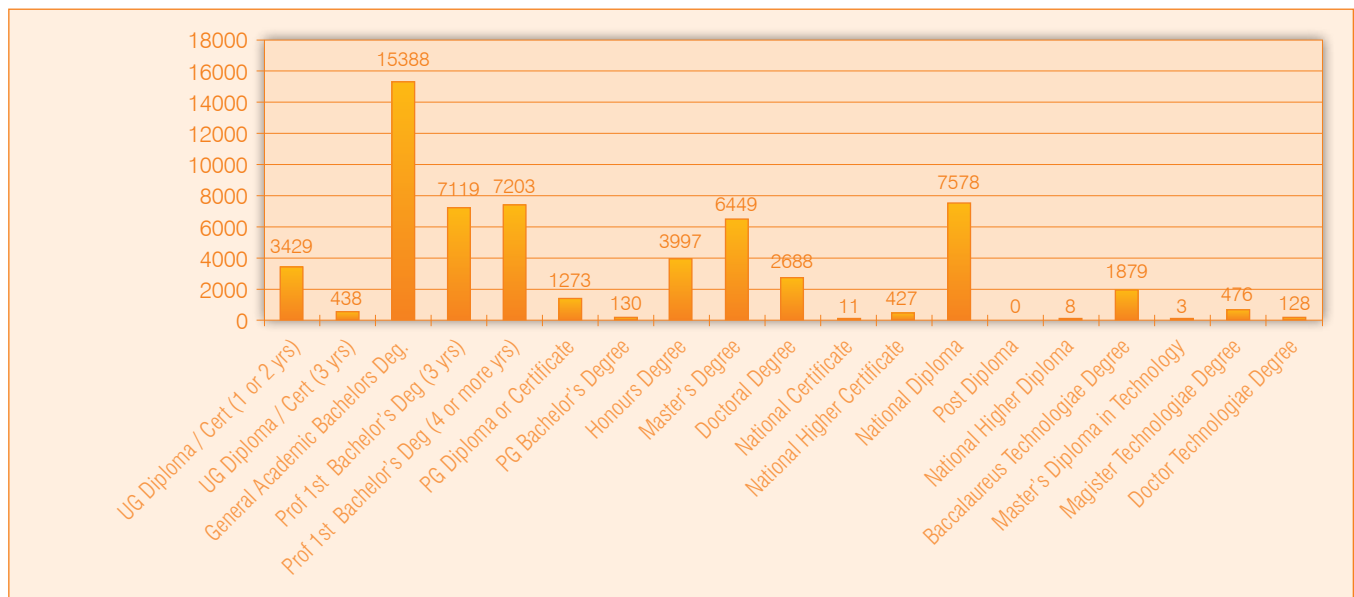


5.7% of South Africa's student cohort, in 2008, came from the SADC region.





Figure 3 - International students and field of study



Benefits for students, and South Africa

For both the outbound student and the host country, the benefits of study abroad are well known and considerable. For destination countries, the fees and living costs paid by foreign students are a form of foreign investment and help to fund higher education. Countries and students benefit from the international relations and links forged between students during their studies.

In South Africa, internationalisation is also viewed as a means of advancing communication and respect among people of different cultures, of developing scholarship, and of strengthening the country's global position.

South Africa also sees accepting students from the rest

of Africa as a way of contributing to the continent's human resource development and helping to stem a crippling brain drain. Africa, which suffers a critical shortage of high-level skills, loses 70,000 highly qualified scholars and experts each year, mostly to developed countries, according to the World Bank. In line with the recommendations of the SADC Protocol, SADC students receive the same government subsidy as local students and are charged the same fees (plus a modest international levy). Several universities also charge home-level fees to students from the rest of Africa. The argument is that by providing quality training to African students, South Africa contributes to the continent's human resource development, and that African students who choose South Africa as a study destination are more likely to remain on the continent than if they studied abroad.



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