



**Optimising student success
in higher education:
The (unique) contributions of the
bursary support provider sector**



Penny Morrell

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for the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP)

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Forum

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The list of member organisations is given in Appendix A.

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
B-BBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BSP	bursary support provider (organisation)
CHE	Council on Higher Education
COVID19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
DGMT	D G Murray Trust
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
ECD	early childhood development
ED	Enterprise Development
FYE	first year experience
HBU	historically black universities
HEI	higher education institution
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HOD	head of department
HWU	historically white universities
IJR	Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
IT	information technology
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
MUT	Mongosuthu University of Technology
NBSPF	National Bursary Support Provider Forum
NEIMS	National Education Infrastructure Management System
NIDS	National Income Dynamics Study
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NPO	non-profit organisation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OMET	Old Mutual Education Trust

PSET	post-school education and training
REAP	Rural Education Access Programme
SAGEA	South African Graduate Employers Association
SBF	Students for a Better Future
SD	Skills Development
SED	Socio-Economic Development
SEL	social and emotional learning
SETA	sector education and training authority
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
TVET	technical and vocational education and training (colleges)
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of the Free State
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
USAf	Universities South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
UYDF	Umthombo Youth Development Foundation
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

ACCESS TO REPORTS

This full report is supplemented by a number of detailed sub-reports which underpin this report. They are listed below and can be found at

<https://www.reap.org.za/pages/reports.html>

<https://nationalbursaryforum.org.za/resource-portal/>

Main reports

- | | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Optimising student success in higher education: The (unique) contributions of the bursary support provider sector: Full report | April 2022 |
| 2 | Optimising student success in higher education: The (unique) contributions of the bursary support provider sector: A Summary | April 2022 |

Sub-reports: Academic outcomes

- | | | |
|---|--|----------|
| 1 | Terms used in the bursary support provider sector when measuring academic outcomes: Towards developing common usage / definitions | Nov 2020 |
| 2 | Guidelines for organisations compiling selected retrospective stats: throughput, time to completion and year-on-year progression rates | Nov 2021 |
| 3 | Academic outcomes of students supported by four bursary support provider organisations | Oct 2021 |

Sub-reports: Psycho-social outcomes

- | | | |
|---|---|----------|
| 1 | Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary support provider sector | Nov 2020 |
| 2 | Eight psycho-social outcomes and their indicators | May 2021 |
| 3 | Matrices for assessing the psycho-social outcomes and indicators | May 2021 |
| 4 | A selection of compulsory indicators for assessing psycho-social outcomes: An example | May 2021 |
| 5 | Measuring psycho-social outcomes and indicators: A Guide | May 2021 |

Sub-report: Employment outcomes

- | | | |
|---|---|----------|
| 1 | Terms used in the bursary support provider sector when measuring employment outcomes: Towards developing common usage / definitions | Aug 2020 |
|---|---|----------|

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research set out to discover what difference the work of bursary support provider (BSP) organisations make to student success at universities¹ – and what their (unique) contributions to this might be. It particularly found that the individual support offered to these largely first generation students is likely to promote academic success and to mitigate dropout – though it also found that the variety of services offered within the sector and the various conditions across universities and the country undermines the ability to make easy comparisons.

The students

The first section of the main report² maps the terrains in which the sector operates. It rehearses the nature of current university students – globally and in South Africa – and describes the challenges faced by first generation students in particular, most of whom come from financially under-resourced settings and who face major adjustments as they enter universities for the first time.

The profile of the approximately nine thousand students supported by organisations in the National Bursary Support Provider Forum (NBSPF) is described. While most are from financially under-resourced households, some are from the ‘missing middle’. The profile of students supported is largely gender balanced, and most are South African as very few organisations support foreign nationals.

Possibly most notably, is that the students supported by these organisations are often not those with the best matric marks so much as are selected for having qualities of perseverance, tenacity etc.

The contexts

The report briefly describes the diverse higher education sector in South Africa in which these students study. It notes the different kinds of difficulties faced by universities, particularly since access has been promoted through the provision of loans – and now grants – through NSFAS.

¹ As BSPs work primarily at universities, the research does not address other kinds of higher education institutions like TVET colleges.

² Available at <https://www.reap.org.za/pages/reports.html>

The role of university education in society is briefly reviewed, suggesting that the BSPs promote both individual and public 'goods'. While being a graduate improves an individual's access to meaningful work, first generation graduates are known to remit some of their incomes home, once they are employed. In addition, some organisations offer their services within an overtly social justice framework, which promotes civic responsibility and community service.

A concern about the advent of 'blended learning' (comprising online and in-person provision) is expressed. It points to the added disadvantages to those whose schooling will not have prepared them for self-managed learning and whose home environments are unlikely to be conducive to learning online. It also notes the loss of enquiry and contestation which are fundamental to critical learning – as well as the loss of exposure to others – that is provided by being on campus.

The unique offering

The different student support services offered by some universities and BSPs are described.

The main difference - heard throughout this research – is the individual attention that BSPs can offer and which the universities mostly cannot. This is said to provide support at times when it is most needed, addressing crises, mitigating loneliness, assisting with problem solving, referring to existing resources etc. - all of which contribute to reducing possible dropout and failure.

The fundamentally supplementary role being played by these small external organisations is noted, however, as they focus mainly on personal support and development, leaving academic support largely to the universities.

The menu of offerings

The research reports in detail on the offerings of seven BSPs who agreed to be key informants. This shows that most organisations offer what each regards as 'full' funding that should cover students' academic needs, housing and personal expenses. Many do so by topping-up NSFAS funding.

The unsurprising finding is that full funding and regular one-on-one support are the centrepieces of the BSPs' offerings and are deemed to be crucial to the difference made. In addition however, a menu of other services allows support to be customised for each student's needs. Some organisations make participation in some activities compulsory, believing that they are fundamental to student wellbeing and success; others leave more discretion with each student.

All seven organisations offer individual mentoring in some form and all have development programmes focussing on various lifeskills, including financial management. They all supplement the orientation offered by the universities. Most monitor academic progress and all refer students to the systems and resources within universities. Most offer some kind of job search skills, though these offerings tend to be quite light. Some also offer medical support and some have funds for transport. The report briefly reviews the obstacles to students accessing these services.

Importantly the research found that BSPs offer these services in a wide variety of dosages and use different approaches and modalities. This difficulty in comparing their effectiveness, then, is compounded by varieties in their funding models, in selection criteria, in the choice of universities and fields they study in which they support students, among others.

A notable gap is that very few BSPs offer information or support about nutrition, which has become an issue in the context of non-catering accommodation in which many first years are housed.

Measuring outcomes

Given that the research question was about what difference the BSP organisations might be making to student outcomes (success), considerable detailed work on measurement was undertaken – measurement of academic outcomes, of employment outcomes and of the thorny issue of psycho-social outcomes.

Academic outcomes

In the past decade, the focus in the higher education sector has shifted from access to success – foregrounding the measurement of throughput and, in some instances, progression rates. These two important measures have been defined differently within and beyond the sector, however, undermining the ability to make comparisons – to show that the extra support makes a difference to academic success. In order to do so, then, a common way of measuring academic outcomes (referenced to national measures where this was possible) was developed for use within the sector.

Four BSPs then undertook a retrospective analysis of their own data using the agreed methods of counting – with some unexpected results, some having lower outcomes than expected. While a comparable national dataset was difficult to access, comparisons with a notionally comparable dataset of NSFAS students suggested that half of these BSP projects obtained better outcomes while the other half may not have. This needs further work to be conclusive however, and recommendations about national data and developing agreed ways of measuring are made so that more secure comparisons can be made.

Employment outcomes

If they are to intervene in the cycles of poverty as some intend, BSPs are increasingly aware of the importance of supporting graduates to access the workplace or income-generating opportunities. Not many BSPs offer this support within their programmes, however, and only a few are accountable for employment outcomes.

Nonetheless, ways of measuring employment outcomes were developed during this research – much of which was about defining levels and durations of work suitable for graduates. No pilots of these tools were conducted, however.

Psycho-social outcomes

Working on measuring psycho-social outcomes was the most innovative part of this research. As the claim has historically been that psycho-social support is what this sector can uniquely offer, finding out the extent of the difference they make – and which bits are the most effective – was a key question, but also the most evasive.

Nonetheless the research undertook to identify psycho-social competencies / outcomes that would both support academic success and be an outcome in their own right, inasmuch as they support employability. Eight outcomes were eventually agreed to following a review of international workplace competencies – and 29 indicators with rating tools were developed. These are being piloted by two organisations; a third organisation is piloting their own set of outcomes and will participate in the conversations about what is possible.

Future sustainability

The research raises the question of how the sector might sustain itself, given current perceptions that undergraduate education is now fully funded by the state. Different sources of funding – including the Socio-Economic Development, Skills Development and Enterprise Development funds – are mentioned, as are suggestions of thinking about operating differently.

While not a new idea, supporting NSFAS-funded students without an offer of additional funding needs further investigation. Increasing reach and reducing costs through decreasing staff:student ratios was also mentioned. These do not comply with the model based on full funding and individual support model, however, and would require a fairly radical re-think.

INTRODUCTION

*'And the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time'.³*

This research process was set up to check some of the assumptions bursary support provider (BSP) organisations hold regarding the impacts they make. It might well confirm what we already know – or may throw new light on long-held views. It has been undertaken in a co-operative spirit of genuine enquiry with a view to reflecting on and strengthening practice. Its purpose has been to find out which aspects of the various forms of support provided to students by BSP organisations make the difference to students and their outcomes – with a view to discerning how best to use resources to optimise student success.

Even if it takes us back to where we started, we hope this exercise allows us to indeed 'know the place for the first time'.

Bursary support provider organisations

'The bursary support provider sector in South Africa comprises a range of organisational forms based in business and civil society.⁴ It includes initiatives of corporate social investment offices (CSIs)⁵, of benefactors and foundations⁶; organisations for-profit⁷ and not-for-profit⁸ are significant players in the sector.'⁹

'All provide material support in various ways as well as elements of 'wraparound' support to students at public universities. In doing so, they may differ with respect to their ultimate objectives - e.g. aiming primarily at high performance / outcomes, or B-BBEE compliance, rather than a social justice imperative. This may affect which students they serve and the nature of the support offered.'¹⁰

³ T S Eliot. 'Little Gidding' from *Four Quartets*.

⁴ This therefore does not include state-funded bursary schemes like Funza Lushaka.

⁵ e.g. HCI Foundation, The Old Mutual Education Trust.

⁶ e.g. Moshal Foundation, Michael & Susan Dell Young Leaders.

⁷ e.g. Career Wise, Excel at Uni.

⁸ e.g. Umthombo Youth Development Foundation, REAP, J B Marks Education Trust Fund, StudyTrust, The Tomorrow Trust.

⁹ Proposal to DGMT: 'Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.' 22 February 2020.

¹⁰ Proposal to DGMT: 'Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.' 22 February 2020.

The National Bursary Support Providers Forum (NBSPF)¹¹ – which has come alongside this research – comprises 23 of these organisations and notionally supports around 9,000 students at any given time. Some organisations have been working in this field for many years – with StudyTrust having been established in 1974 – while some are relative newcomers.

While civil society BSP organisations employ a variety of approaches to promoting student success, this is framed by the common assertion that higher education can contribute to shifting poverty and producing employable graduates for various professions and the economy more broadly. In promoting opportunities for young people from financially disadvantaged households it is also about promoting equity, recognising the struggles of first generation students in higher education systems around the world.

‘We’ve all been conditioned to an extent, to believe that the only way to access meaningful opportunities is through attaining some sort of post-secondary schooling education. I also think that labour markets (for the most part) reflect this trajectory. Thus, I’d have to say that I study because it’s a means for me to access meaningful opportunities and to gain credibility.’

- Male, 24 years old
(Voices Unite Youth Development Report, p 143)

The research question

All BSP organisations want to get as many of their students to graduate in as short a time as possible – sufficiently prepared to engage in a post-university world. The overarching question of this research is how much (and what kinds of) difference these organisations make to making this possible – and what their unique contributions to student success may be.

An interest in measuring impact is not a new one – but how to do so is not always immediately evident. In their in-depth 2020 report, local organisation Lucha Lunako comments that

‘developing a framework for youth development measurement and reporting with a few key measures that are agreed and adopted across the ecosystem will foster benchmarking, best practice sharing and provide consistent data and comparable results. This furthermore allows programmes to scale and replicate success at a manageable price point.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020).

It is exactly to develop measures to be adopted across the ecosystem which is one of the aims of this research.

¹¹ The list of members is given in Appendix A.

This research project has

- reviewed the backgrounds of bursary-receiving students as a reminder of the obstacles that some face;
- reviewed the higher education sector in which they study, and some of the current issues within them;
- identified various meanings of success, and the challenges of measuring evidence;
- described what wraparound support comprises and the importance of psycho-social support in particular;
- surfaced various resources offered and approaches and modalities used by some BSPs;
- differentiated between the support roles that can be played by HEIs and by BSPs;
- developed common ways of measuring academic outcomes;
- undertaken an analysis of four organisations' retrospectively compiled data, comparing it with national data;
- developed common ways of measuring employment outcomes; and
- developed an approach to measuring psycho-social outcomes which is currently being piloted by two organisations; and finally
- summarised the findings and made recommendations about ways forward.

Limitations and focus

As the majority of the bursary support provider organisations we are considering work almost exclusively with university students, our use of 'higher education' – and even 'post-school education' – refer only to universities and universities of technology – which we refer to as higher education institutions, or 'HEIs'. We do not include consideration of the substantial TVET or community college sectors. While there will be some overlapping considerations, there are many that are particular to those sectors and deserve focussed attention.

In addition, the default is to publicly funded HEIs. One organisation has supported students at smaller private universities – but the director notes that the experience was not good and they are expensive.¹²

Our references to 'students' are also informed by the sector's work - which is largely with undergraduate students. While there are a few postgraduates, our concern is with those doing their first qualifications.

We use the term 'learners' for those at school.

¹² Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach has been used – with a heavy emphasis on empirical data obtained from the sector itself. While this runs the risk of reflecting back to the sector its own realities, this has been mitigated by an appetite for critique and hard-nosed evidence within the Forum (our main supplier of informants), our own interest in robust and critical enquiry, as well as the external location of the main researcher.

Sources

Sources – listed in Appendix B – comprise key informant interviews, focus groups discussions, working groups, surveys. The literature consulted, both published and ‘grey’ (i.e. of the organisations or national bodies) are listed in the References section.

Key informant interviews and focus group discussions

BSP sector

The primary key informant interviews and focus group discussions have been with directors and some senior staff of the BSP organisations, drawn from the National Bursary Support Provider Forum. In response to a request for volunteers seven directors / senior staff agreed to be interviewed

- Monique Adams (Career Wise)
- Jodi Bailey (Moshal Scholarship Program)
- James Donald and Stacey Rontiris (Tomorrow Trust)
- Murray Hofmeyr (Study Trust)
- Russell Davies and Emma Francis (Rural Education Access Programme - REAP)
- Leonie Sampson (Old Mutual Education Trust - OMET)
- Gavin MacGregor (Umthombo Youth Development Foundation)

These were carried out in April and May 2020 (in early lockdown), with one in October 2020. A brief profile of each is given in Appendix C.

Each organisation completed a questionnaire prior to the interview; each interview lasted about four hours and was held over two sessions. Their responses were inserted into a framework which included all the questions to be pursued – to which comprehensive notes taken during the interviews were added.

A sub-report was written in March 2021 summarising this information: ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff’. It is referenced in this main report where a summary of the findings is included.¹³

¹³ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

An on-line focus group discussion was also held with six BSP directors - to answer three questions.¹⁴ They were the same informants as above, barring OMET.

HEI sector

The second set of key informants were directors and practitioners from student support functions at seven HEIs – namely DUT, NMU, UCT, UFS (and USAf), UKZN, UWC and Wits.¹⁵ The purpose was to find out what they thought BSP organisations might best do to contribute to student success in their institutions – including but beyond the upheavals of the COVID19 context. A sub-report was produced on ‘Views of seven universities on the role of bursary support providers in promoting student success’ (August 2021)¹⁶ – and again is cited in this report.

Working groups

Three substantial working groups were convened consecutively in 2020 /early 2021. They focussed on how to measure academic outcomes, employment uptake and psycho-social outcomes, and comprised volunteers from the NBSPF who offered their expertise – summarised here and listed in Appendix B.

Measuring academic outcomes	Measuring employment uptake	Measuring psycho-social outcomes
Career Wise	Career Wise	
Moshal	Moshal	Moshal
REAP	REAP	REAP
Students for a Better Future		
Tomorrow Trust		Tomorrow Trust
Umthombo	Umthombo	Excel at Uni Make a Difference (MAD) Leadership Foundation

¹⁴ The questions were:

1. If the NBSPF organisations are positively impacting completion, are you also impacting quality? What does this look like? What difference does it make to the students’ prospects? To society?
2. Are there institutional contexts / conditions in which your efforts cannot hope to make much difference (e.g. where there are very few referral services and /or the university is frequently in disarray etc)? Should NBSPF organisations contain themselves to working largely in contexts where you are likely to be able to make a / a big difference – or should organisations (also) work in more challenging contexts?
3. Should the NBSPf members increase their reach? Is there an appetite for doing so?

¹⁵ Durban University of Technology (DUT), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of the Free State (UFS), Universities of South Africa (USAf), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of the Western Cape (UWC) and University of Witwatersrand (Wits).

¹⁶ Sub-report: *Views of seven universities on the role of bursary support providers in promoting student success. August 2021.*

Through examining various ideas, current usages and practices, quite significant differences within the sector were surfaced. Nonetheless each working group ultimately reached agreement on the ways terms that would be commonly used and how various factors might be measured going forward. In so doing, some of the participating organisations reflected on, and shifted, some of their current practices – effectively implementing some of the research findings.

Each working group produced a document reflecting the detailed agreements. In the case of academic outcomes (Working Group #1), we also produced a guideline on what should be included in each calculation. Working Group #3 working on psycho-social outcomes included developing actual outcomes, indicators tools for measuring and ways of recording.

Piloting the methods developed

Two of the three pieces for which we have developed measuring ‘tools’ have been put to the test.

Academic outcomes

Four volunteer organisations undertook an intensive exercise of retrospectively reviewing their student outcome statistics. This entailed extensive cleaning and re-fashioning of their data so that it could be commonly analysed. It was a substantial undertaking, generously executed.

The report has been anonymised for public distribution - though the participating organisations are aware that they are identifiable to organisations within the sector.

The analysis was presented to a meeting of the whole Forum on 21 October 2021. Relevant points are included in this report as useful.

Psycho-social outcomes

At the time of writing, three organisations¹⁷ are piloting two of the eight outcomes developed to measure psycho-social outcomes, while a fourth organisation¹⁸ is piloting all eight. This entails ensuring that the outcomes are included in their programme designs, in order that they measure what they influence.

¹⁷ Shoprite, Students for a Better Future, and Umthombo Youth Development Foundation.
¹⁸ REAP.

Employment outcomes

Measuring employment uptake remains a piece of work to be pursued more concertedly going forward, given that economic productivity is an ultimate outcome of the sector. It is not an outcome of this process.

Surveys

Alumni: what made a difference

An on-line survey was conducted in July 2020 among alumni of nine of the NBSPF member organisations who volunteered to participate.¹⁹ It was designed to assist the sector 'better understand which of our offering to students actually make a difference'. 250 alumni responded, following an extension of time after an initial poor response. In doing so we are aware of possible skewing in the results: that they are necessarily graduates who completed their degrees while being supported by an BSP organisation – added to which those who choose to respond may be more well-disposed to their BSP.

The separate comprehensive report compiled in September 2020 by the researcher – 'Survey report: Research into wraparound/ holistic support: survey of alumni' – was circulated among the Directors of participating organisations for their comment. There were no substantive comments – other than that alumni are not always easy to access outside of organised programmes like that run by Moshal.

The report is available and summaries are included in the relevant sections is this report.²⁰

Bursary support provider organisations: Lessons from COVID19

A survey of bursary support provider organisations was conducted in July 2020 - three months into the first COVID19 lockdowns – to access lessons regarding how wraparound support might be offered. It asked how the recent experiences might affect how organisations offer their services going forward, once they are able to meet students face-to-face again.

Ten organisations participated: Career Wise, the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation, the HCI Foundation, Moshal Scholarship Program, Old Mutual Education Trust (OMET), REAP, Students for a Better Future (SBF) Foundation, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust and Umthombo Youth Development Foundation.

¹⁹ They were Career Wise, HCI Foundation, Making a Difference (MAD) Foundation, Moshal Scholarship Program, REAP, Students for a Better Future Foundation, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust and Umthombo Youth Development Trust.

²⁰ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020.*

The responses are regarded as provisional, given that circumstances and universities' decisions are unknowable. In addition, some organisations were wanting to consult their students about what works and what does not.

The report is available and summaries are included in the relevant sections of this report.

Existing literature

Published

This research process has only dipped lightly into the extensive literature which exists in the various related fields. We have taken the liberty of assuming readers know about the challenges of particularly first generation youth in higher education and the ways in which the varied quality of schooling adds to the struggles for academic and personal success.

We have therefore only reminded readers of some of the main issues, shamelessly using a few main sources.

- *The South African Child Gauge* which is produced annually by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town. It provides a comprehensive overview of the social determinants of the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the country. We have used the edition published in 2019.
- A 2020 report '*Youth development re-imagined*' published by the South African 'youth lab', Lucha Lunako, which focusses on youth employment.
- Voices Unite Youth Development Report (July 2021) - *A recent survey of South African youth undertaken by Voices Unite*²¹ published in 2021:
'The results contained within this report include detailed statistics, insights and direct quotations from the surveys, focus groups and discussion forum conducted with members of the Voices Unite platform (all aged between 18-34) during the course of 2020... The first ever Voices Unite research report covers a wide range of youth development topics that more than 3,000 Voices Unite members have shared their views on, first running chronologically through primary school, high school and post-school education, and then shifting gears

²¹ 'Voices Unite was conceptualised by In On Africa (IOA) in 2017 and launched as a game-changing digital platform in February 2020, with the overarching objective of unifying the voices of tomorrow's leaders. Through this platform, Voices Unite is rolling out the largest ongoing youth-focused digital research in South Africa, targeting youth in South Africa aged 18-34 and aiming to guide and inform real change. Since its launch, members of the Voices Unite platform have been completing a range of detailed surveys, participating in on-line focus groups, and engaging through the Voices Unite on-line discussion forum. The research presented in this report covers the data and insights collected from our members between February-December 2020. (*Voices Unite Youth Development Report*, p 15.)

to focus on employment, unemployment and entrepreneurship'. (Voices Unite, 2021:84)

In citing the Youth Unite report, it is important to note that while the respondents were mostly from households whose financial circumstances are similar to those supported by the BSP sector, there was a preponderance of respondents living in Gauteng and who were student attending UJ (University of Johannesburg) in particular. A brief profile of the respondents is given in Appendix D. The findings, and comparisons made, must be read with this in mind.

Thandi Lewin and Monica Mawoyo's report on Student Access and Success: Issues and Interventions in South African Universities, published by Inyathelo in 2014.

'Grey literature'

In research like this, the various reports and websites of the bursary support provider organisations, their sister organisations, and those of national bodies, are invaluable. Those referred to are listed in the references section. They may not all have been cited, however.

The researcher's voice

This is not an academic dissertation and, as such, I have taken the liberty of making some statements without references. They are sometimes commonsense knowledge and are sometimes opinions. I hope I have differentiated between the two, but am sure to have shown interests and biases unwittingly.

SECTION A: MAPPING THE TERRAINS

1. WHO ARE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS?

This section briefly rehearses who university students are – both to locate South Africa within the global higher education context as well as to foreground for whom this support is provided, and why.

1.1 Young people around the world

Around the world undergraduate university students are invariably young people – from about 17 years old – who have qualified to attend post-school education. Students are heterogeneous within and across campuses, with diverse reasons for being at university and varied levels of preparedness for being there.

The ‘race’ and class profile of students has changed over the last 40 to 50 years, following the opening of access to universities in various countries. This makes for an increasingly diverse student body which cannot assume common world views and values – and certainly cannot assume that the language of instruction is the first language of all / most students.

In addition, the gender binary has given way to various gender identities – a reality that again textures the student population.

1.1.1 *Life stage*

Most undergraduate students are adolescents / entering adulthood - invariably a time of disorientation/re-orientation and discovery.

The need to conform and belong is offset by risk-taking behaviours; the desire to be seen co-exists with wanting to feel invisible and safe. Hormonal changes, new relationships of all kinds and, for some, being away from home for the first time produce a heady cocktail of insecurity, excitement, anxiety, adventure – to name a few.

1.1.2 This generation of young people - social contexts

Two current social contexts deeply inform the realities of young people internationally:

- technology and social media; and
- identity politics – and, for some, being born into Generation Z.

Technology and social media

There is little doubt that from the advent of Facebook and followed by many subsequent forms of social media, the personal lives of young people are more exposed, at exactly a time when they are trying to work out who they want to be. People's reputations are being profoundly informed by their social media presence which has produced the need to 'perform' oneself in public, with the ubiquitous selfies overriding any sense of privacy. While there are positive aspects of social media, it plays a part in the increase in this generation's depression and anxiety.

While South Africa has some of the most expensive data in the world, even students from poor households have smart phones and operate on social media, if in sometimes limited ways. This in the context in which some people leave school never having worked on a computer and never having sent an email.

Identity politics and Generation Z

The culture of the individual is an increasingly dominant feature of many young people's identities. In its acute form it means that the particularities of one's identity are understood inter-sectionally, with various facets combining to create a niche identity. This has been accompanied by a growing culture of 'offence' – such that any aspect of a person or organisation's identity, or the views they hold, can be offensive to someone else. This has led to a culture of blame, silencing ('cancel culture') and of victimhood – making for precarious social relations.

Resilience and resourcefulness are casualties of these cautions. Without being allowed to test experiences and make mistakes, young people cannot develop a toolbox of abilities, competence, views that help them through the difficulties and conflicts that may well come their way, whether at university or beyond.

University staff are increasingly subject to accusations of insensitivity from students which, unnervingly, includes their calling for material that offends them to be expunged from the curriculum, and for guest speakers whose views they do not like to be prohibited from lecturing / speaking. This is particularly the case at universities in the Global North – but can also be seen at some of the more elite South African universities.

An HEI support staff member interviewed for this research cited Crain Soudien, then-DVC of Transformation at UCT. Commenting on identity formation, he noted that one of the phases in growing up is the ‘moratorium’, a time when things are put on hold as young people (in the teenage / adolescent phase) experiment. He suggested, however, that a lot of people who come from socio-economically stressed contexts do not have that luxury – to experiment, to ask ‘who am I?’. So the whole language of setting their own goals or of self-fulfilment may be quite alien²² – as may be the idea of ‘inter-sectional’ identities.

1.1.3 This generation of young people - wellbeing

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the levels of anxiety and depression among young adults has increased. While this may also be because they report it more readily, around the world the levels of anxiety and depression are reported to have increased with the COVID-related lockdowns which have interrupted many forms of interactive social behaviour and made already potentially isolated young adults even more so – with reported repercussions for their mental health.

In South Africa this is certainly the case – in addition to which there are specific concerns faced by students from financially-poor households whose default concern about how they will support themselves, but also how they will contribute to their families, is exacerbated. This is elaborated on in the section 1.2.6 below.

1.1.4 First generation students

In some countries the proportion of students who are the first members of their families to attend university is more so than others – particularly countries with new immigrants, or histories of exclusion, as in South Africa. Some new immigrants will not have been schooled in the country / education system in which most students have been educated – and English is likely to be an additional language and not their mother tongue.

There is a considerable literature on how to optimise the success of ‘first generation’ students. What is significant here is that a high proportion of current undergraduate students in South Africa are the first members of their families to attend university: 70% of all students are said to have parents who did not attend university²³ – thus making their inclusion a mainstream challenge. In addition they carry the burden of their families’ expectations that they will be successful – as well as that they will support their extended families once they have qualified.

²² University of Cape Town.

²³ Monique Adams. 2019. Overview of the OMT Scholarship Programme 2000 – 2019 citing Bawa and Strydom, 2019.

1.2 Young people in South Africa

South African students come from a widely diverse range of households and contexts. Certainly the profile of students has changed significantly to begin to reflect the demographic 'racial' profile of the country since HEIs began to be more inclusive in the 1980s, and the subsequent post-1994 extension of access, initially through NSFAS loans and more recently through state-subsidised tuition.

In short, then, many of the factors mentioned above are found among South African students although they obviously vary in form and intensity.

Certainly growing up in financially disadvantaged households and settings, and experiencing under-resourced /poor schooling does not prepare many of these first generation students for the range of experiences and challenges they will face when going to an HEI for the first time.

1.2.1 Class and 'race'

Class and 'race', still powerfully present in South African society at large, are a dominant feature of student life in South African universities. While class sometimes acts to mitigate 'race' in some ways, 'race' remains a dominant discourse. This is particularly the case at the more elite, historically 'white' universities (HWUs) like UCT, Wits, Stellenbosch and Pretoria, while the 'racial' profile of students at other HWUs - like the universities of Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal and the NMU (Nelson Mandela University) have changed so significantly that their student profile is dominantly 'black'.

Some campuses, particularly those that were historically 'black', are almost mono-cultural - like the universities of Zululand, Limpopo, Walter Sisulu, Fort Hare etc.

Given that the operational language of the majority of universities is English, with a few having Afrikaans as a parallel language of instruction, the vast majority of 'black' students learn in a language other than their mother tongue. Where this is combined with poor quality schooling and compounded, in many instances, by under-resourced households, first generation 'black' students are at a structural disadvantage – which they and the universities are required to address if they are to succeed.

1.2.2 Household income, poverty and inequality

It is essential to remember the indelible effects of poverty on people's lives. That people overcome them and still 'succeed' in systems often unsympathetic to backgrounds and resourcing is not to be underestimated. Certainly student support staff at HEIs and BSP staff live with the daily challenges of assisting students from under-resourced backgrounds to navigate and survive.

Produced annually by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town, the much-cited *South African Child Gauge* provides a comprehensive overview of the social determinants of the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the country.

This brief review of the conditions which young people bring with them to HEIs by is included here so that it is foregrounded in the deliberations.

Income poverty

The poverty in which many children in South Africa are still raised seems intractable, 25 years after the country's first democratic elections:

'There are glaring racial disparities in income poverty: while 65% of African children lived in poor households in 2018, and 31% of Coloured children were defined as poor, only 3% of White children lived below this poverty line. There are no significant differences in child poverty levels across gender or between different age groups in the child population.' (Hall, 2020b: 222).

And

'Child poverty remains most prominent in the rural areas of the former homelands, where 81% of children are below the poverty line. The urban child poverty rate, by contrast, is 44%.' (Hall, 2020b: 222).

The researchers also notes that 'income inequality is clearly associated with unemployment. Affirming that 'unemployment in South Africa continues to be a serious problem' the 2019 *Child Gauge* cites an 'official national unemployment rate' as '27.5% in the third quarter of 2018' – but Hall adds that 'a higher, more accurate, indication of unemployment' is the 'expanded unemployment rate (which includes those who are not actively looking for work)' which she proposes was 37.3% (Hall, 2020b: 223).

Over two-thirds of children in the poorest income quintile (5.2 million) live in households where no adults are employed' (Hall 2020b, 223):
'In 2018, 70% of children in South Africa lived in households with at least one working adult. The other 30% (5.9 million children) lived in households where no adults were working.'
(Hall 2020b, 223)

She adds that ‘Apart from providing regular income, an employed adult may bring other benefits to the household, including health insurance, unemployment insurance and parental leave that can contribute to children’s health, development and education.’ (Hall 2020b, 223)

And more recently, the 2021 *Afrobarometer*, a survey of opinion produced by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation,²⁴ included in their key findings

- ‘Almost two-thirds (63%) of South Africans say they went without a cash income at least once during the year preceding the survey, including 25% who did so ‘many times’ or ‘always.’ Many also experienced frequent shortages of food (14%), clean water (19%), medical care (13%), and cooking fuel (17%).’
- ‘Based on these reported shortages, almost half (47%) of South Africans experienced either high (14%) or moderate (33%) lived poverty.’ (IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

Housing

‘In 2018, 3.5 million children lived in overcrowded²⁵ households. This represents 18% of the child population - much higher than the share of adults living in crowded conditions (10%).’ (Hall, 2020d: 250)

She elaborates on the effects of overcrowding on children as follows:

‘Overcrowding is a problem because it can undermine children’s needs and rights. For instance, it is difficult for school children to do homework if other household members want to sleep or watch television. Children’s right to privacy can be infringed if they do not have space to wash or change in private. The right to health can be infringed as communicable diseases spread more easily in overcrowded conditions, and young children are particularly susceptible to the spread of disease. Overcrowding also places children at greater risk of sexual abuse, especially where boys and girls have to share beds, or children have to share beds with adults.’ (Hall, 2020d: 250)

Nutrition

The food insecurity in this middle-income country is chronic. Stats SA reported that ‘almost 20% of South African households had inadequate or severe inadequate access to food in 2017’; and this has been exacerbated by the economic impacts of the COVID19 lockdowns (StatsSA, 2019: 8). According to the UFS Dietetics Dept, 80% of current UFS students are food insecure.²⁶

²⁴ ‘The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 1,600 adult South Africans in May-June 2021.’ (IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

²⁵ According to Hall, dwellings are overcrowded when ‘when there is a ratio of more than two people per room (excluding bathrooms but including kitchen and living room). Thus, a dwelling with two bedrooms, a kitchen and sitting-room would be counted as overcrowded if there were more than eight household members’ (Hall, 2020d: 250).

²⁶ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 21.

While school buses and school lunches provide relief for children at poorly-resourced schools, access to meals and nutrition is not available in the long holidays.

The *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* noted that

‘Nutrition programmes were less prevalent in high school than in primary school. That said, more than half of Black members (56%) had some form of nutrition programme at their high school.’ (Voices Unite, 2021:84)

Various universities have established food support for needy students but there is no national approach to student food security.

Noting that COVID19 has ‘exacerbated the inequalities present in the country’s education system, exposing the gap between impoverished and privileged students Bangani (2020) cites research by StatsSA and the Human Sciences Research Council which reported that there has been ‘an increase in hunger since the lockdown, owing to many workers losing their income and children no longer receiving free school meals (Van der Berg, 2020)’.

1.2.3 The enduring effects of poverty

The authors of the chapter in the 2019 *Child Gauge* on ‘Maternal, child and adolescent mental health: An ecological life course perspective’ drew on the ‘emerging evidence from developmental psychology, genetics, biology, and neurology [which] helps us to understand how risk is conferred - or individuals develop resilience - over time’ (Hunt et al, 2020:134). We have reproduced here their insights into the enduring effects of a child’s upbringing as these are often homogenised and the systemic limitations are not always remembered:

*“**Biological embedding**’ refers to the way in which children’s early environments influence their biology. This process of adaptation is referred to as embedding - or ‘the environment getting under the skin’ and causing biological changes which result in different patterns of development across the life course. For example, exposure to violence early in life causes changes in physiology that may make a person more susceptible to substance abuse or mood disorders.’*

*“**Cumulative risk**’... proposes that the more risks a child encounters, the more it will compromise their health and development. For instance, if a child lives in poverty, in a high HIV-prevalence area, with high rates of community violence, and is exposed to maternal depression and violence in the home, their development would be more compromised than the development of a child who only encounters one of these risk factors.*

'Finally, 'developmental cascades' describe the way in which all individual functioning either builds upon or is limited by prior experience. Early functioning in one area of development will influence functioning in other domains. For example, a child who develops emotional problems in response to violence in the home, may go on to have academic difficulties later in life, because their capacity to focus is limited. Positive and negative outcomes are underpinned by the same processes, so good outcomes can be laid in motion by good early foundations, and poor outcomes can be set in place by negative early experiences.' (Hunt et al, 2020:134)

These clearly describe the burdens carried by some/many of the students with whom the BSP sector works – pointing to the challenges faced by universities, support organisations and, most importantly, the students themselves in the quest for 'success'.

This is echoed in the 2020 report of the South African 'youth lab', Lucha Lunako, which cites a study²⁷ which focused on 'the science of trauma' and which 'reviewed a framework that organisations can use to shift culture and policies to improve social outcomes':

'One of the key considerations raised is that culture and the nature of the capitalist 'anyone can be anything' society within which we live tends to imply that people living in poverty and inequality have created or perpetuated their own problems and that social problems are inherent in people. It is, however, the systemic conditions which have been created and sustained in our existing systems which reinforce the pattern and create the vicious cycle.'

'The document further indicates that global studies conducted since the 1990s have contributed to a growing body of evidence that childhood trauma and chronic stress often harms the brain as it develops and results in excessive hormone flow in the body, which has a variety of negative consequences on the physical, mental, social, emotional and/or spiritual well-being over a period of time.'

They add:

'Within the South African context, the consequences of single-parent or no parent households, segregation in traditional homelands, Apartheid, migrant labour, poor quality education, and the societal impact of poverty – including basic needs not met and the myriad of psycho-social ills that result – continue to be felt amongst most of our youth. This includes those who may have been

²⁷ They cite a document published in 2019 by the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at Stanford University.

'born free' (i.e. born post the end of Apartheid) in theory but who have grown up in anything but an equal society offering truly equal opportunities to all its citizens. We must therefore acknowledge that many young South Africans have experienced and continue to experience high levels of stress and trauma during their childhood and early teenage years, making it more difficult for these young people to develop the foundational skills needed for workforce success.' (Lucha Lunako, 2020).

Family structures and parenting

Across class, the majority of children in South Africa are raised with one of their parents, often in family structures that are complex and extended:

'Virtually all children live with at least one adult, and nearly 90% of children live in households where there are two or more co-resident adults. ... Although many children live with just one of their biological parents (usually the mother), this does not mean that the mother is a 'single parent' as she is not necessarily the only adult caregiver in the household.' (Hall, 2020a: 217)

So children may grow up with a range of adults who may or may not be related to them, who play more or less constructive roles in their lives.

The 2019 *Child Gauge* describes the household structures in South Africa as follows:

'Many children in South Africa do not live consistently in the same household as their biological parents. This is a long established feature of childhoods in South Africa, and international studies have shown that the country is unique in the extent that parents are absent from children's daily lives. Parental absence is related to many factors, including historic population control, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities, low marriage and cohabitation rates, as well as customary care arrangements.

It is common for relatives to play a substantial role in child-rearing. Many children experience a sequence of different caregivers, are raised without fathers, or live in different households to their biological siblings.' (Hall, 2020a: 217)

The authors are careful to say that 'parental absence does not necessarily mean parental abandonment' however. While absent fathers is a common feature – and there is a default to vilifying men who are not present - there is evidence that this is also not simple as, while not physically present, there are remittances and various supports:

'Many parents continue to support and see their children regularly even if they have to live elsewhere.' (Hall, 2020a: 217)

A 2018 report on fathers in South Africa reported statistics:

'Analysis of the first wave of NIDS [National Income Dynamics Study] data (2008) shows Black children had the largest percentage of absent fathers (40%) and 7% had a non-resident, involved father. Twenty-seven percent lived with both parents, and 45% with their biological mother only.'

They add, however:

'The statistic of children's co-residence with biological fathers is only one measure of the relationship between fathers and children. It is an important measure when considering dual-income, heterosexual, nuclear families since it is likely that children in these families may not be exposed to other sources of fathering. But applying this measure to all South African families not only overlooks the social fathering that happens, but presents a negative view of extended families, which are mostly Black.'

'The neglected focus in our documentation of fathering, in addition to the emphasis on the presence or absence of co-resident biological fathers, may thus perpetuate the colonial tradition of White middle-class frames of reference being imposed on low-income Black families.' (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018:9)

Options

Parenting approaches differ dramatically along a range of axes.

Where there is a benevolent dispensation, it seems that parents want to prevent their children from experiencing the challenges they faced – be it the effects of institutional racism under apartheid or more personal difficulties. It is not uncommon in countries which are emerging from political strife for parents to want to shelter their children from some of the pain and difficulty they endured. While providing their children with chances of a 'better life', the risk is that they are not given opportunities to develop resourcefulness and resilience as they grow up. In this way some young people – even those from resource-poor settings – have some of the qualities of Generation Z, described earlier.

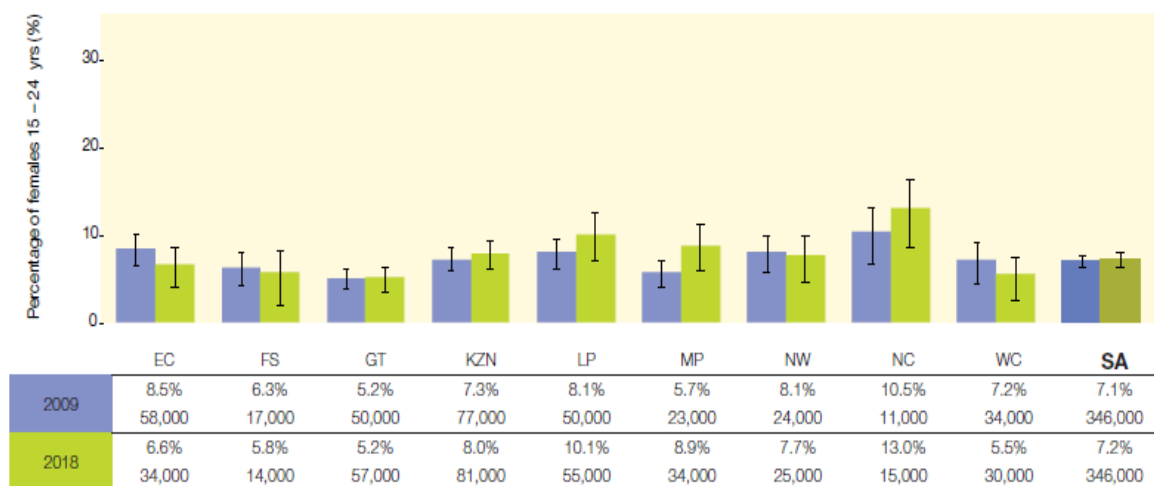
1.2.4 HIV, teenage pregnancy and sexual violence

South Africa continues to have distressingly high rates of new HIV infections with little reduction in the nearly 30 years of considerable efforts made to shift this burden of disease. HIV is now a chronic condition for which there is treatment in the public health system.

The unprotected sex – both wanted and unwanted - that produces HIV infection also produces teenage pregnancy. ‘Despite widespread assumptions that teen pregnancy in South Africa is an escalating problem [however], the available data suggest that the percentage of teenage mothers is not increasing’ and ‘a number of studies have suggested a levelling off and even a decrease in fertility rates among teenagers in South Africa’ (Hall 2020a: 230).

‘Fertility rates are, of course, an indicator of possible exposure to HIV. HIV prevalence rates are higher among women in their late twenties and thirties, and lower among teenagers, and the prevalence rate in the 15 - 24-age group has decreased over the past 10 years. However, prevalence rates are still worryingly high: of the young pregnant women surveyed in antenatal clinics in 2017, 11.3% of those aged 15 - 19 and 21.9% of those aged 20 - 24 were HIV positive.’ (Hall 2020a: 230)²⁸

Figure 3b: Annual childbearing rates among young women aged 15 – 24 years, by province, 2009 & 2018



Source: Statistics South Africa (2010; 2019) General Household Survey 2009; General Household Survey 2018. Pretoria: Stats SA.
Analysis by Katharine Hall, Children's Institute, UCT.

Figure 1: Annual childbearing rates among young women aged 15-24, by province, 2009 & 2018.

(Hall 2020a: 230)

²⁸ ‘According to the GHS, the national childbearing rate for young women aged 15 - 24 was 7% in 2018. There has been no significant change in this rate since 2009 when the question was first asked in the survey, ... Only 2% of girls aged 15 - 17 were reported to have given birth in the previous 12 months (representing 31,000 teenagers in this age group). Childbearing rates rose to 9% among 18 - 20-year-olds ... and 10% in the 21 - 24 age group (188,000). These rates have also been stable over the past decade.’ (Hall 2020a: 231)

In South Africa, sex can often be linked to assault and violence. Worryingly:

'Large numbers of South Africa's girls report that their first sexual experience was forced or coerced, yet many girls and boys do not consider this as sexual violence as they view such behaviour as a norm in intimate relationships.' (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 118)

This sexual activity sits alongside a dominant narrative of religious institutions – to which the majority of South Africans belong - that discourages sex outside of marriage. While this contradiction is not the topic of this report, suffice to say that many South African students arrive at university from contexts in which both wanted and unwanted sexual activity is prevalent, and contested.

1.2.5 Substance abuse

Experimenting with addictive substances, and addiction itself, during adolescence and early adulthood are not peculiar to South Africa – but the levels of exposure in this country are high. In the section on basic education, the *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* noted that 'substance abuse appears to be a bigger issue among Black Africans than other race groups – 42% of Black Africans were exposed to substance abuse often or very often'. (Voices Unite, 2021:105)

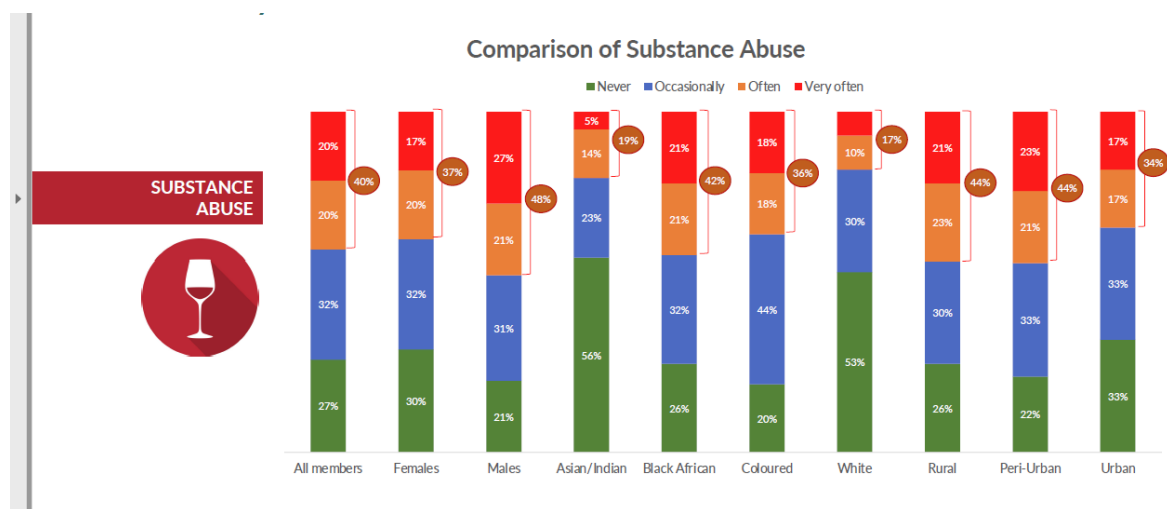


Figure 2: Comparison of substance abuse – by gender, 'race' and geography

(Voices Unite, 2021:105)

They add:

'Substance abuse amid learners in South African high schools is a common problem. In spite of being educated on drug and substance abuse, learners are still turning to drugs due to peer pressure, unconducive households and the lack of adult role models.' (Voices Unite, 2021:114)

1.2.6 Violence

South Africa has the dubious reputation of being one of the most violent countries in the world. While not confined to those who live in poverty, it is nonetheless deeply informed by historical and current socio-economic conditions – as well as by the gender expectations and practices inherent in South African society.

On the underlying causes of violence, authors of the *Child Gauge* report the following:

'Income inequality, low economic development, in combination with high levels of gender inequity, are strong positive predictors of rates of violence, including homicides and major assaults, but also increase children's vulnerability to various unintentional injuries such as road traffic, poisoning and burn injuries.'
(Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 118)

Writing in 2020, they rehearse the well-known relationship between gender inequality and expectations and their links to violence:

'In South Africa, gender inequality is illustrated by high levels of violence against women and children and the recent gruesome accounts of femicide, rape and sexual assaults in the news media. The dominant constructions of masculinity in South Africa have been shown to emphasise competition between men, ready use of violence to defend honour, and heavy use of alcohol which often fuels violent behaviour. These readily translate into risk-taking behaviours that result in injuries, including road traffic injuries and drowning, with both argued to result from enactments of toughness and risk-taking.' (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 118)

The implications for young people, then, are described:

'The risk of violent injury and homicide intensifies among adolescent boys, who are more likely to be victims of interpersonal violence in community settings. These risks increase due to young men's involvement in fights and the ready use of weapons linked to ideals of what it means to be a man. Conversely, teenage girls may experience early forms of intimate partner violence in dating relationships and sexual violence, mainly by known perpetrators, can occur across settings.' (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 118)

The authors also point to the 'widespread use of alcohol and substances' which compound the 'hazards faced by families' – as well as of firearms often used 'to threaten and exert power and control over women and families' – which raises concerns about 'long-term physical and emotional harm' (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 119). They assert that 'these early experiences that children have also impact on their risks of involvement in violence in adolescence both as perpetrators and victims.' (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 121)

Within the realm of schooling in particular, the *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* cites bullying as an example of one of a 'wide range of obstacles that can significantly hamper their academic, social and personal development'. They note that 'around 2/3 Voices Unite members [survey respondents] experienced some level of bullying in school. ... [and] Black African members displayed far lower levels of feeling safe compared to others – just 69% noted that high school was a safe learning environment'. (Voices Unite, 2021:7)

They add:

'Despite the efforts and partnerships made with the Department of Basic Education, safety concerns that plague many African high school learners have not been adequately addressed to encourage change within the school environment. These safety concerns particularly affect 'non-white' schools, with regards to bullying, sexual harassment and drug abuse.' (Voices Unite, 2021:112)

And

'In addition, the increased use of smart phones and social media has further exacerbated bullying, with some perpetrators inciting acts of violence as a means of gaining popularity and fame.' (Voices Unite, 2021:111)

Protective factors

Of course, despite prevailing contexts, many financially under-resourced homes are not characterised by violence and disruption at all. There are countless examples of young people who have been loved and who have felt secure and cherished despite economic hardships in their households and local contexts.

In their chapter on 'Developing young people's capacities to navigate adversity' in the 2016 edition of the *Child Gauge*, Swartz and Soudien list the 'multiple factors that can help interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty':

'Education and employment are central: keeping young people in school, and ensuring that the quality of education received enables access to further skills training to improve their chances of entering the labour market. Accessing public goods such as health care, good nutrition, clean water and sanitation and housing that provides shelter and dignity is also fundamental. Social, cultural and symbolic capitals that enable access to networks, improve psychosocial well-being, provide insight into the so-called 'rules of the game' and open opportunities for advancement and entry into the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship are also critical.' (Swartz and Soudien, 2016: 92).

The figure below – from the 2019 *Child Gauge* – presents risk and protective factors for child abuse and youth violence – the protective factors being instructive when thinking about comprehensive support to university students (Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 122).

Table 19: Risk and protective factors for violence and abuse

	Individual factors	Relationship	Community factors	Societal factors
Child abuse (including fatal child abuse)	Risk factors			
	- Female - Neonatal period (Infanticide) - Under five years old - Vulnerable groups include: premature infants, twins, and disabled children	- Young parents - Single parent families - Families with large number of children - Mothers with children at young age - Low socio-economic status - Low family cohesion - Substance use in the home	- High level of substance abuse in the community - High level of crime - Overcrowding - Poor/inadequate social services - High unemployment	- High levels of inequality and social exclusion - Patriarchal norms - Gender inequality - Social and cultural norms that permit corporal punishment
	Protective factors			
	- Intact families (well-structured households) - Secure attachment to parents	- Secure attachment to infant and child - Parents with supportive relationship with children - Parental monitoring and social support	- Cohesive communities with structures to support responsive policing and criminal justice system - Adequate child-care facilities - Supportive and safe school environment	- Economic empowerment programmes including job creation - Policies to regulate alcohol use - Social norms campaigns to address positive forms of parenting
Youth violence	Risk factors			
	- Male - Involvement in physical fights - Carrying weapons - Gang involvement - Not attending school - Substance abuse	- Bullying - Low family cohesion - Violence in the home (including child abuse)	- Peer pressure to use alcohol and drugs - Lack of positive peer group support - Violent communities with gang and gun violence - High unemployment - Communities with reduced social capital	- High levels of inequality and social exclusion - Patriarchal norms - Gender inequality and social exclusion - Social and cultural norms that condone the use of violence
	Protective factors			
	- Education - Reducing alcohol consumption	- Conflict management skills - Positive male role model in the home	- Strengthening interpersonal relations - Increase social interaction among other positive youths - Reducing availability of alcohol - Extracurricular activities such as sport - School connectedness	- Social norms campaigns that promote gender equity - Enforced criminal justice sanctions for perpetrators of violence - Policies to regulate gun control and substance abuse and their enforcement

Figure 3: Risk and protective factors for violence and abuse

(Van Niekerk & Mathews, 2020: 122)

1.2.7 Mental wellbeing

‘Social inequalities and poverty increase the risk of common mental health conditions in caregivers, which have detrimental effects on their children. Importantly, exposure to adversity – in the shape of poverty, violence, unstable housing and other social determinants – can influence child, adolescent and adult mental health in a number of indirect ways, meaning that if we are looking for causes of mental health conditions, we not only need to take a temporal perspective: We also need to look outside of the individual – to their community, context and the policies in their countries – to understand and address their mental health.’ (Hunt et al, 2020; 136)

Writing in the 2019 *Child Gauge*, Hunt et al continue that overall ‘nearly one in three South Africans will suffer from a mental health condition in their lifetime’ – and that, according to the South African Stress and Health Survey:

‘the most prevalent mental health conditions were anxiety disorders (15.8%), followed by substance use disorders (13.3%) and mood disorders (like depression and bipolar disorder) (9.8%).’ (Hunt et al, 2020: 131)

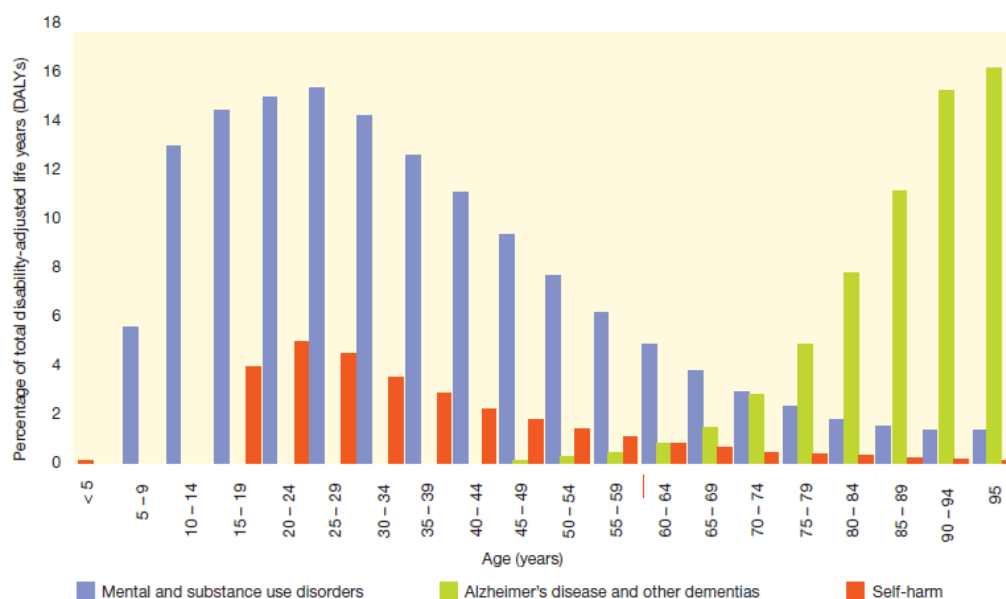
Repeating that ‘early development trauma increases the risk of subsequent mental health conditions’, they illustrate in the figure reproduced below

‘how rates of self-harm peak in adolescence, and mental and substance use disorders are most prevalent in young adulthood (around age 25). In South Africa, the National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, last administered in 2011, showed that 24.7% of learners had felt so sad or hopeless during the past six months that they stopped doing some usual activities for two or more weeks in a row. The prevalence of sad and hopeless feelings among learners increased with age.’ (Hunt et al, 2020: 132)

Regarding the possible effects on mental health, Hunt et al suggest there is a strong relationship between ‘the highest violent crime rates in the world’ plus the seemingly unrelated poor schooling (‘by the end of grade four (age 11), 78% of South African children cannot read for meaning’). Although they ‘may appear only tangentially related, yet the relationship between them is strong ... [although] the link between causes and consequences doesn’t always follow a neat linear chain’. They posit that

‘The pathways from an insult in early childhood to adult homicide, or from struggling to read to dropping out of school and developing a mental health condition are often long and complicated. Therefore, interventions must span the life course, and interrupt risks and promote flourishing at every possible point in time.’ (Hunt et al, 2020)

Figure 38: The global burden of mental health conditions across the life course



Source: Global Burden of Disease health data (2016) Reproduced with permission from: Patel V, Saxena S, Lund C, et al (2018) The Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development. *The Lancet*, 392: 1553-1598.

Figure 4: Global burden of mental health conditions across the life course

(Hunt et al, 2020: 132)

While some South African students will have been 'kept safe' by their parents from experiences which may have helped them become resilient –and others will have been loved and made secure, despite economic poverty – many will nonetheless experience challenging experiences to do with poverty, inequality, prejudice and violence. For some this will convert into a resourcefulness and resilience – but it damages and crushes others.

... and then there was COVID19

While mental health has increasingly been identified as an issue at universities worldwide, 'it has now has been put onto steroids' due to the effects of the COVID19 regulations!²⁹ The negative effects of COVID-related illnesses and deaths, as well as of the social and economic impacts of the lockdowns, are well documented.

²⁹ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

Going to university is not only about getting a qualification but is also about growing up; about learning about yourself in relation to a range of other people in a range of situations – often away from home. Having to remain at home and learn on-line has been bad enough for young people whose homes have suitable space and technology – but for those who do not, and for whom all the supports on how to use technology and learn in a substantially different way have not been available, this has been really stressful.

Student Village's relatively small survey of the Class of 2020³⁰ found that, following the COVID19 lockdowns, 'that the mental wellbeing of some young people is precarious', adding :

'Lockdown has laid bare mental health issues. Our survey revealed that 57.1% of respondents say that the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on their mental health and more than half of this cohort is either unemployed or a student.' (Flux Trends & Student Village , 2021: 6)

1.2.8 The state of schooling

The *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* notes that 'despite South Africa investing a sizeable amount in basic education, a prescribed R225.1 billion in the 2021/22 budget, the state of education is still poor (National Treasury of South Africa, 2021)'.

'This is particularly the case for the Black majority. Between 2017-2019, an estimated 30 schools in the poorest provinces achieved a pass rate average of less than 20%. An elementary pass, set at 30% for secondary schools, makes South Africa's current grading system one of the lowest in the world. The pass rate is lower than countries such as Nigeria, India and Ireland (McKane, 2020). The low pass rate does not provide learners with quality points for university entrance, and further does not adequately prepare them for studying towards university degrees.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 43)

³⁰ *The Youth Tribe. Trend report* is the result of a survey conducted by Flux Trends & Student Village³⁰: this 'looks at new tribes that were spawned during the pandemic, with special attention given to post-pandemic youth tribes. To get to know the Class of 2020, Flux Trends and Student Village conducted a survey of 157 young South Africans that was both quantitative and qualitative in nature³⁰, in order to research tribes or subcultures among the youth. We also conducted focus groups with a selection of young people chosen in conjunction with Student Village to verify the tribes we identified and to identify new ones.' As this survey does not report on their sampling method or on the demographics of the profile of respondents, only high-level commentary is reported.

In their 2020 report *Youth development re-imagined*, local youth development NGO Lucha Lunako echoes this assertion that ‘South Africa has one of the poorest performing education systems in the world’:

‘Despite spending more than the global average on education, South Africa has consistently ranked last in both the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) reports^{18 19}. Primary school learners have also consistently achieved the lowest scores in international reading tests. The lag in literacy skills puts South African students at a deficit for the remainder of their primary, secondary and tertiary studies, as well as their ability to secure decent work opportunities, unless interventions redress and correct these skills.

They added:

- *At the end of Grade 4, 78% cannot read for meaning or interpretation, compared with 4%, globally*
- *80% of Grade 9 pupils are only at a Grade 5 level of Mathematics*
- *76% of Grade 9 pupils do not understand basic whole numbers, decimals, operations or basic graphs*
- *20,000-30,000 new teachers are needed annually to replace those that are leaving the system, but in 2014 only 15,655 teachers graduated.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020).*

It is no wonder that many young people produced by this system are ill-equipped for the rigours of higher education.

1.2.9 Schooling – obstacles to access quality education

Enrolment and attendance

In her chapter on ‘Children’s access to education’ in the 2019 *Child Gauge*, Hall noted that ‘South Africa has high levels of school enrolment and attendance’: ‘Amongst children of school-going age (7 - 17 years), the vast majority (98%, or 11.3 million children) attended some form of educational facility in 2018’ – although Hall warns that ‘racial inequalities in school advancement remain strong’ (Hall 2020c: 240). The main reasons for not attending school related to ‘the quality of education or the learners’ ability to progress’.³¹

³¹ “‘Education is useless or not interesting’ is the reason given for 10% of those not attending school. Another 9% are “unable to perform at school” while 5% dropped out because they failed the exams. These signals of failures in the education system account for a quarter of all reported non-attendance. A further 7% of children not attending school are excluded because they were not accepted for enrolment.’ (Hall 2020c: 240)

Not surprisingly she identified the ‘second main barrier to education is financial constraints’:

‘These include the cost of schooling (the reason given for 13% of children not attending schools) - which would also include related costs such as uniform and transport - and the opportunity costs of education where children have family commitments such as child minding (4%) or are needed to work in a family business or elsewhere to support household income (2%).’ (Hall 2020c: 240)

In addition ‘pregnancy accounts for around 7% of drop-out amongst teenage girls not attending school, and only 3% of all non-attendance.’ (Hall 2020c: 240)

Noting that ‘attendance rates alone do not capture the regularity of children’s school attendance or their progress through school’, Hall adds that

‘Research has shown that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds - with limited economic resources, lower levels of parental education, or who have lost their mother - are more prone to dropping out or progressing more slowly than their more advantaged peers. (Hall 2020c: 240)

And she cautions that ‘school attendance rates tell us nothing about the quality of teaching and learning.’ (Hall 2020c: 240)



Inequality in schooling

Completion of schooling – quite apart from the quality experienced – is directly related to household income:

‘There are significant differences in grade completion across income quintiles, especially amongst children who have completed grade 9: in 2018, 64% of 16 – 17-year-olds in the poorest 20% of households had completed grade 9, compared to 84% in the richest 20% of households.’ (Hall 2020c: 245)

Hall’s analyses of the determinants of school progress and drop-out point to a range of factors, ‘many of which are interrelated’. In addition to the ‘huge variation in the quality of education offered ...[which] reflect the historic organisation of schools into racially defined and inequitably resourced education departments’ she notes that ‘household-level characteristics and family background also account for some of the variation in grade progression’:

‘For example, the level of education achieved by a child’s mother explains some of the difference in whether children are enrolled at an appropriate age and whether they go on to complete matric successfully. This in turn suggests that improved educational outcomes for children will have a cumulative positive effect for each subsequent generation.’ (Hall 2020c: 245)

These are important considerations for promoting the success of these young people at university, when they get there.

Distance and access

Barriers to education posed by distances from home to school are that ‘the cost, risk and effort of getting to school can influence decisions about regular attendance, as well as participation in extramural activities and after-school events’. In addition

‘Those who travel long distances to reach school may wake very early and risk arriving late or physically exhausted, which may affect their ability to learn. Walking long distances to school may also lead to learners being excluded from class or make it difficult to attend school regularly. Two-thirds (67%) of South Africa’ learners walk to school, while 12% travel in vehicles hired by a group of parents, 8% travel in private cars and 8% use public transport. Only 3% report using school buses or school transport provided by the government.’ (Hall, 2020c: 243)

She notes that ‘risks may be different for young children, for girls and boys, and are likely to be greater when children travel alone’ (Hall, 2020c: 243).

Distances in rural areas, where school and homesteads can be sparsely populated, are likely to be bigger than in peri-urban and urban which are more densely organised – although all children are vulnerable to various hazards of getting to school, often unsupervised.

Facilities

The physical infrastructure of schools remains deeply unequal. The *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* cites the 2017/2018 National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) report in describing the poor schooling infrastructure:

‘Notwithstanding the gains that have been made in basic education, inadequate resources and substandard infrastructure are persisting hurdles. These hurdles are more felt by learners in rural and township schools. Research compiled in the 2017/2018 National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) report shows that 269 schools lack electricity, while 8702 have pit toilets (Yates, 2018). Other research shows that in 2016, close to half a million learners complained about not having enough textbooks (Department of Basic Education, 2018). (Voices Unite, 2021: 42)

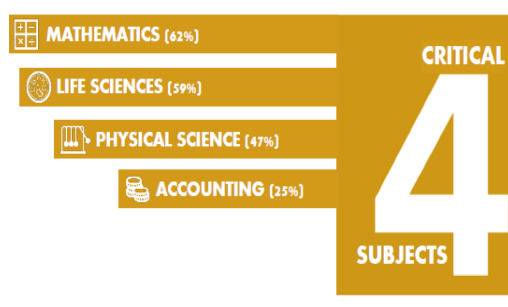
In addition Lucha Lunako cites 2015 research which stated that ‘68% of schools nationally have no computer labs’ and ‘77% of public schools nationally have no libraries’.³² The advent of the ‘4th Industrial Revolution’ exacerbates the inequality young people at these schools must bridge.

The STEM issue

A lack of proficiency in Science, Technology, Maths and Engineering (STEM) and related fields blocks access to career paths that require ability in these fields.

The 2021 *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* reports their findings (bearing in mind the Gauteng/urban skewing mentioned in the Methodology section above):

‘Across what is considered as ‘Critical Subjects’ in high school (Maths, Life Sciences, Physical Science and Accounting), less than half of our members studied Physical Science (47%) and Accounting (25%) in matric.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 88)



³² The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship at University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business (2015) cited by Lucha Lunako in their 2020 report *Youth development re-imagined*.

They add that their results also showed that

‘almost 1 in 5 members (19%) who studied Mathematics in Matric did not pass – the lowest pass rate across the critical four subjects. Even with this growing trend, there is a general decline in enrolments in the critical STEM subjects. Last year, there was a substantial drop in the pass rate for Physical Sciences (75.5% in 2019 to 65.8% in 2020). A drop was also seen in Mathematics during the same period (54.6% to 53.8%). (Voices Unite, 2021: 113)

These outcomes affect post-school choices – but also, again, do not bode well for young employees who must operate in the context of a ‘4th Industrial revolution’.

Career guidance

Nearly half of the respondents cited in the *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* (49%) ‘were not aware of any career guidance in high school. Among those who received such guidance, most did so via career talks (72%) and in Matric (78%).’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 85)

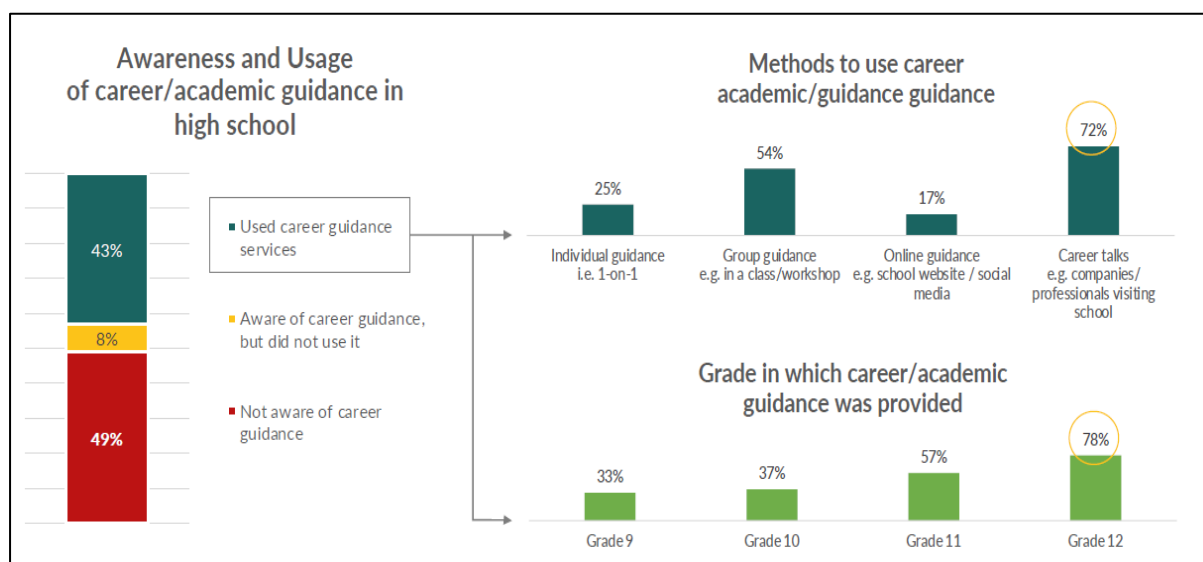


**Figure 5: Career / academic guidance in high school
– per Voices Unite survey respondents**

(Voices Unite, 2021: 85)

'More than 2/3 of Voices members were not properly prepared for post-school education (43%). Members strongly feel that schools should guide students on academic requirements and offer more career/academic guidance.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 159)

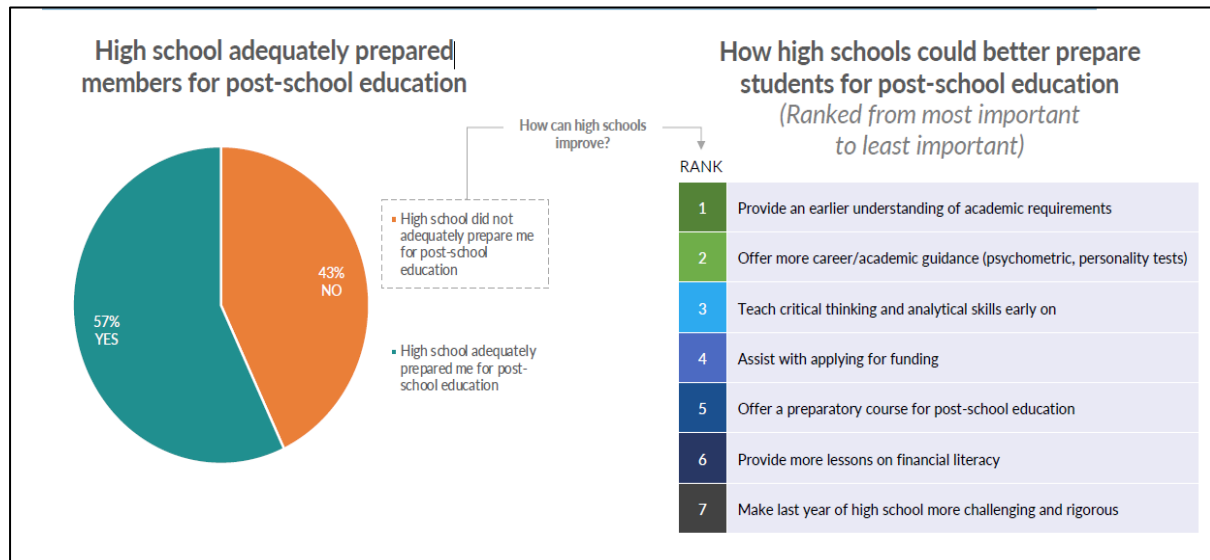


Figure 6: Preparation for post-school education in high school – per Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 159)

'In their evaluation of the academic/career guidance that they received, Males were significantly more positive than Females, and rural-based members were also particularly positive.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 86)

This is an area that HEIs have flagged for possible attention by the BSP organisations.

Bridging courses

Regarding bridging courses for matriculants, just under half of the respondents of the *Voices Unite* survey were 'unaware of bridging courses for matriculants (44%), suggesting a lack of information about these courses. Black African and Rural members attended bridging courses more than others.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 107)

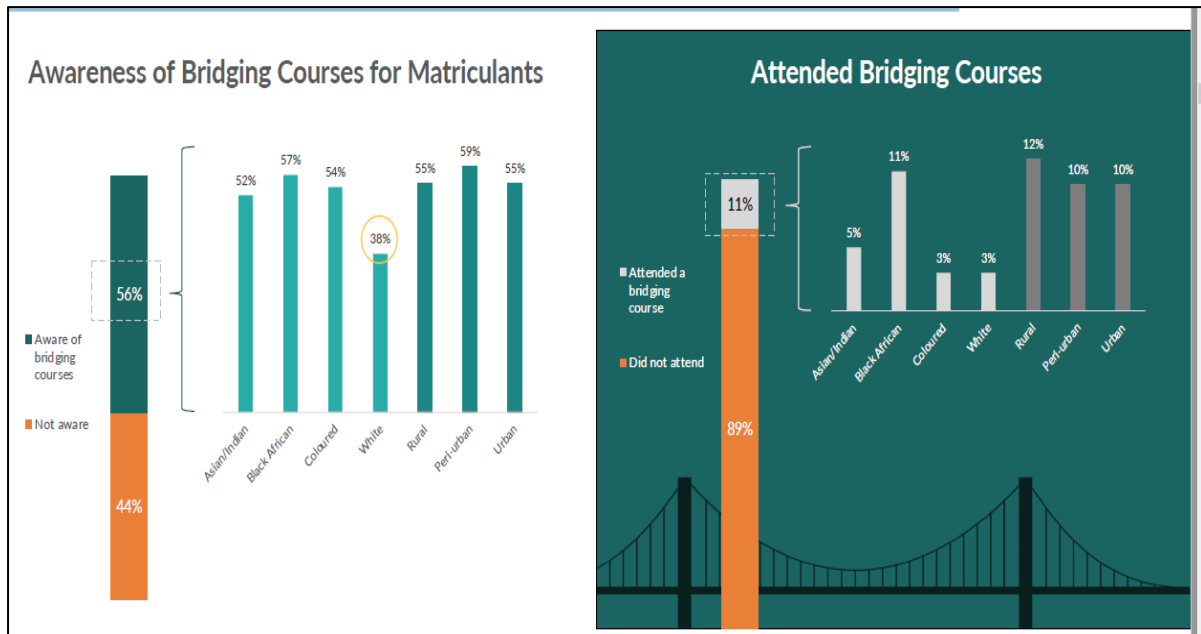


Figure 7: Awareness of bridging courses in high school – per Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 107)

'Surprisingly, while 89% of members did not attend a bridging course, the reasons for not doing so varied greatly, suggesting a definite need for such courses – 37% noted a lack of information, and 22% noted lack of funding.'
(Voices Unite, 2021: 108)

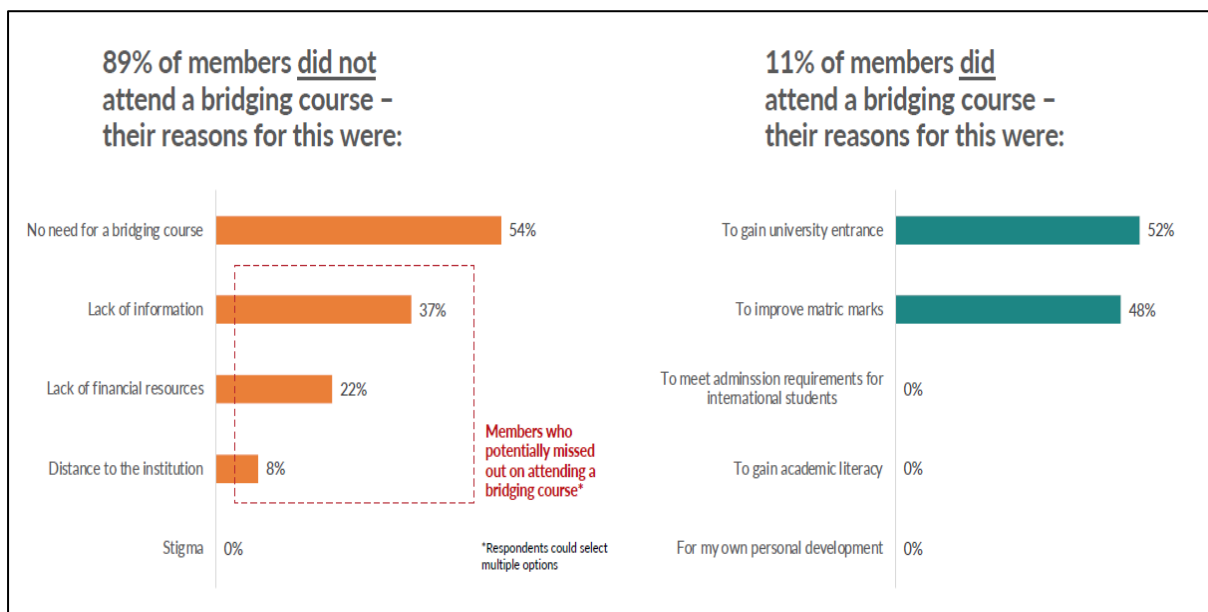


Figure 8: Attendance at bridging courses in high school – per Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 108)

The report noted that three quarters of those who did attend a bridging course ‘found it quite/extremely useful (81% in Rural)’. (Voices Unite, 2021: 109)

The articulation gap and the transition

The gaps that must be bridged by first year university students who may have been raised in some of the constrained circumstances described are many and varied.

This ‘articulation gap’ – between school (and home) and higher education – has been the focus of much attention within universities as they strive in various ways to produce bridging mechanisms to make it possible for young people to perform in the post-school education system.

In their 2014 research report on *Student Access and Success*, the authors define the articulation gap as ‘the disparity between the learning requirements of higher education programmes and the knowledge and competencies of students entering universities. This disparity is caused by differences in teaching and learning between high school and university’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Repeating the ‘well-documented’ facts ‘that quite a large number of students drop out at critical transitions in their education, from high school to post-school education’, the *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* underscores the learning mismatch identified by Lewin and Mawoyo:

‘Everything was new to me and it was hard for me. I did not have any friends, so I used to hide in the ladies’ room until my next class. I hardly heard the teachers, especially the Indians, because they were so fast. Things got even worse when I was introduced to the computer. I felt like being at university at my age was a mistake.’

– First year Engineering student,
University of KwaZulu-Natal.
(Study Trust Principles and Processes,
15 May 2019. Powerpoint.)

‘In transitioning from basic to post-school education, close to half of our members indicated that they were not properly prepared for post-school studies and feel that schools should better guide students on academic requirements and offer more career/academic guidance.... More than 1/3 of our members found the transition into post-school education either very or extremely difficult.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 7)

Interestingly neither of them mentions (here at least) the psycho-social disruptions and deficits of cultural capital, among others. Still focussing on the academic realm, Voices Unite reports:

'The biggest reasons for the transition into post-education being difficult for our members all relate to time management and the need to plan – the larger workload as well as the level of independence required.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 162)

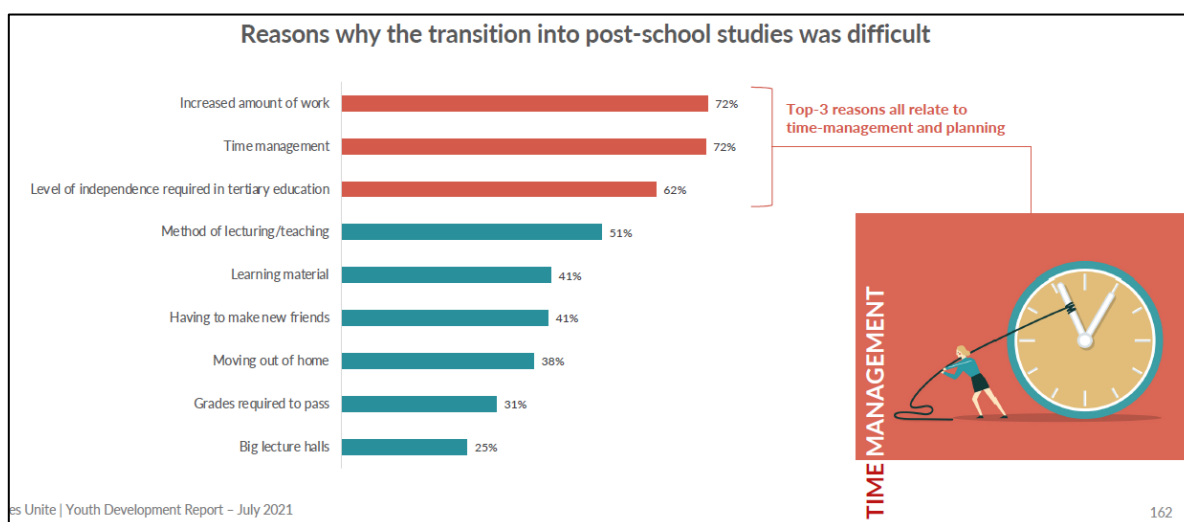


Figure 9: Difficulties in transitioning to post-school studies

(Voices Unite, 2021: 162)

A novel journey

There are various ways of describing the process which young people undergo as they leave school (and, possibly, home) and go to university. This is one, described by University of Stellenbosch as comprising

- A: Honeymoon
- B: Culture shock
- C: Initial adjustment
- D: Mental isolation
- E: Acceptance and integration³³

– and they track the possible emotions associated with the transitions between each phase.

³³ 'Stellenbosch University: First year experience.' Powerpoint presentation: Support Provider's Conference, Johannesburg, 26&27 June, 2019.

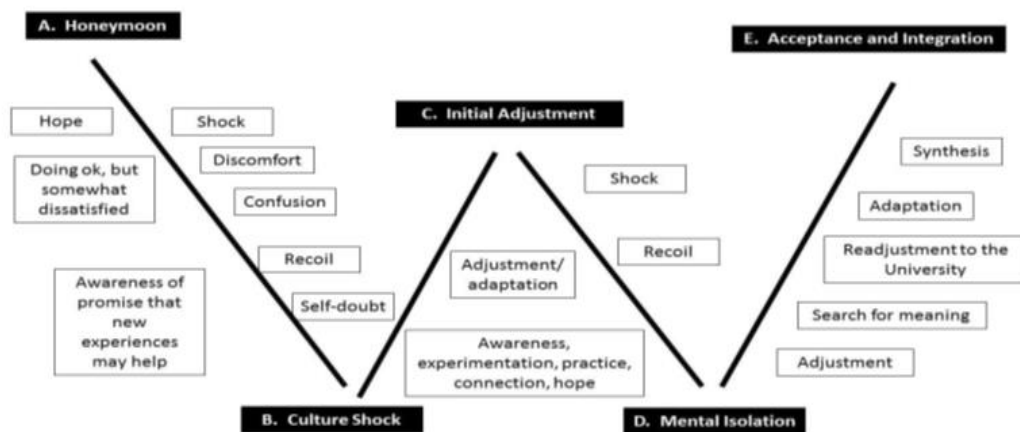


Figure 10:
Students' experience in transition: University of Stellenbosch³⁴

Another example is one adopted by the oldest BSP organisations, StudyTrust, portrayed as their 'Hero's journey' (below).³⁵ Crucially it includes individuation, overcoming isolation and the building of resilience.

An example of a stage of this journey is seen in a Study Trust student's story:

*'Two days before my exams, my grandfather passed away. This hit me hard because I wasn't passionate about my course any more and I had lost hope already because of the marks I was getting. I sought medical help, but the medication actually made everything worse. But then during the whole scenario I found myself. I realised that even if I wasn't depressed or stressed, I wasn't interested in the course I was doing and that made me act negatively towards my studies too.'*³⁶

³⁴ 'Stellenbosch University: First year experience.' Powerpoint presentation: Support Provider's Conference, Johannesburg, 26&27 June, 2019.

³⁵ Study Trust Principles and Processes, 15 May 2019. Powerpoint presentation.

³⁶ Study Trust Principles and Processes, 15 May 2019. Powerpoint presentation.

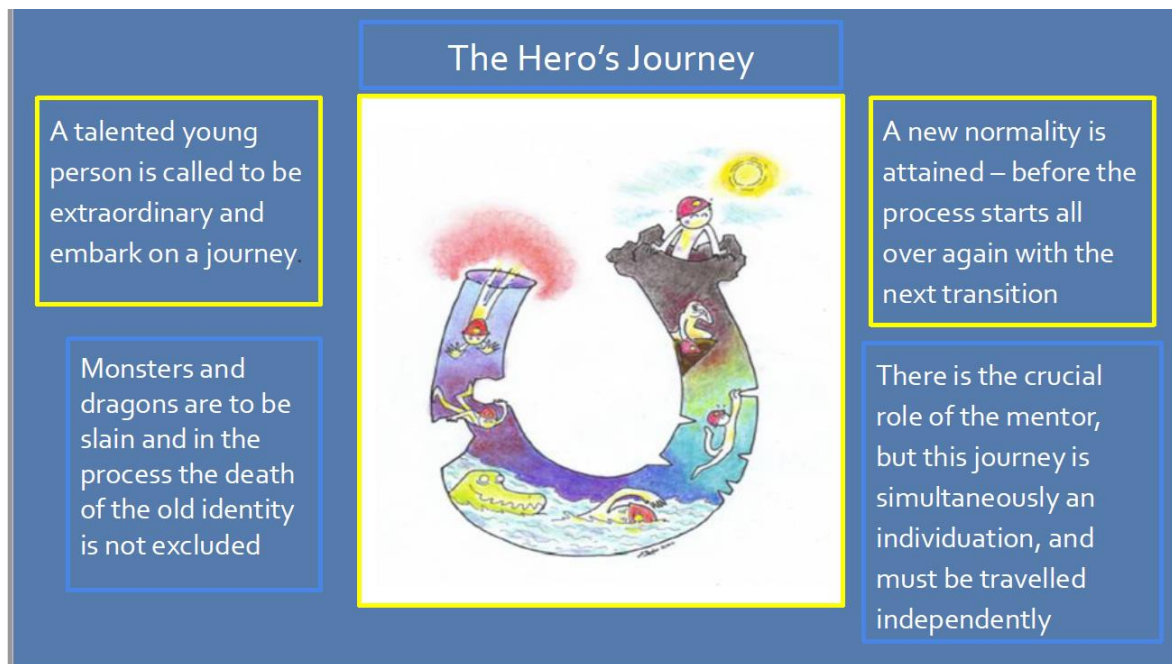


Figure 11: The Hero's Journey – Study Trust³⁷

Study Trust places resilience at the centre of this journey – which they understand as 'the capacity to 'bounce back' after having experienced stress or catastrophe'. For example a third-year BCom Accounting student said:

*'I learned that the expectation of things getting better was illusionary and the best thing to do is to become stronger. Emotional strength becomes as much important as intellectual strength as one becomes a senior student; therefore preparing myself emotionally has become a priority.'*³⁸

Without facing the monsters, the journey to becoming a resilient and resourceful adult is not undertaken.

1.2.10 Youth unemployment and NEET

'NEET' is the term used to describe young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training. The *Child Gauge* reported that 'in 2018 there were 9.5 million young people aged 15 - 24 in South Africa. Of these, 34% (3.2 million) were neither working nor enrolled in any education institution such as a school, university or college' (Hall, 2020c: 246).

³⁷ Study Trust Principles and processes 15 May 2019. Powerpoint presentation.

³⁸ Study Trust Principles and Processes, 15 May 2019. Powerpoint presentation.

A more recent report – undertaken during the COVID19 lockdowns – noted that ‘according to Stats SA, youth unemployment for the first quarter of 2021 was a staggering 74.7%. Young people have failed to find employment and have lost jobs and loved ones.’ (Flux trends & Student Village, 2021: 6)

The 2021 *Afrobarometer*, a survey of opinion³⁹ produced by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, headlined the overview of their findings as ‘South Africans rank unemployment as the country’s most urgent priority, support jobs program for youth’. They report the following findings from this recent survey:

- ‘Unemployment is the problem mostly widely seen as a top priority for government action, cited by six in 10 respondents (60%). Job creation has been at the top of the list for the past decade (Figure 1).
- ‘Seven in 10 (70%) citizens say they would be willing to pay higher taxes to fund youth programs (Figure 4). (IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

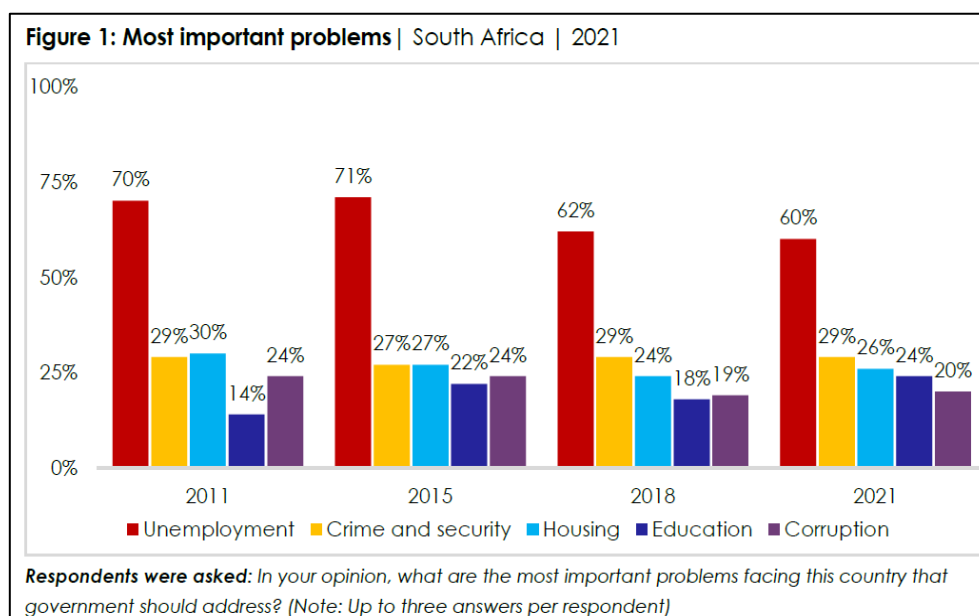


Figure 12: The most important problems – South Africa – 2021 (Afrobarometer)

(IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

³⁹ ‘The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Plus 94 Research, interviewed 1,600 adult South Africans in May-June 2021.’ (IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

They add:

- *'More than (53%) say that if the government could increase its spending on programs to help young people, the highest priority for additional investment should be job creation (Figure 5)'. (IJR & Plus 94, 2021)*

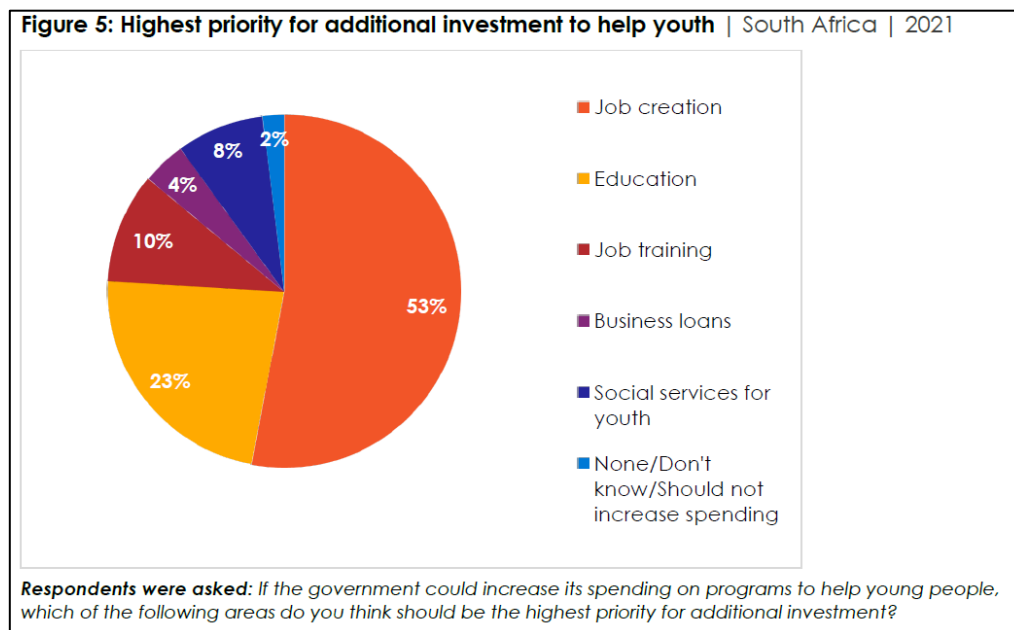


Figure 13:
Highest priority for additional investment to help youth – South Africa – 2021
(Afrobarometer)

(IJR & Plus 94, 2021)

These are truly worrying statistics for the country at large. Addressing this will involve concerted efforts at youth development, vocational training and employment creation initiatives – which are largely beyond the remit of universities. While noting the gravity of this, the NEET will not be addressed in this research – but are a sobering context.

1.2.11 Implications of these for barriers to success

The contexts described above give insights into the variety of challenges that particularly first generation students may face – and as most of the students supported by the civil society-based BSP organisations are from households in poorly-resourced areas, these are the issues that must be taken into account when thinking about supporting their success in the higher education system.

1.3 Profile of students supported by the bursary support providers

While most of the organisations in the NBSPF work with young people from financially disadvantaged households, a few also include people from the ‘missing middle’ - i.e. from households which earn above the R350 0000 per annum NSFAS limit.

In addition organisations select students with particular qualities – for example:

- highly-motivated, determined and tenacious (Moshal)
- with potential and determination to study (StudyTrust)
- academically able young people (REAP)⁴⁰

Some serve particular constituencies:

- those who matriculated from rural schools (REAP)
- rural youth from poor households (Umthombo)
- orphaned and vulnerable children (Tomorrow Trust)
- the members and dependents of Old Mutual’s business partners – namely certain trade unions – providing ‘our staff member or their families [who are members of those unions] with a chance to study further’ (OMET).⁴¹

Psycho-social profile

All BSP organisations recognise that the students they support have challenges – both by virtue of their simply being young people who are growing up, as well as a result of aspects of their particular upbringings.

In the ‘Most Significant Change study’ (part of the report arising from an evaluation of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders programme) the authors reported that ‘the most frequently mentioned crisis topics that threatened students’ academic progress and mental health were pregnancy, family pathology, grief and depression, and difficult home situations that resulted in various pressures on students’. (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

They also reported on the results of the psychometric assessment of their students ‘in what is thought to be the first such assessment of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students’. They note that

‘When compared to working adults, programme students have a specific psychometric profile, one which clearly points to the need for supports:

- *From a personality perspective, the students tended to be less emotionally stable, more anxious, self-conscious, and prone to depression.*

⁴⁰ ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.’

⁴¹ ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.’

- *From an emotional intelligence perspective, the students tended to score lower on most elements measured, most notably stress management (a typical finding in student profiles generally, not just those in the Dell Young Leaders programme.)*
- *The students scored lower on ‘resilience factors’ such as stress tolerance and conscientiousness (unsurprising given that the programme selects students who have experienced adverse circumstances and hardships, and overcome them. According to JvR Psychometrics, these environments tend to cultivate a less resilient psychological structure; students will possibly have more difficulty coping with university demands than students with more positive experiences growing up.) ’ (Singizi Consulting, 2016)*

They continued:

‘The main factors that appear to contribute to student success are self-discipline, emotional stability, and the ability to cope with stress. The students more at risk of failure would be less conscientious, more prone to stress, and more impulsive risk-takers. Profiling found a high correlation between situational factors students face and their academic performance.’ (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

A founding Director of a longstanding BSP organisation works from the premise that *‘All students battle with something at some stage’*:

‘There is no cookie cutter wraparound support model. Some students fly even though they have no family support, while some middle class students stumble. Career Wise does not put people into boxes. Students at university are the top-end of those from schools, so we just have to maximise their abilities. After all, they survived 12 years of schooling! Young people also change over time given circumstances, broken relationships etc....’⁴²

This report is about how these organisations each approach this differently and what might best promote student success.

1.4 Effects on students of the COVID19-related lockdowns

This report has asserted that not only are students often from vulnerable households which are unlikely to be conducive for on-line studying – but that there is a value in moving away from home and into university life, despite the difficulties entailed in doing so.

In their letter in the *Daily Maverick* in December 2020, 300 academics refuted claims made by DHET and university managements that 2020 had been a successful academic year. They noted the ways in which on-line learning had exacerbated inequality:

'If the home is the primary learning environment for students, the effects of segregated and unequal neighbourhoods directly condition students' learning experiences. While some universities gave data to students, and loaned them laptops, this only accounts for some of the issues that students face when needing to study at home.

'We need to be aware of what 'home' is, and how much that varies. For some, this means being able to finish assignments in a safe comfortable environment, but many students do not have that luxury. Many students are working without stable internet, network connection, or electricity, without a quiet space to study, with increased duties in the household when they are home, within cramped spaces, and without academic or personal support. These conditions impact mental health and academic performance.' (Pikoli, 2020)

This was echoed in one organisation's response to the on-line survey administered three months into the first lockdown:⁴³

'COVID-19 has brought new challenges to the surface and has rekindled some challenges that were not visible – such as on-line learning, navigating the home environment while studying, black tax (which is now amplified) and mental health.'

In a presentation to the NBSPPF in mid-2020,⁴⁴ Tomorrow Trust's Stacey Rontiris presented the social, emotional and psychological impacts that lockdown may have on society and on students.

⁴³ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations'*. July 2020.

⁴⁴ *What about Tomorrow?* Powerpoint presentation by Stacey Rontiris to the NBSPPF on effects of COVID19. Mid-2020.

SOCIAL IMPACT	EXAMPLE	OUTCOME
Social environments have shrunk	E.g. no lecturers, campus activities, extra-curricular activities	Critical opportunities for key emotional & social skills to be developed have diminished
Less access to positive social support	E.g. you don't see that lecturer who always asks how you are	Decreased capacity to cope with stress
"Safe spaces" are no longer accessible	E.g. you can never escape from "home"	Continuous exposure to physically or emotionally unhealthy/unsafe environments
Unable to work through trauma	E.g. Strained relationship with a father figure	Traumatic healing = positive emotional & social development

EMOTIONAL IMPACT	EXAMPLE	OUTCOME
Exposure to trauma (esp. because it's prolonged & unpredictable)	E.g. Not knowing what will happen, not in control, feeling helpless	Neurodevelopmental, social, cognitive & emotional development disrupted
Being in a continuous state of fear	E.g. Will I complete the academic year? Will I catch the virus? Will someone I know die from the virus?	Constantly being in survival mode – cortisone levels over active
The lockdown environment = psychological experiment	E.g. A lack of freedom or feeling of not being in control can bring up an incident of childhood rape	Potential mental "triggers" have been activated for everyone
Unique opportunity for forced self-reflection; plenty of time with ourselves, our thoughts, our memories	E.g. Not having social distractions, when you do have social support everyone is talking about their fears, anxieties	Having to deal with multiple issues at the same time (both Covid related and not)

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT	EXAMPLE	OUTCOME
Experiences of mass grief/mourning with an unknown ending	E.g. Missing out on graduation, unable to experience a new city, planned activities not happening, not being able to say goodbye	Experiences of different types of grief can be confusing and overwhelming – inability to move on
Loneliness (not the same as social/isolation, aloneness or choosing to be alone)	E.g. planned activities like birthdays, trips, celebrations being cancelled	Sense of belonging is lost, inability to build resilience
Burnout	E.g. Honeymoon Phase, Onset of Stress, Chronic Stress, Burnout, Habitual Burnout	Of the 5 stages of burnout we are currently stuck between 4 & 5 with no relief in sight
PTSD is most common in post-conflict settings	E.g. Feelings of helplessness, disappointment, worthlessness	Complicated long term mental and emotional issues

Figure 14:
Possible social, emotional and psychological impacts
of lockdown on society and on students⁴⁵

⁴⁵ What about Tomorrow? Powerpoint presentation by Stacey Rontiris to the NBSPP on effects of COVID19. Mid-2020.

She suggested that BSP organisations may do the following:

- 'Focus on the social and emotional development.
- Design programmes that allow for students to keep building their social relationships. (So much of human communication is non-verbal meaning we have to build in human interaction.)
- Create safe spaces for our students.
- Build a sense of belonging. (Help students feel cared about, thought of, a priority.)'

In addition there is the issue of equal access to technology to which much attention has been paid, though there is still a way to go in terms of infrastructure and. But alongside this there are initiatives to develop a pedagogy and support systems that assist students in the context of this new world order and helps to retain them in the system.

2. SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

This section again names and sometime reviews, very superficially, aspects of the public higher education system that create the contexts in which students supported by the BSP organisations must succeed. This reiteration here of well-known information is to insist on the structural aspects of the higher education system which students must navigate and with which they must engage. We hope the overall impression is of an unevenly resourced and often contested sector – with some wonderful innovations alongside some dysfunctional and sometimes careless systems.

2.1 Diverse institutions

South African public universities are not homogenous. Most still bear witness to the legacy of apartheid resourcing – with the infrastructures of HWUs massively outstripping those of the lesser-resourced HBUs. Some universities and /or campuses merged in an attempt to mitigate some of this legacy, including to rationalise the distribution of higher education institutions – while technikons became universities of technology and are similarly unevenly resourced.

Some universities are largely functional while others limp from one difficulty to another. The efficiency of the administrations varies widely as do the upkeep of the material infrastructure of campuses. Where students are from poorly organised schooling backgrounds, these more disorganised universities risk repeating their experience of education as a half-hearted patchwork – far from the engaging, provocative and rich space that higher education might ideally provide. Unfortunately some of the HBUs are the less functional universities, which means that the most vulnerable students are offered the least functional university settings in which to try to succeed. It cannot be a surprise that outcomes from this combination of offerings is tepid at best.

*'The high failure rate at universities can be attributed to issues both within and external to the higher education system. While various initiatives within universities have sought to improve the possibility of students succeeding within the system, these have only been partially successful. Given the vast state resources now being allocated to student access, the imperative to optimise this investment and to improve throughput is now even more pressing – quite apart from the difference a university qualification can make to a person, their family and society at large. Proposals that the system needs to be re-designed for student success jostle with concerns about standards and meritocracy.'*⁴⁶

So there is also an academic stratification of universities. Not only is this in terms of research ratings and outputs etc but also perceptually, in terms of the difference their qualification makes on a CV. Rightly or wrongly, having a degree from UCT arguably places a candidate for a job above someone with a degree from a university like Walter Sisulu University.

South Africa has resisted formally stratifying universities, however, cautious that this would directly echo apartheid resourcing, as the 'postgraduate/ research' universities would be the HWUs and the 'undergraduate teaching universities' would largely be HBUs. This overlooks the opportunity that these 'undergraduate teaching universities' might have exploited to become specialists in teaching, which is exactly what is needed for students who must bridge the gap between their under-resourced households and schooling and the world of higher education.

'Standards'

While the debate about falling standards at universities raises its head periodically, there is little doubt that 'standards' across universities are not the same. Where professional bodies are involved (like the Law Association) there are some external check on this – but with less vocationally-linked qualifications, there is a sense that the reputation of some qualifications do not serve their graduates – or the economy - well

⁴⁶ Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

Institutional culture

The influence that institutional cultures have on student (and staff) performance has again been the subject of much debate. Writing in 2014, Lewin and Mawoyo note that

'Institutional cultures are increasingly mentioned as influential in understanding student success or attrition. While the concept of institutional culture is contested (CHE, 2010), it is well documented that the cultures of institutions affect student integration and performance (Letseka et al, 2010; CHE, 2010, Leibowitz et al, 2012).

- adding that 'the experiences of black and poor students in the higher education system, particularly in former white institutions, are fairly well documented (Mabokela and King, 2001; Soudien, 2008; DOE, 2008; CHE, 2010).' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

Citing the CHE (Council on Higher Education), Lewin and Mawoyo conclude:

'The history and the contextual realities of a university influence students' academic performance. Institutional resources, cultures, internal politics, everyday academic practices and the particular ways in which universities interpret and respond to broader societal challenges, combined, play a role in influencing students' chance of academic success (CHE, 2010:168).' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

Much more could be said – but suffice to say here that culture lives in a variety of locations and mediums; it is not static; and is contested even (or especially) when hegemonic. Aspects of it are often unnamed and /or unconscious until overtly foregrounded and named. It is present in messaging, in approaches and priorities, in who speaks and who is heard, in whose interests arrangements are made - among many others. Institutional culture can undermine or optimise the possibility of students performing optimally.

Effects of HEI contexts

Six directors of BSP organisations were asked during a focus group discussion if there were any HEI contexts / conditions in which their efforts could not hope to make much difference (e.g. where the climate was too alienating, where there are very few referral services and /or where the university is frequently in disarray etc). Alongside this they were asked whether BSP organisations should contain themselves to working largely in contexts where they are likely to be able to make a / the big difference – or whether organisations should (also) work in more challenging contexts. Their opinions are presented here.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ From focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20: Organisations were Career Wise, Moshal Scholarship Program, REAP, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust, Umthombo Youth Development Foundation.

HBUs – all of which were historically less-resourced – were identified as more difficult to work with. Their often poor (over-extended) administrations make it difficult to simply access results, fee accounts etc. and this makes relating to them ‘really hard’. In addition, their inadequate systems mean that they recruit too slowly and lose good students to better / other universities.

A BSP which works across most universities reported that there were ‘serious issues at various institutions’ to do with accommodation and administration and they ‘prefer not to send students there’.⁴⁸ Another reported that ‘UKZN resisted [their] offers of student support’; in doing so they felt ‘defensive as if they did not want to be exposed’.⁴⁹ That ‘some HBUs like TUT are not coping at all’ was echoed by a third organisation which has very few students at HBUs (at universities of Venda, Limpopo and Fort Hare). They added that ‘this year has been particularly tough’⁵⁰.

And finally one organisation had a generally negative experience at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) where they experienced ‘poor quality accommodation and admin’ as well as ‘hostility from WSU staff (defensive / guarded) and hostility from the SRC who tried to sabotage the organisation’s activities. Our staff found it hard to persist’.⁵¹ The organisation withdrew after two years of working there.

That being said some HBUs provide a more congruent experience (in terms of language and ‘culture’) than an HWU would. One director noted that the University of Zululand ‘certainly suits some students who would not survive elsewhere’ but added that there also ‘needs to be good enough quality’.

Working with what works

Some BSPs choose to support students only at the good departments in each HBU. One such organisation has students at all universities – including Limpopo, Venda, WSU – and their throughputs are similar across universities. They ‘pick good students and good departments at those universities’ whose quality is often about their leadership. That being said, if students do well, they do ‘try and get them to move to a better university’. Another organisation also ‘supports their transition to HWUs’ as their students at HBUs have to ‘spend too much time advocating for basic things to happen’. Despite this, ‘most graduates go back home to live in the area from which they come’.

⁴⁸ Monique Adams in focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20.

⁴⁹ Gavin MacGregor in focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20.

⁵⁰ Murray Hofmeyr in focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20.

⁵¹ Russell Davies in focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20.

Noting that ‘there are some individuals who make a huge difference’, one director cited a new head of a department at the University of Zululand who worked constructively with their organisation after they threatened to withdraw all their students, given the poor quality of education being provided.

Support in more challenging contexts

The organisation which works at various HBUs confirmed that the support they offer these students is not very different to what they offer elsewhere. It still comprises one-on-one support and providing tutoring etc as needed – although they may contract in some services like a counsellor more often than at other universities.

2.2 Challenges within universities

The *Voices Unite Development Report* summarises the overall situation in higher education as follows:

‘South Africa’s post-school education system is faced with a myriad of challenges, having to redress the inheritance of apartheid, steer transformation and produce quality education that is relevant to the 21st century world of work (Bajinath, 2018:89; DHET, 2016:7). Not discounting the gains that have been made since the advent of democracy, the education system continues to reproduce inequalities based on class, gender and racial lines.

‘Moreover, the infrastructural landscape is evocative of the apartheid regime, with historically ‘Black’ institutions still experiencing disadvantages in terms of funding, facilities and staff (DHET, 2016:7). Although former ‘White’ institutions have opened up, students of colour are still subjected to discrimination and racism. The unequal fragmented and exclusionary state of post-school education has encouraged dissent and protest action from students and academics alike.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 126)

It goes without saying that the past five years have seen prolonged contestation and disruption within the higher education sector.

- From 2015 to 2017 the **‘#Rhodes must fall’ and ‘#Fees must fall’** campaigns on a few campuses – often confrontational and sometimes destructive in various ways – effectively disrupted teaching and assessment.

- At the end of 2017 then-President Zuma announced the **introduction of free (subsidised) education** for students from households with less than R350,000 per annum⁵². This was contrary to advice that this was unaffordable and was promulgated without any time to enable systems to be set up to implement this at the start of the 2018 academic year.⁵³
- And in 2020/21 – at the time of writing – **physical access to HEIs** has been restricted as part of the **prevention of the transmission of the COVID19 virus**. This has massively disrupted the core business of HEIs – and risks exacerbating inequality as mentioned in 1.4 above. In addition, support from the HEI and fellow students, the cut and thrust of being among other young people some of whom will have similar issues and challenges – and the importance of transitioning from home and school into the shallows of the adult world – are all lost as students study on-line at home.

Contestation



University protests have become the new normal at the beginning of every academic year as students march against fee increases, racism and discrimination.
Image courtesy of [Khatija Nxedlana \(Jacaranda FM\)](#)

Pic from Voices Unite Youth Development Report (Voices Unite, 2021, 126)

Combined with the still palpable legacies of apartheid, and fuelled by identity politics among others, South African students (particularly at HWUs) expressed their frustrations and entitlement very powerfully in the #Rhodes must fall and #Fees must fall campaigns of 2015 to 2017. The important issues raised were often obscured by the silencing and destruction of anything with which – or whom - they disagreed. Stark binaries of right and wrong alienated other students and allies. While alliances were made with striking workers on some campuses, there were no broader (political) calls

⁵² The NSFAS financial requirement had been students from households earning less than R122,000 per annum. Zuma's announcement effectively doubled this, extending financial support to many more students who, in addition, did not need to be repay these subsidies.

⁵³ While this was seen as a student victory, it is also understood to be about then-President Zuma's attempts to woo the ANC Youth League and to undermine the burgeoning EFF.

for the schooling system to be improved, both as an end in itself and so that issues of access and success were less challenging for those who come after them.

Calls to 'de-colonise' the institutions and the curriculum are ongoing – sitting alongside the ongoing calls for 'transformation', often a proxy for a change in the 'racial' profiles of staff and the student body.

These are turbulent contexts which can render more vulnerable exactly those students who are trying to break through into new opportunities.

2.3 The distinctive roles of universities and bursary support organisations

While the state now provides financial support for all academically eligible students from households with annual incomes less than R350,000, this only addresses access. For universities, the challenge of producing academic success lies, in the first instance, in the classroom and in the provision of academic and student supports, including housing. This continues to be an enormous undertaking for which many universities are under-resourced/ under-prepared – although extraordinary and innovative practices are nonetheless found at institutional and departmental levels, implemented in a range of ways.

What universities cannot easily do at scale, and which BSP organisations can with their limited student cohorts, is to provide individualised support, both psycho-social and financial. Affecting only about 9,000 students in any given year, the organisations in the National Bursary Support Providers Forum (NBSPF) argue that this support improves the retention and throughput of the students with whom they work, as well as better prepares young people for the adult world and employment. It is this assertion that we are addressing in this research.

That being said, the introduction of subsidised higher education 'has meant that bursary support providers have had to re-position some of their initiatives. While they continue to focus on promoting student success, some have changed their financial support models; some the students they support; some the emphasis within their support; and some the kinds of qualifications they support.'⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

The move to largely on-line learning in the context of COVID19 has posed another challenge to both universities and BSP organisations – most particularly of how to ensure students have proper access to on-line communication (hardware, software and data); the skills to use a range of technologies (when these students have often not worked on computers before at all); and to provide support to students who are often not living in conditions that are optimal for academic work and learning.

2.4 Subsidised costs

The funding of students has been central to the offerings of these BSP organisations – although optimising the chances of student success (and securing a return on investment) is an essential and intrinsic part of their offering.

From loans to subsidies

Established by an act of Parliament in 1999, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) provided means-tested loans for students from households whose annual income was under R122,000. Since the beginning of 2018 the costs of university education for students from households with annual incomes under R350,000 have become subsidised, meaning that some of the ‘missing middle’ who were previously left out are now also eligible. In addition, rather than loans which must be re-paid, students now receive these funds as grants that are not repayable.

Information about funding

The *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* noted that

‘Just over three quarters of Voices members who have applied for funding have been successful (76%), with the large majority of these successful applications being through Government funding (84%).’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 151-152)

They added that although ‘nearly three quarters of our members (73%) have previously applied for postschool education funding (highest among Black Africans and Rural members), awareness of different avenues of funding is relatively low’ – and that there is a need for better communication:

‘There is a severe lack of communication and understanding in terms of funding applications that are declined. More than half of Voices Unite members who have had their funding application declined were not informed of the reasons for the decision. With 89% of our members noting that they intend to apply for funding in the future, the lack of feedback on the decline of funding applications is likely to impede members’ efforts with future applications.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 7)

A lack of information among school learners about how to access PSET opportunities generally, and funding in particular – has been echoed by a number of key information both at HEIs and in the BSP sector.

Quantity vs quality

While the extension of NSFAS funding has further extended access to university to more young people, little attention was paid to the infrastructure needed to service these students, many of whom are from the under-resourced backgrounds described above. Interestingly this echoes the massification of secondary schools in then-Natal in the 1970s and 1980s following ‘funding changes’ – as described by Mark Hunter in *Race for Education. Gender, white tone and schooling in South Africa*:

‘The expansion of secondary schooling in South Africa, propelled by funding changes in 1972, was nothing short of spectacular. In the early 1970s Umlazi Township had only two schools that educated children to senior certificate/ matriculation level: Menzi High and Vukuzakhe High. However in the 1970s and 1980s, almost all of the now 27 high schools were built or converted from existing schools. By 1985, more than one in four residents aged 15 – 29 had attained a senior certificate / matriculation or higher qualification, twice the ratio of over thirties. Just as the building of primary schools in the 1950s and 1960s created a demand for secondary schools, the building of the latter created a demand for high education.’

He continues:

‘Yet education departments prioritised quantity over quality. The widely noted situation today – poorly built secondary schools staffed by underqualified teachers – is in many ways a product of a relatively short period of schooling growth in the late 1970s and 1980s.’ (Hunter, 2019:81)

This emphasis on increased access without paying attention to how quality education might be delivered is strongly resonant of the political expediency that, some suggest, was the rationale for then-President Zuma’s announcement of ‘free fees’.

Nonetheless, this opening up of financial access has moved the debate from access to success – both to realise the considerable investment made by the state in this education, but also to make the difference to young people that the promise of a higher education qualification might hold.

Financial support from bursary support providers

There has always been, and continues to be, a range of funding models implemented by organisations within the BSP sector. Many depend on accessing NSFAS as part of their funding package while others have sufficient funds not to need to do so.

That being said, the perception that the state is paying the fees of those who cannot afford to do so has meant that there is less appetite in the donor community for supporting undergraduate university education. This is requiring that some organisations re-position their offerings and where they might work.

Full funding?

The term 'full funding' is used within the BSP sector to mean that all of a student's financial needs related to being at university and living away from home are met. Nonetheless during this research we have come to understand that some 'full funding' is just sufficient with very little extra (perhaps 'three star' full funding) while others include enough for students to participate more fully in social and other activities ('five star' full funding).

The 250 alumni surveyed for this research all studied before the advent of subsidised fees. Findings from the survey were that 'just under half (43% - 107 alumni) had received funding from NSFAS [in the form of loan] during their undergraduate qualification' (although only 23% of these had been funded throughout their entire undergraduate qualification).⁵⁵

In terms of the (often supplementary) financial package offered by the bursary support providers, 85% of the alumni respondents thought the funding they had received 'from the bursary organisation plus NSFAS, if applicable' was sufficient for their 'basic university-related needs – including accommodation and food' – although a quarter (24%) thought so 'only if I was very careful'.⁵⁶ In addition '41% of the respondents said that their bursary organisation had offered small 'emergency grants for unforeseen expenses (like bus fare to a funeral, laptop repairs, the fee to apply for or attend something etc.)' – two thirds of whom had used it.

⁵⁵ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5

⁵⁶ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5

As reported below, some organisations feel that anything less than ‘five star’ full funding is not worth doing as it leaves students pre-occupied with accessing the balance of the resources they need. Others feel that ‘three star’ full funding is good enough – while others know that they are only making a partial payment towards the students’ costs , and that these students will have to seek the balance elsewhere.

Reliability and cover

The *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* noted that

‘Private sector funding appears to be the most reliable when it comes to paying on time (90%). Although Government is the most prevalent, it is also the most likely to be paid out late (34% of payments were delayed). (Voices Unite, 2021: 154)

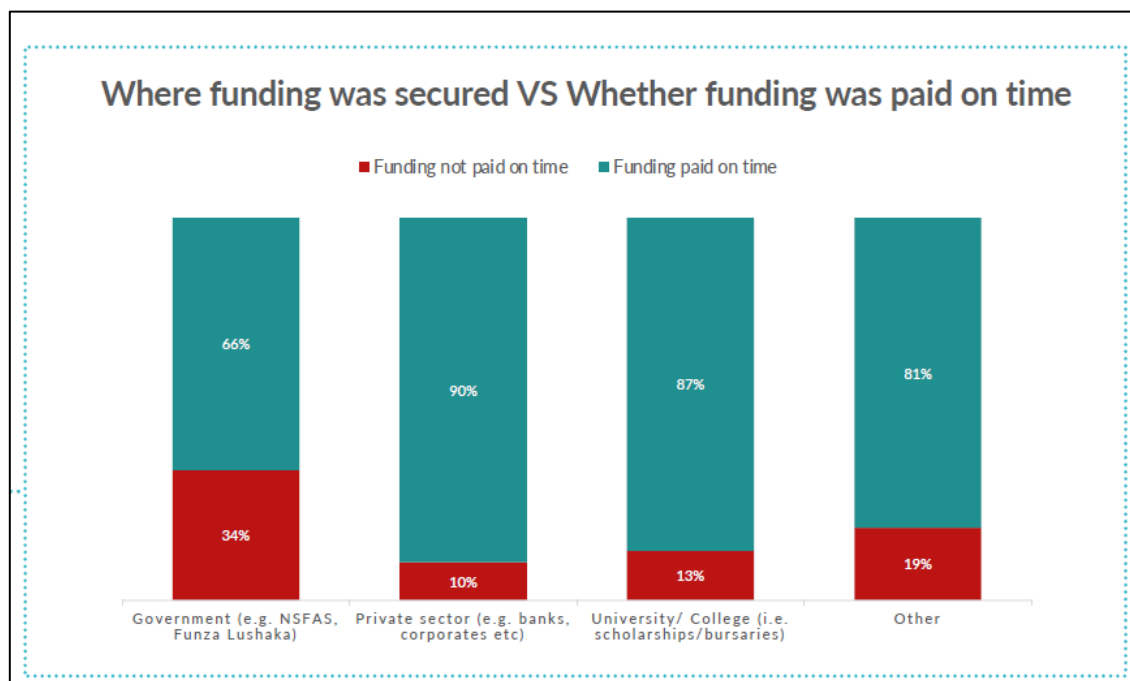


Figure 15: Timing of payment of funding – Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 155)

That being said,

‘Government funding more often covered administration fees, books and stationery, food, and residence fees compared to other sources. Private sector and University/College funding was mostly geared towards tuition.’

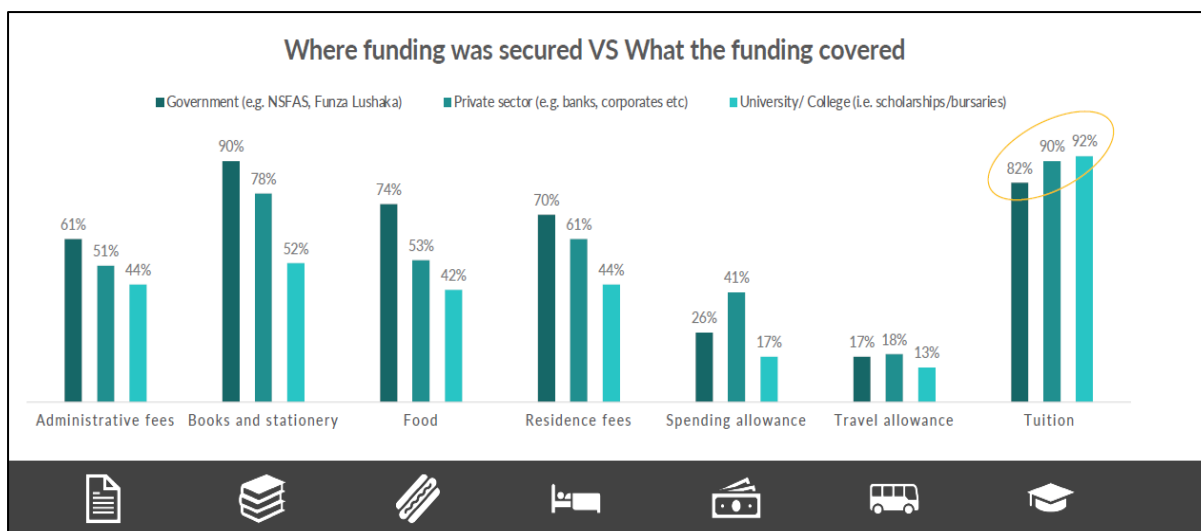


**Figure 16: what was covered by various funding sources
– Voices Unite survey respondents**

(Voices Unite, 2021: 154)

Financial delays and exclusions

The other source of historical – and continuing – student ire, then, is financial exclusions. With origins in the 1980s/90s (prior to the establishment of NSFAS), students from financially disadvantaged households have been barred from returning to university or accessing their qualification until their debts have been settled.

While the presence of NSFAS loans/ grants should have put an end to many of these cases, their late payment of fees (let alone living allowances on which young people depend, often entirely) still causes frustration and distress among students. Some bursary support providers recognise this and ensure that their NSFAS-supported students are protected from at least the late payment of food and accommodation allowances. Some also engage with NSFAS and the university Financial Aid/ Finance departments.

Those middle class students whose families are able to pay for their education – or young people on full scholarships or who have bank loans – do not have to spend time and energy on these anxieties and frustrations.

Financial support from siblings

While the funding situations of the student respondents in *The Voices Unite Youth Development Report* are not known, their responses included that about a third are recipients of funding (possibly ‘black tax’?) from their siblings:

‘When it comes to financial support, more than a third of Black African siblings that provide support (36%) do so financially.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 172)

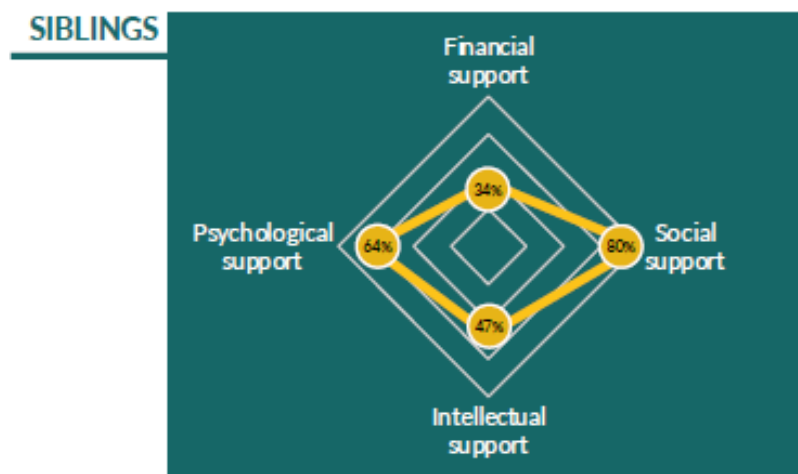


Figure 17: Support offered by siblings - Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 172)

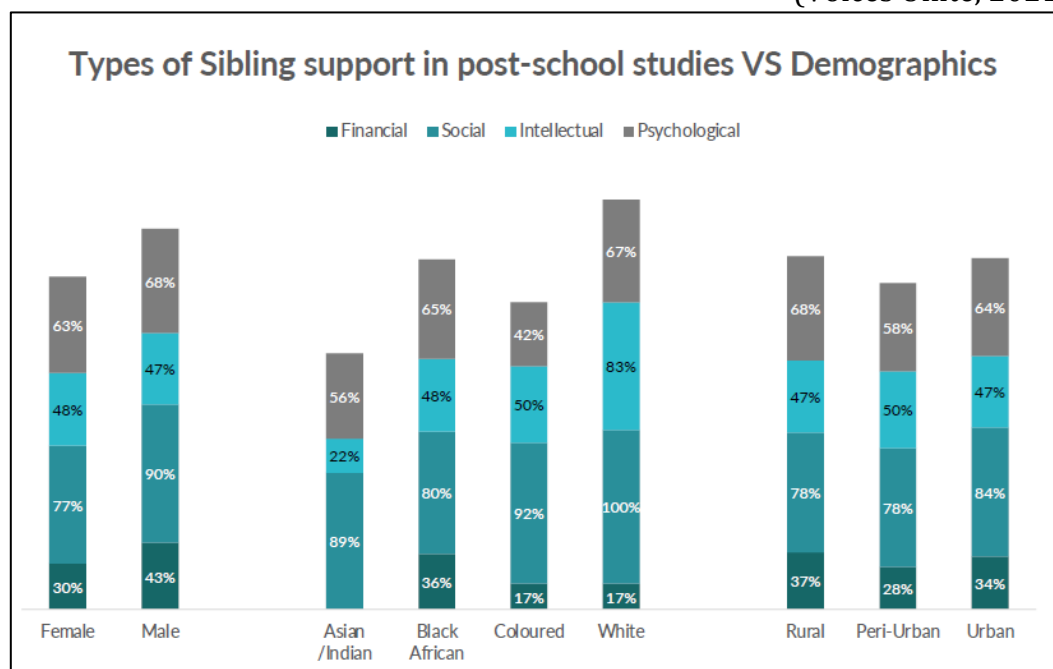


Figure 18:
Types of support offered by siblings – by gender, ‘race’ and geography
- Voices Unite survey respondents

(Voices Unite, 2021: 172)

Comment

Having sufficient funding to cover all costs and to mitigate anxiety seems to be a basic requirement of supporting students.

That being said, some students remain anxious about the lack of funding in their households at home, and are known to send remittance some of their funding to relieve their family's financial predicaments. This underscores the difficulties faced by first generation students – that those from more financially secure backgrounds do not have to address.

2.5 Access – a partial achievement?

One of the main emphases in higher education after 1994 was to improve access. Some universities doubled their number of students, which had the simultaneous effect of meeting another important aim, namely changing the 'racial' profile of the student body.

The initial establishment of NSFAS in 1996 opened the doors to those who would otherwise not have been able to afford fees. As noted above, this was given a boost at the end of 2017 when then-President Zuma increased the level of the means test to enable more people to access financial support and, thus, higher education.

Writing in 2014 on access and success in higher education, Lewin and Mawoyo note that 'debates about access to and success at university – i.e. access with success – have been a central concern of political and policy debates in the university sector since 1994'. As such the 'issues relating to student access and success in South African universities dominate the higher education policy landscape' and 'the problems of low participation and low student throughput rates are, arguably, the single biggest challenge facing the South African public higher education system.'

They elaborated on the idea of access as 'not simply ... formal access to university but more broadly encompassing issues of 'epistemological access'. Equally, success is not merely understood as graduation from an academic programme, but encompasses issues of quality, employability and personal growth' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

That being said, access without success begs the question of the value of this access:

'These low [throughput] rates raise significant concerns about the productivity of the system and the high costs to government and institutions. Importantly, it also raises substantial equity issues. Despite the overall demographic changes to the student bodies of South African universities, low graduation and throughput rates still affect black students - particularly those from poor backgrounds - in large numbers.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

Indeed, citing studies by the CHE and higher education expert Ian Scott, these authors report *‘if both participation and throughput rates are taken into account, i.e. combining access with success, South African universities are only catering effectively for about five percent of young African and coloured South Africans (Scott et al, 2007; CHE, 2013a)’*

Citing Scott, they conclude that ‘the major racial disparities in completion rates in undergraduate programmes, together with the particularly high attrition rates of black students across the board, **have the effect of negating much of the growth in black access that has been achieved** (Scott et al, 2007, p19)’ (our emphasis) (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

They caution, however, that ‘cohort data are limited, in that they do not improve our understanding of the reasons for low student success, high dropout rates, and slow completion times’ and that ‘quantitative measures of throughput fail to reflect the intricacies of social conditions and the teaching and learning process (CHE, 2010:6)’. (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

Given that schooling post-1994 has not increased the quality of educational outcomes that would have put all children on a better footing to access post-school education opportunities, many students from poorer households (most of whom are ‘black’) have been poorly prepared for higher education. This has contributed to the high dropout rates from universities as well as an increase in extended times taken to complete qualifications. While the latter at least produces an educational outcome, neither is good for the young people concerned – nor for the effective use of state funds.

A report of an evaluation of one BSP programme described the effects of this lack of success as follows:

‘The 2011 Ministerial Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme by the Department of Higher Education and Training described the net result of the high drop-out and low graduation rates among poor, disadvantaged students as a ‘revolving door’: While some are able to enter higher education, they face many challenges to complete their degree, dropping out only to return to poverty (and often saddled with significant student loan debt). The White Paper for Post School Education and Training states that ‘success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge for the university sector and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves, in particular in improving access and success for those groups whose race, gender or disability status had previously disadvantaged them.’ (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

While throughput as a measure of success was always a priority, then, there has been shift in emphasis from access to that of success. It is within in this complex context that this research endeavours to suggest if and what contributions the BSP organisations may be making to student success.

Statistics

For the sake of brevity, a summary of findings of a report published in July 2020 - *The Changing Size and Shape of the Higher Education System in South Africa* - which focuses on the period 2005 and 2017 is reproduced here:⁵⁷

- 'Total enrolments at higher education institutions went from about 700 000 in 2005 to more than one million in 2017. The number of enrolments at universities increased by 40% in 12 years.
- 'Even in historically white institutions black students were in the majority, except at Stellenbosch University. The headcount of black students at all universities stood at 84.8% in 2017 compared with 14.3% of white students. In 2005, black students comprised 74.5% of the university population while white students made up 25.3%.'
- 'On average, white students performed better than black, coloured and Indian first-time undergraduates. ... Indian students also performed better than African and coloured students.
- 'The dropout rate of black and coloured first-time undergraduate students was higher across all qualifications, according to the report. This was due to a combination of factors such as access to better schooling, language of instruction, access to funding, conducive home environments, and educated parents' (Macupe, 2020).

2.6 Contestations

Different priorities?

The student mobilisation of 2015 to 2017 – under the rubrics of '#Rhodes must fall' and '#Fees must fall' – included a range of demands, the most prominent being to cancel fees, to de-colonise the curriculum and to remove offensive statues and artworks. At the heart were perceptions (largely at HWUs) of an ongoing enactment of the legacy of various forms of 'whiteness' and the colonial origins of the university system.

⁵⁷ The report is by research associate Ahmed Essop of the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies at the University of Johannesburg and focuses on the period 2005 and 201. It was cited by Macupe, Bongekile. 'More black students at university, but still starting at a disadvantage.' *Mail & Guardian* 15 August 2020.

Unfortunately obstruction and destruction began to characterise the contestations – particularly on the HWU campuses – the reportage of which overshadowed the annual expressions of concern by students often at less resourced universities for proper accommodation, for NSFAS to pay their fees on time so that they are allowed to progress, and for stipends sufficient that stave off hunger, a horribly prevalent condition on a number of campuses.

This again illustrates the diverse range of conditions and concerns across the higher education sector – including among students.

Decolonisation

An analysis of what comprises ‘decolonisation’ is not within the scope of this report. What it the invocation does signal for the academic enterprise and related support services, however, is a disconnect felt by these students with what and how services and the academic programme are offered. Unfortunately this has coincided with the largely Northern phenomenon alluded to above of taking offence and of a ‘cancel culture’, with the result that the students’ calls for change are presented in stark, polarising and often a-historical ways.

Their distaste for discomfort flies in the face of the central idea that education is exactly meant to be disruptive and not simply confirmatory, or more of the same. While clearly not an argument to retain the status quo, the requirement that students should find resonance with the material and ways of learning – that they should see themselves in it – has echoes of wanting to see one’s own reflection in a pool. Disagreement, debate and discussion may well be sacrificed in this quest, supported by the potentially anodyne effects of on-line delivery which reduces the possibility for robust interaction.

Academic development / support

A longstanding grievance at some (particularly historically ‘white’) universities is about the supplementary supports offered – through units like ‘academic support’ / ‘academic development’ etc; that they are patronising/ stigmatising; that they are only for ‘black’ students to ‘catch up’. And indeed given that ‘black’ people are the majority of the recipients of poor schooling, the remedial and supplementary nature of many of the offerings has meant that it is largely ‘black’ students who are directed to access these services.

Two arguments are made: (1) that this support is welfarist and patronising; and (2) that the system/ content /teaching should change, rather than make the majority of students conform to it. There is little criticism of poor schooling – and ‘under-prepared’ is seen to beg the question ‘under-prepared for what?’. This suggests that the university should suit the students better – and that somehow this would address the articulation gap at the same time.

There is no doubt that the university system needs to be sensitive to, and change in relation to, context – but in what and whose interests. The danger is that one constraining orthodoxy / ideological approach is simply replaced by another; that enquiry, contestation and real diversity (i.e. the ongoing inclusion and tolerance of difference) are sacrificed.

While considerable efforts have been made since the 1980s to improve the ways in which academic-related support is offered, poor schooling continues to produce students for whom the articulation gap from school to university is considerable. Moves to change the system/ content /teaching to accommodate these underprepared students have been concerted in some faculties / fields, and negligible in others. Sometimes it has been mainstreamed while in other cases it has remained supplementary.

There nonetheless remains among some students, particularly on the more mobilised campuses, a deep suspicion of these services⁵⁸ – while on others, students simply use whatever is offered.

As noted in various places in this report, the BSP sector relies on referring students to these services. While these organisations assess the suitability and effectiveness of services for each student, they understand them to be essential to promoting the academic success of some students and do not engage in an ideological critique of what is being offered. As such the BSP sector is largely characterised by its supplementary role, rather than one of advocacy and system change.

⁵⁸ That being said there is anecdotal evidence that “sometimes those with a big political voice personally need and appreciate the help given to them.” Prof Ian Scott – skyped into Bursary Support Providers Forum, Johannesburg, 17 February 2020.

2.7 The legacy of COVID19: entrenchment of blended learning?

Lockdowns and on-line learning have changed learning and teaching forever; no university will go back to pure contact and there is going to be a blend. This view from one of the HEI informants for this research, suggested that this is heralding a 'new world' in which universities are going to have to 'think very carefully about how to create structure for students'.⁵⁹

The Voices Unite authors reflected on the 'series of disruptive forces that higher learning institutions have experienced' as a result of COVID19, citing Wangende-Ouma & Kupe as follows:

'With the need for life-long learning, skills and competencies for an increasingly digital world, and financial crises, it is clear that universities will have to reinvent themselves to remain competitive, relevant, and sustainable (Wangende-Ouma & Kupe, 2020:1).

They add, crucially, that

'The process of reinvention will need to take into account the majority of students who are dependent on financial assistance. These are students who have struggled with data costs, mobile connections and digital devices, hindering their access to on-line content (Hedding et al, 2020:1).' (Voices Unite, 2012: 131)

The ways in which HEIs have adjusted to COVID-related lockdown, and the extent to which these will be normalised, remains a concern. This is particularly the case for students whose households environments are far from ideal for on-line learning, effectively exacerbating the inequality between these students and those who have relatively easy access to the facilities that make on-line learning possible.

If 'blended learning' is mainstreamed – which includes the option / requirement of doing some learning on-line –, all students will lose some of the social interaction that attending classes on campus crucially offers young people. Being on campus plays a vital role in individuation and becoming a self-sustaining socialised adult – all part of producing citizens with competencies suitable for a range of societal roles, including work/employment.

⁵⁹ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

Contested understandings

The December 2020 edition of the USAf (Universities South Africa) 'News Update' reported on the speech of 'a buoyant Minister Blade Nzimande' made at the opening of the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) virtual summit. In it he celebrated that 'at the end of the year, all 26 public institutions are still standing. All had, to a greater or lesser extent, managed to move curricula from face-to-face to on-line modalities. The sector had survived R1 billion being removed from its annual budget and some research institutions had been part of proactive and creative interventions addressing the pandemic. They had also participated in the search for a vaccine'. (Fish, 2020)

While these are indeed achievements, his announcement of academic outcomes for the year were controversial – namely that:

*'According to the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET's) early research findings, university students were **doing better academically than last year**. The expectation had been that throughput rate⁶⁰ would be dismal for 2020 and yet the opposite appeared to have happened. 'Our initial assessment' said the Minister, 'indicates that during this period we had positive impact in many areas in respect of (i) the multimodal, blended approach to teaching and learning, (ii) opportunities provided to students to learn in different ways, and (iii) multiple assessment methods' (our emphasis). (Fish, 2020)*

As already noted above, 300 academics did not agree with this claim, however:

'As lecturers and academics at many universities in South Africa, we note with concern the recent public statements from our university managements, and from the Department of Higher Education and Training, that describe the 2020 academic year as a 'success'. We are particularly concerned about the idea that on-line learning has been successful because average marks have gone up from previous years. We have been at the coalface of teaching and marking at universities across the country. We have a very different sense of what happened to university education during lockdown.' (Pikoli, 2020.)

⁶⁰ It is not known how this 'throughput' (what we would prefer to call 'year-on-year progression') is calculated; whether it is of all of those who started studying at the beginning of 2020 or only those who survived to write assessments. Presumably they used the same method of counting in 2019 and 2020, however.

Their statement elaborates:

'There are many reasons for this improvement that do not signal an improvement in education: students were given more than usual opportunities to submit work, we often reduced the number of assessments required to pass, and we tended to mark more leniently on account of the crises in student life that were caused by the pandemic.'

'In contrast to what has been published about the 'success' of 2020, our experience of this year was mainly of loss. Closing campuses may have been necessary to fight the pandemic, but in the rush to on-line teaching, we lost important face-to-face engagement with our students. Even as our classes are often too big to have the kind of classroom interactions we would like to have with our students, the loss of discussion in lecture rooms, after classes, in offices and on campuses, reduced the quality of university education dramatically. Much of what students learn at university does not come from lecture content, but from ongoing interactions with lecturers and tutors, in seminars and workshops, and with the many different people and settings that shape campus life. Often the best ideas come from the crossing of different kinds of information, different disciplines, and people from different backgrounds. Campuses are very important public places to nurture these crossings, and the generations of young people who benefit from them with critical skills.'

'Campus life creates encounters – with other students, with ideas from different times and places, with a range of pedagogical methods and relationships – that are crucial to the creation of democratic values, and indeed to democracy itself. On-line learning radically diminished the experimentation with ideas, the critical peer-to-peer learning environments that happen in tutorials, in cohort-relationships, in student societies and campus politics. It also diminishes the possibility of us learning from our students' lives and questions, an experience that always deepens and extends our teaching and our thinking. Moving on-line narrows and limits the scope of education – and its worth.' (Pikoli, 2020.)

While on-line learning was suitable during states of lockdown, there is a fear that this heralding of 'success' – coupled with this less expensive model of supplying teaching and learning which must be attractive to a financially stretched sector – will be adopted as the modus operandi going forward. The academics' concern is that 'university management might decide to take learning on-line permanently based on the 'improvement' in results and cost-savings, disregarding the value of a well-rounded campus experience.' (Pikoli, 2020.)

Indeed, the same USAf 'News Update' reported that

'This positive [academic] result has prompted a number of new and striking developments in the DHET strategy. The Minister intends 'to set up a Ministerial Task Team to help us develop strategies to make on-line learning a reality in our sector beyond the existential challenges of the CoVID-19 pandemic'. It is intended that the task team has a wide mandate that includes technological opportunities but that also interrogates the new curricula that will be needed in the future and even the way that universities will be accessed by students.' (Fish, 2020)

At the time of writing – still within the context of a lockdown– the teaching and learning models being adopted by universities continue to rely heavily on on-line learning – although there are signs that campuses will open in 2022, some with the requirement of vaccination.

Implications for the support model are addressed in section 10 below.

2.8 The role of university education in society

There is an invocation that graduates are 'good for society', that they are a public good, socially and economically – which lives alongside the social and economic capital it provides individuals, making it an individual good.

These are not mutually exclusive however – although the focus of most BSP and the students themselves seems to emphasise individual success. While not incompatible, they are a matter of emphasis – which is also seen in the different aims of organisations in the BSP sector.

A public good

There is a view that university-qualified citizens are a public 'good' – that they contribute positively to the productivity and wellbeing of a society. Graduates provide particular skills for the economy; university education can contribute to a deeper sense of a socially just society, to social cohesion; and qualified graduates reduce (youth) unemployment by providing opportunities not open to those who are not suitably qualified.

These are optimistic views which rely on their being employment/ income generating opportunities for graduates in the economy; and that graduates will embrace values that promote a socially just society and social cohesion, when it is clear that many who do not do so are equally educated.

An individual good

In 2020, Matric college suggests the following relationships between education and earning potential:



This shows the clear disparity in monthly income between those with matric (R4 977) and those with a Bachelor's Degree which 'can send your earning potential up to **R21 527** and will increase with further levels of education'.⁶¹

Certainly in the health sector in which the Umthombo Youth Development Foundation works, they have been able to track the difference made:

'In clarifying the quantitative data on the changes in their material assets, they indicated that: 'The house I grew up in did not have electricity or running water. Also, in my entire family, no one had ever owned a car but I have one and I have built myself a house and one for my parents.' (Medical doctor)

A key achievement was their improved financial status, which enabled them to build houses and purchase a car to travel to work.

A similar response was given by an HCP when asked about things that she can now afford that she could not have afforded previously:

'I have been working for the past five years now. I have built a house and it is fully furnished. I drive my own car although I am still paying for it but this year I will settle its balance and become debt-free. (Pharmacist)'

⁶¹ Matric College website.

The article reported on their ability to care for siblings and extended family as follows:

'Caring for siblings is part of life for most rural families, with the participants indicating that as soon as they started to earn an income, they were expected to become the supporter of the entire family, anecdotally referred to as 'black tax'. The participants reported that they were able to provide financial support to their families, which they could not have afforded without becoming an HCP and obtaining employment:

'In my second year of my work, I purchased a car and started to build a house for my family. Both mom and my three siblings are now staying in a nice house. I am paying for my siblings' school fees and we can now afford all basics without trouble.' (Social worker)' (MacGregor, Ross & Zihindula, 2019: 186).

Having a university qualification (in health sciences) has improved these individual's social and economic opportunities, improving their future prospects and that of their families.

There is also a (political) sense in which access to university in a middle-income country like South Africa is a right – with the benefit accruing to the individual. A university qualification can be a personal ticket into better economic and social opportunities, access that has been long denied the parents of many first generation students. So for many, a qualification is a real and symbolic attempt to shift themselves and their households out of poverty.

That being said, the performance of the higher education system will need to improve if the increase in access is to materialise into success:

'It is evident from the performance patterns that the higher education system is a long way from successful adjustment to the educational realities and needs of our majority population groups. As long as this failing persists, so will our debilitating skills shortages, and the higher education sector will not have the capacity to play the full role in individual and national development that the country needs from it.' (Singizi Consulting, 2016: Foreword)

2.9 Graduate employment

Graduate employment is a huge topic all on its own – replete with a range of statistics, some of which tend to focus on corporate employment rather than on economic occupation more broadly.

That being said, the economic utility of a qualification is only as good as the economic opportunities it secures – be this formal work or viable self-employment. These are currently being significantly negatively impacted by the COVID19 lockdowns – which, in South Africa, has exacerbated an existing recession.

In addition, there is the international invocation of a '4th Industrial Revolution' which is changing the kinds of skills and competencies needed in some workplaces – though the extent of the impact of this in South Africa more broadly is yet to be seen.

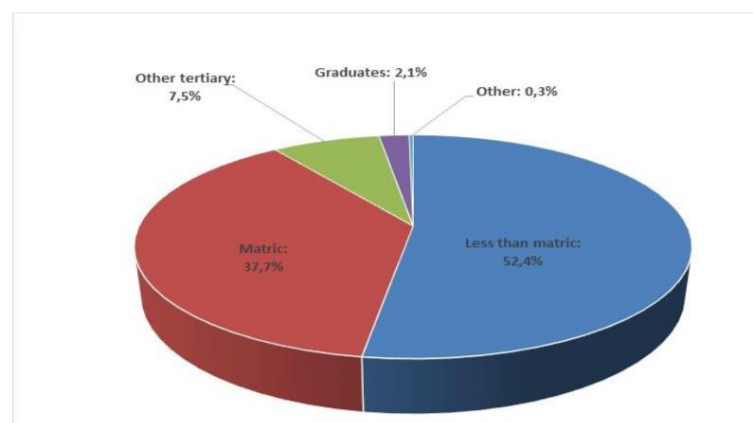
These are not easy times for new graduates to be entering the world of work.

2.9.1 The graduate advantage

As noted above, youth unemployment reported by Stats SA for the first quarter of 2021 was 'a staggering 74.7%. Young people have failed to find employment' (Flux trends & Student Village, 2021: 6). The proportion of the unemployed by education level in the first quarter of 2021 shows the advantage of those with post-school qualifications:

"of the 7,2 million unemployed persons in the first quarter of 2021, as many as 52,4% had education levels below matric, followed by those with matric at 37,7%. Only 2,1% of unemployed persons were graduates, while 7,5% had other tertiary qualifications as their highest level of education.' (StatsSA,2021: 13)

Figure 13: Proportion of the unemployed by education level, Q1: 2021



Unresolved tension

In the first report produced by the psycho-social working group, the issue of measurement was extensively discussed. Developing ways of measuring psycho-social outcomes entailed a debate about what it is ethical and possible to measure. Among others, we noted the following:

'One school of thought was that assessing qualities and characteristics is not only really difficult to do at all, but that it will always be subjective; that it is presumptuous to try to make these assessments of other people. Drawing on workplace training paradigms, the recommendation was that the focus of measurement be on the performative end of the continuum as performance requirements can be described and legitimately required and are more observable and measurable. This was not to negate the importance of the underlying qualities, characteristics or circumstances that people may be experiencing, however – and indeed poor performance might exactly point to attention being required in particular areas. It was not saying there should be no psycho-social work and intervention, so much as performance of required outcomes is the most feasible and suitable factors to be assessed and measured.

*Although the funded organisations did not disagree with this view - which was held by a for-profit organisation - they did not abandon the possibility of trying to measure qualities or characteristics.'*⁶²

2.9.2 The changing world of work

As all BSP organisations focus on supporting students to graduate, they all have a support / development component which at least supports them in completing their qualification. Within the personal supports they offer – at least to realise academic success – some also develop a range of competences that are needed to access the world of work. This is more purposeful in some organisations than others – and some even measure their organisation's success by the employment/ work uptake of their alumni.

There is a sense in which formal employment is shifting, however. Prior to COVID19 there had been a move within the service sector to self-service through on-line platforms. This has reduced the need for a layer of lower-level/ entry –level jobs – for example at banks – and have been replaced by work in call centres.

This trend has been exacerbated by the COVID-related lockdowns and the emphasis on working from home. The extent to which this persists going forward will be important for all kinds of employment – but particularly for young people starting work, for whom opportunities may be limited, but also who may not have access to the social /interpersonal interaction which is an important aspect of learning how to work. For those who studied during lockdown, the need for self-sufficiency and the dangers of isolation may continue. And again, while people in sufficiently resourced households may have the wherewithal to make a plan, young people who may be entering 'white collar' work for the first time – and whose home setting are not ideal for working at

⁶² 'Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. 28 November 2020.' p 14.

home – may battle. (For instance how do call centre staff who work from home manage in a house with little private space.)

Growth in self-employment

It seems that entrepreneurship is being promoted as a panacea for limited formal work opportunities. Self-employment implies that a range of things are in place, however – like finance and expertise – that will support the new entrepreneur through the inevitable obstacles and challenges that they will face. As best it seems optimistic.

The recent Youth Unite respondents (mostly in Gauteng) were optimistic however. The survey found that ‘members believe the future of work will be defined by side-hustling, working flexible hours, entrepreneurship and the ability to work multiple jobs – all close inter-connected characteristics.’ (Youth Unite, 2021: 222)

‘Our findings also support the growing trend in South Africa (and globally) towards self-employment through entrepreneurship and side-hustling. The pandemics of youth unemployment and more recently COVID-19 have further accelerated this shift, and Voices Unite members are clearly on board. Nearly two thirds of our members indicated that self-employment is their preferred career path – just 21% noted that they would prefer to work for an employer. In addition, more than two thirds of these members who are hoping to one day be self-employed are already taking action to pursue an entrepreneurial venture.

‘This entrepreneurial pursuit was also found to be particularly high among Voices members living in rural areas (71%). An even higher percentage of our members (79%) have a business idea that they would like to work on.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 9)

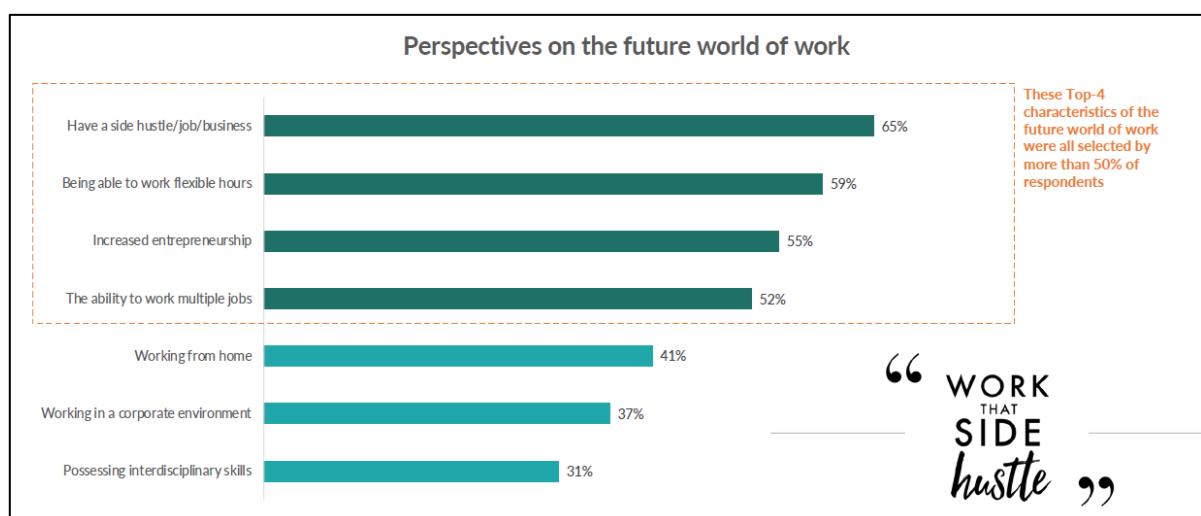


Figure 19: Perspectives on the future world of work

(Voices Unite, 2021: 9)

The report added that the respondents thought that ‘working in a corporate environment is not considered a key feature in the future workplace’. Instead, Voices Unite members (like many young people of the 21st century) are increasingly looking for work-life balance – a rewarding career in tandem with a happy family life. And they want employers who can help them fulfil this balance. In addition, youth in South Africa want to have options and be challenged.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 9)

2.9.3. 4th Industrial Revolution

The issue of access to technology raised earlier – and the lag that young people face who have had not had access to computers during their schooling – is a considerable issue, particularly as it seems ‘blended learning’ at universities may well become a mainstream practice. It certainly has implications in the short term.

Added to this are the competencies increasingly being looked for (in the Global North) under the rubric of the ‘4th Industrial Revolution’ (4IR). These are to do with cognitive critical thinking, complex problem solving, cognitive flexibility, negotiation, emotional intelligence, co-ordinating with others, creativity /cognitive flexibility, judgement & decision making, service orientation / purpose and people management.⁶³ These are a far cry from the unchallenging rote learning that many young people who attended under-resourced South African schools will have experienced. It is not clear quite how universities are to ensure that students access technical computer competence PLUS master the basic foundational knowledge of their fields PLUS do so in a way that promotes the cognitive agility and analytical skills looked for in the workplaces that are looking for 4IR.

In citing ‘the lack of relevant skills’ as being ‘one of the core reasons attributed to the high rate of youth unemployment, Voices Unite notes that ‘the lack of skills development programmes available to the youth further exacerbates the problems faced by young people’ - but that, in addition, ‘the 4IR brings with it new skills requirements such as cognitive flexibility and problem solving, skills that are not traditionally taught and imparted across all academic fields.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 8)

So the question facing the higher education sector – and therefore the organisations who play a supportive role to students within it – is what kinds of graduates are possible, and for what?

⁶³ From the World Economic Forum 2020 – cited by Moshal in the sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

2.9.4 Work readiness

All of this begs the questions of work readiness – the extent to which new graduates have a range of graduate competencies, have an idea of their options and have the knowledge and motivation to obtain viable and suitable income generation opportunities – broadly referred to as work (but not as ‘employment’ as this is only one option). While BSP organisations have tended to focus on formal employment – some particularly on high-profile corporations – this will need to shift towards thinking about fitness for a range of kinds of work.

In their final section on employment and entrepreneurship, the *Voices Unite Youth Development Report* nonetheless underscores the importance of work readiness, even in its quite formal sense:

‘Almost all Voices Unite student members emphasised the importance of work readiness being part of post-school education. However, a much smaller percentage (57%) believe that this has been sufficiently emphasised. Particularly concerning is that interviews and CV writing were rated the lowest in terms of current skills relating to entering the workplace. A lot of emphasis has been placed on the skills that graduates need once getting into the workplace, but basic skills like CV writing and interviewing skills have been relatively neglected.’ (Voices Unite, 2021: 8)

Some of the better resourced universities have well-established and resourced units that offer a range of skills and information to those who access them. These services are likely to be less developed in less resourced universities, exactly where access to information and work-related skills are crucial. Certainly bursary support providers offer a variety of supports – from basic work seeking skills to, in some cases, exposure to networks and interviews that others would not easily access.

While accessing economic opportunities are not the remit of many in the BSP sector, this is the difference that needs to be made if the sector is to have a substantial impact on the youth with whom they work.

3. BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

While this section repeats some of the descriptions about students and HEI contexts above, it is intended to summarise how these convert into barriers to success.

3.1 First generation students

As outlined in section 1 above, the contexts in which many young people from under-resourced households are raised produce various barriers to succeeding at university.

Poor schooling and financially challenged households can mean that first generation students have had minimal exposure to some of the basic literacies of post-school education and/or to the recreational and social opportunities that other young people have enjoyed. While each person adapts and responds in their own way, this must be a factor for some young people who, at least initially, find they lack the automatic competences that make them feel they belong. In addition some/many will be leaving their family/home for the first time. While this is a normal process of life, this can be exacerbated by being financially constrained in a context which is dominantly – or aspirationally – middle class. Financial inequities mean that under-resourced students cannot easily meet the standards of clothes, hair, phone etc. – this being exacerbated by social media and the associated curation of image.

Another factor is that some of these young people have grown up in mono-cultural /linguistic contexts, with unquestioned norms and ways of operating. This is exacerbated where (secondary) schooling has largely been in the vernacular – and by a lack of travel, even to a nearby city, let alone another province. A real barrier, then, may well be a lack of confidence / ability to operate in a context in which other languages are dominant –with unfamiliar norms and ways of operating – and where English is the language of instruction. One HEI informant noted that their analytics work has shown that across all faculties, English competence is a massive predictor of success.⁶⁴

While many universities have students from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds – which makes it possible for students to find people ‘like them’ – first year students will invariably be faced with unfamiliar situations in which they may not be sure how to operate or behave. While this is partly an aspect of growing up and becoming an adult, experiences in South Africa are exacerbated by inequalities of various kinds, so indelibly and deeply inscribed in the fabric of this society.

⁶⁴ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

The financial pressures (to survive), the social pressures from family (to succeed) and friends (to fit in) can mean that these young people are under considerable pressures.

'Historically disadvantaged students, most of whom are black, face a slew of other barriers in getting to and through university, from imperatives to contribute to family income to orphan status. Many attend under-resourced primary and secondary schools that are ill equipped to prepare them for university. ... For disadvantaged students who do make it to university, the challenges can be daunting. Many arrive on campus with massive academic deficits. Many are the first in their families to attend university and feel socially and culturally alienated on historically white campuses. Many students confront myriad financial challenges that result in untenable trade-offs to meet their basic needs. Both the Dell Young Leaders programme and the Centre for Higher Education Transformation have found that even relatively small expenditures can create big problems. Students miss classes because they are self-conscious about lacking basic toiletries for personal hygiene or because they were too hungry.' (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

3.2 Funding

Sufficient funding, then, is critical so that students who are already vulnerable are not made more so by preoccupations with their survival and access to basic necessities.

Lewin and Mawoyo note that a range of studies have testified that 'addressing student poverty and funding needs are essential to improving access and success in university (Chisholm et al, 2009; Letseka et al, 2010; van der Berg, 2013)' – and cite Letseka et al, who

'demonstrate that lack of finance was the most important reason provided for students leaving higher education prematurely, and conclude that poverty was 'the most important issue' to be addressed in remedying student dropout rates.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

They note 'how profoundly socio-economic class affects student success, both as a prior condition to accessing education and in being able to access the right level of resources to enable effective university study.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

This was echoed by then-Minister of Higher Education, Naledi Pandor, in her keynote address to the 2018 Siyaphumelela conference:

*'The patterns are clear: funded students have a better success rate. Students who are inadequately funded experience great challenges in regard to food security, suitable accommodation, and ability to obtain textbooks and other resources. These tend to be poor black working class students. We need to develop models of funding and support that address their needs.'*⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Siyaphumelela website.

The effects of scarcity

The consequence of insecure funding is obviously not unique to South Africa.

In an interview on ‘why scarcity can damage decision-making’, professor of Behavioural Science and Policy at Princeton University, Eldar Shafir, noted that when people do not have enough of a particular resource they ‘start spending a lot of time worrying about it’:

‘There is this concept of cognitive load – your head is busy and then you attend less and do less well at things around you. ... When scarcity occupies you, you have less mental resources, in some sense, for other stuff in your everyday life.’

When you are juggling poverty – when you are focussing on the challenges or the threats of not having enough money for dinner on Friday or rent at the end of the month ... you are focussing right ahead. A lot of other things are out of mind, they are on the periphery of your attention. For people who are stressed, alternatives don’t appear and they cannot sort them and make priorities. They make decisions of the moment. The best laid plans are dropped or pushed aside...’⁶⁶

And ComPsych, the (self-proclaimed) ‘world’s largest employee assistance program’ confirms these findings:

‘Student stress, often over money, is one of the biggest factors driving the demand [for their services]. Studies have shown that challenges such as a past-due bills are enough to derail the educational success of some low-income students, many of whom must work and support their families in addition to attending classes.’⁶⁷

Sufficient funding is essential if financially vulnerable students are to be relieved of this cognitive load so that they have an equal chance to perform.

The NSFAS reprieve?

Writing in 2014 Lewin and Mawoyo testified to the difference NSFAS funding made. They cite Servaas van der Berg’s findings regarding the relative success of students funded by NSFAS compared with those in need who were not funded in this way:

⁶⁶ ‘Why scarcity can damaged decision-making. Interview with Eldar Shafir (Prof of Behavioural Science and Policy, Princeton University, hosted by Aisha Thomas-Smith. “The Why Factor”, BBC World Service, broadcast 3 May 2020.

⁶⁷ From ‘Inside Philanthropy’ website.

‘relative to students not funded by NSFAS, higher numbers of NSFAS-funded students achieved qualifications and are retained in the system (van der Berg, 2013). First-year dropout is also higher among non-NSFAS students. (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

Citing Van der Berg’s speculation that ‘the NSFAS advantage ‘arises from a stronger incentive [among NSFAS students] to complete their studies”, Lewin and Mawoyo concluded that ‘this supports the conclusion that a state-funded financial aid scheme is a positive policy intervention’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). And indeed it may well be – with an additional motivator for successful completion having been a desire to have an outcome for the debt incurred.⁶⁸

It is clear that NSFAS funding assists students to access university – and stay when they might otherwise have left for financial reasons. That being said, some argue that the NSFAS allocation is not always sufficient to cover all basic needs, such that a scarcity of a kind persists. While an increase is unlikely to be affordable⁶⁹ and/or the premise is that students’ families should also contribute, this does not alleviate all students’ preoccupations that scarcity produces.

When alumni were asked to rate the extent to which they had experienced various challenges at university, 60% of respondents named their greatest cause for concern during their first year as being funding; this decreased to 41% when reviewing their whole time at university.⁷⁰ This concern trumped the challenges posed by academic work which was second (with just over half choosing this).⁷¹

In terms of the (often supplementary) financial package offered by BSP organisations, 85% of the alumni respondents thought the funding they had received ‘from the bursary organisation plus NSFAS, if applicable’ was sufficient for their ‘basic university-related needs – including accommodation and food’ — although a quarter (24%) thought so ‘only if I was very careful’.⁷² In addition ‘41% of the respondents said that their bursary organisation had offered small ‘emergency grants for unforeseen expenses (like bus fare to a funeral, laptop repairs, the fee to apply for or attend something etc.)’ – two thirds of whom had used it.⁷³

⁶⁸ Lewin and Mawoyo undertook their research at a time when NSFAS funding comprised loans for students from households under R122,000 per annum. They were not yet the grants for those from households under R350,000 per annum that they have become.

⁶⁹ Whether the NSFAS/ higher education ‘spend’ has had a good enough ‘return on investment’ is a topic of concern, as the South African higher education systems is notoriously expensive, with relatively low returns. This will not be addressed here however.

⁷⁰ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 4.

⁷¹ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*.

⁷² Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5

⁷³ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*.

Bursary support providers & NSFAS

Many BSPs support students who access NSFAS funding, providing financial ‘top-ups’ so that the students are ‘fully funded’. There remains a concern about the impacts of NSFAS’ poor administration, however, which results in late payments at the beginning of each year leaving students without money to buy food and set themselves up to study; and unpaid fee accounts which can result in their not being allowed to progress or graduate. As these undermine students at exactly the time they most need financial security, some organisations pre-empt this by ensuring that extra funding is available at that time.

The 250 alumni from nine BSP organisations who responded to the survey undertaken for this research, were studying when NSFAS offered loans (not grants) – and they will also have received some funding from the BSP organisations. Findings were that ‘just under half (43% - 107 alumni) had received funding from NSFAS during their undergraduate qualification, only 23% of whom had been funded throughout their entire undergraduate qualification. 44 respondents said they still owe money to NSFAS.’⁷⁴

Improving throughput

NSFAS has no mechanism for selecting students other than their household incomes and each university’s own admission procedures. As BSP organisations select their students – and provide various supports that most NSFAS-funded students do not get – a comparison between the outcomes of the two funding mechanisms is fairly tenuous. Comparing those from similar economic backgrounds who are funded by NSFAS with those who are not funded at all is therefore the only comparison that may testify to any difference made by NSFAS funding in terms of student success.⁷⁵

Throughput statistics of students supported by NSFAS were included in a 2019 study by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The ‘2000 to 2016 first time entering undergraduate cohort studies for public higher education institutions’ identify one of the data sets as being those who had been funded by NSFAS *at some stage*:

‘All first time entering undergraduate students, who received a loan during their studies, are tracked, irrespective of the loan year or number of years. ...The year in which the student received the loan does not influence the cohort, neither the number of years the student received a loan.’ (DHET, 2019:14)

⁷⁴ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5

⁷⁵ In addition, terms like ‘throughput rates’, ‘success rates’, ‘progression rates’, etc are used differently within the country - calling into question comparisons made.

While the study presented the following table showing the throughput rates of this inclusively-defined group of NSFAS-supported students, there is no corresponding group with whom to compare their throughput – i.e. no group of students from a similar economic bracket who were not funded by NSFAS or anyone else. It is therefore difficult to name the difference NSFAS made to student outcomes from the data in this study.⁷⁶

(In addition – and importantly – this data set includes students who studies at distance, for whom there is invariably a lower throughput rate.)

Table 1: National total % of students who graduated who received DHET NSFAS funding (contact and distance)

Intake year (Year 1)	GRADUATES (%)							
	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
2005	13,4	33,4	46,3	52,9	56,7	59,1	61,2	63,0
2006	13,9	34,6	47,3	54,2	58,3	61,0	63,3	65,2
2007	13,1	33,4	46,9	54,3	59,0	62,1	64,5	66,2
2008	13,2	34,6	49,1	57,1	61,7	64,9	67,1	68,9
2009	14,6	36,8	51,2	59,4	64,0	66,8	68,9	
2010	17,2	39,7	54,4	62,2	66,4	69,2		
2011	15,5	38,3	52,8	60,3	64,7			
2012	16,1	39,3	53,6	61,3				
2013	17,8	44,0	58,9			Data not available		
2014	19,4	46,3						
2015	20,0							

Note: Data not available - requires data from 2018 academic year and onwards. 2018 data available October 2019

(DHET, 2019:141 - Table 74)

Findings from the alumni survey undertaken in 2020 for this research found that ‘nearly two thirds of the respondents (64%) said they had completed their undergraduate qualification in minimum time; just over half (56%) have pursued postgraduate studies.’⁷⁷ ‘84% had graduated recently’ (within the last five years) and almost all (94%) were 30 years old or younger. Just over half the respondents were women (55%).⁷⁸ Those who accessed funding from NSFAS will have done so when it was a repayable loan – not a grant.

⁷⁶ It is obviously not worthwhile comparing them with the general outcomes as these include students from all economic brackets who are funded in a variety of ways.

⁷⁷ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p4.

⁷⁸ Note the possible skewing in the self-selection of respondents who chose to respond to the survey (mentioned in Methodology section above).

Sending money home

Lewin & Mawoyo summarise the well-known concern of students for the financial circumstances at home:

'Poor students are affected by financial problems at home, which can interfere with their ability to concentrate on their studies (Jones et al, 2008). Other research also presents evidence of these factors. Chisholm et al (2009) show how students on a fairly comprehensive scholarship programme sent some of their stipend money home to help their families.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

BSPs are all too familiar with the many stories of students who send some of their money home, whether this is affordable for them or not. Some are unable to reconcile the difference between their relative comfort with the conditions in the family households – while others are pressed by their families to pay for younger siblings, funerals etc. Either way, these are unlikely to be pressures faced by young people from sufficiently resourced homes.

3.3 Adjusting to contexts

Adjusting to new contexts

As noted above, undergraduate students are typically at the age when they are becoming adults; when they are finding their place in the world outside of their immediate familiar circles and when they are deciding who they are in relation to society at large, and to intimate friends in particular. It is a phase primed for growth, and learning with all the pain, challenges and contestation this can entail.

In the process of leaving home, most students will find themselves in environments with greater diversity than they may have experienced, with different social norms, behaviours and expectations. Among students – as in grouping of all young people - there are codes for belonging to sub-groups on campus. This becomes a barrier when students fail to find a group to which to belong; where exclusion leads to social isolation or alienation from the project of learning. It also presents opportunities for growth and change.

All institutions – and groupings in society – have a dominant 'culture' and universities are no exception. These are experienced through, among others, organisational arrangements – through the ways in which staff relate to students, the ways in which classes are organised and taught; the tolerances for (and impunity given to) certain behaviours over others. These are formed through the history of the institution – the way things have been done – as well as through consciously changing these to adapt to the needs of new student groupings and to the developments in the broader context.

They are also changed through contestation – by students, by staff groupings, by political formations external to universities. Particular evidence within the organisational arrangements of unhelpful dominant culture are pointed to – and sometime mobilised in the interests of broader issues.

Institutional culture – and sometimes the process of contestation itself – can be barriers to success as students find themselves unable to settle and function optimally. Where a dominant culture is experienced as excluding, judgemental and /or inaccessible, diversity can be hard to navigate, perhaps particularly for those who cannot mobilise social capital or material resources. In its extreme forms, prevalent racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia etc can make an environment intolerable. In addition to its being offensive, feeling uncertain, isolated and lonely and no longer confident of the skills they had can be a barrier to real access and learning.

The contestations around institutional cultures and practices can also be a barrier to some students' success when they take physical and social forms that are unsettling or threatening.

Adjusting to institutional cultures at universities

As noted above, a refrain in the current student debates is why students must adjust to the university and why the university does not adjust to them. This goes to the heart of the issue of institutional culture and practices (as well as to what is taught and by whom).

While applauding the efforts of the state and universities which have 'seen an improvement in student success in some of our universities' then-Higher Education Minister Naledi Pandor added that 'we have to intensify our efforts' ... [as] [t]he dropout levels remain high, poor university leadership in some institutions has led to continuing inadequate success rates. In many campuses racism, gender inequality and student alienation have intensified the problems'.⁷⁹

Lewin and Mawoyo comment that, while students bring their own challenges with them, 'the institutional context is of primary importance once access to university is achieved' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014) as it is this which either mitigates or exacerbates the barriers to real access and ultimate success.

⁷⁹ Siyaphumelela website.

‘Race’ and class

Given our still-recent history of institutionalised apartheid, it is not surprising that this need for change is framed in terms of ‘race’ and ‘being African’. Indeed the vast majority of excluded students were ‘black African’ and this continues to be the case. Universities are invariably contested spaces – and over the last 30 years or so, affirmative action debates and those about ‘transformation’ have clashed with those arguing for meritocracy and / or ‘international standards’.

‘Race’ is invoked rather than ‘class’ however, as university education is instrumentalised in the interests of accessing the ‘individual good’ offered by middle class lives to which degrees are meant to give graduates access. It is into this relative maelstrom that these students try to make their way.

3.4 Multiple dimensions affecting success

In their 2014 research, Lewin and Mawoyo identify the ‘complex and multi-dimensional’ range of factors affecting student success, shown in their figure below – some of which have been examined above.

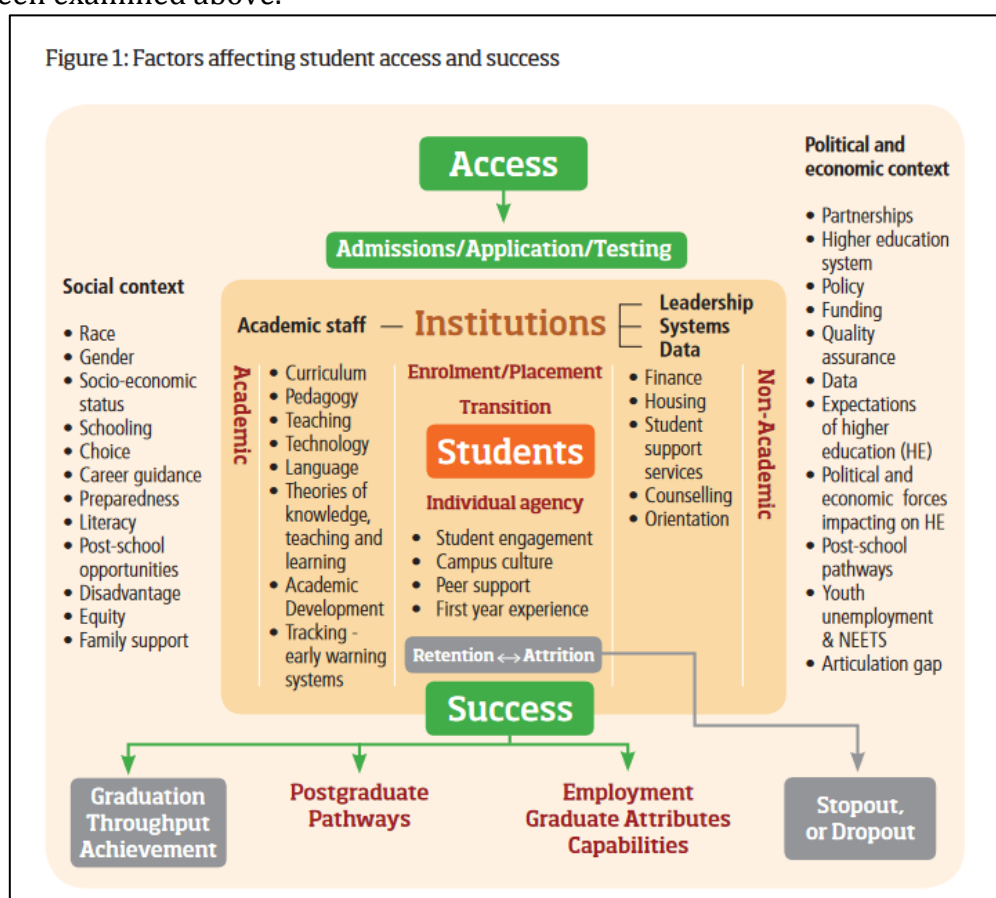


Figure 20:
Factors affecting student access and success

(Lewin and Mawoyo, 2014)

Universities are far from indifferent to the plight of their student bodies – though they respond unevenly and differently from one another. Most do so in ways that are remedial rather than radical, requiring that students are supported to fit into the (amended) existing systems, rather than changing the university substantially.

This may change with the challenges brought by on-line and blended learning as a result of COVID19 – but it remains to be seen if this opportunity will sufficiently accommodate – or be used in the interests of – first generation students.

3.5 What is to be done?

And it is in these contexts that these BSP organisations from civil society – who are outside of the formal higher educational system and have limited reach – generally assist students to fit into these existing university systems and cultures, and to use the existing resources as much as they can. This is not done in ignorance of the lack of suitability of some support services, or with the assumption that a complete suite of services is accessible, so much as trying to help them navigate the external world which is often less than ideal.

While some organisations advocate on behalf of individual students – and work with academic staff and departments to try to improve the possibility of their students succeeding – these organisations do not tend to confront the system as a whole. They do not query curricula or institutional cultures.

What they do do, is recognise – and support the student in addressing – the particular barriers experienced by these students, in an attempt to help them navigate, survive, develop and succeed.

Through their interpersonal support, bursary support providers assist students as they learn to navigate their new environments, link them to existing supports, accompany them through various crises – and keep them on track towards academic success.

‘While the bursary provider sector is not well positioned to analyse and make proposals regarding these mainstream and structural issues, its intimate access to students has enabled these organisations to develop a well-grounded sense of what inhibits success for (some) disadvantaged students within the current system.’⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Proposal to DGMT: ‘Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.’ 22 February 2020.

When asked to identify external (non-financial) resources that had helped them overcome barriers and challenges, the 250 alumni survey respondents ranked most highly the bursary organisations' staff – with three quarters (77%) choosing these staff.⁸¹ This was followed by the universities' academic staff (41%) and services within the university (40%). Friends and partners, family members and general university staff were the least recognised as external resources.⁸²

This research argues that in order to tip the balance towards these mostly first-generation students succeeding, these supports are to be offered within an awareness of the challenges presented by these often alien and diverse contexts – to students who are fully funded such that they are not undermined by scarcity.

3.6 Digital access

The COVID19 lockdown and the almost wholesale move to on-line learning and support has highlighted the issue of digital access, among others.

In interviews with the seven bursary support provider directors undertaken mostly during the first phase of the initial COVID19 lockdown – in April and May 2020 – they noted that their organisations had checked in with students regarding

- their access to technology;
- their experience of accessing support remotely.

Some formally surveyed their students (e.g. Career Wise, REAP) while others did so less formally (e.g. Umthombo). This included checking how they were faring regarding a range of aspects e.g. *'about home, data, learning capacity, their university'*. Some used Mentimeter to access student feedback and identify support and topics which students would like addressed.

In terms of providing supports, some are trialling various apps (e.g. StudyTrust) but recognise it is early days.

One organisation noted that their individualised model of support *'helps with this situation as there are unequal responses from institutions, departments, students' notes etc.'* The organisation's *'individual (customised) responses will help those who have access, to finish'* and those with *'individual challenges, or those of the universities to help them complete'*.⁸³

⁸¹ The issue of skewing has been raised in the methodology section above. Our assumption is that the alumni who felt positively toward their bursary support provider had responded and that those who did not, may not have responded. This affirmation should be read in that light.

⁸² Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 4.

⁸³ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

Material access⁸⁴

Access to technology is, of course, an issue – although Tomorrow Trust’s recent analysis indicated that very few of their students had no access at all; the majority had something they could use or could make a plan of some kind. Those with no access were largely in rural areas where there was no connectivity at all. They confirmed that data remained a challenge, however.

To overcome any material obstacles to access, Career Wise intended to raise the issue of shortfalls with sponsors, although they regard the ‘unequal digital divide’ to be less about connection and more about a lack of academic literacy among junior students. OMET is deviating from their normal practice and providing laptops to students who have not been provided with one. They are also paying for data.

4. PERSONAL RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

The same alumni survey found that the most dominant (self-identified) personal qualities which respondents believed had helped them through challenging times were hard work, being disciplined, resilient and determined, and being able to perform under pressure (49%). This was followed by 22% who identified their internal motivations of passion, motivation, a positive mindset, being focussed, and using personal initiative.⁸⁵

Lucha Lunako are clear that youth development is about working with the potential that young people bring:

‘It is our principal belief that ‘the youth are not a problem to be solved’; they already have what it takes, and therefore development programmes merely unlock potential. All people have innate value, are talented, and have a purpose to discover and enjoy. We believe that individual and collective purpose must be pursued, discovered and valued. Development in general, therefore, must speak to a holistic approach to an individual across all facets of self, namely, spiritual, emotional, intellectual (mental), physical, and communal.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020).

There is little doubt that a deficit model of economically vulnerable students completely ignores the variety of – and sometimes considerable – personal resources they bring with them. The presenting question, then, is how support systems, both within universities and those offered by BSPs manage to harvest and work with the resiliences and resourcefulness of young people.

⁸⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁸⁵ Sub-report: Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020, p 4.

5. MEASURING SUCCESS

During this research process, the participating organisations urged that we should look at their data – even if this was uncomfortable for some; that this opportunity should be used to clarify their quantitative outcomes using the same definition and methods.

We therefore set about grasping this particular nettle!

5.1 Success – whose benefit

What constitutes success goes to the heart of what universities are about – an individual good, a public good – or a bit of both, as introduced above.

- **For individuals**, success can be regarded as obtaining a qualification⁸⁶ while incurring minimal debt and then obtaining/creating suitable work. These outcomes can be achieved to varying degrees. Factors include how long it took to complete the qualification; how much debt was incurred; whether they get work and whether their first work opportunity matched their qualification and/or was suitable for a graduate etc. including salary level.
- **Publicly**, the country is interested in skilled graduates suitable for the needs of the economy – as well as the development of functional adults who will contribute to society, be good family and community members etc. Higher education should also play a role in reducing youth unemployment. And higher throughputs should be obtained at manageable cost to the fiscus.

5.2 A renewed interest in ‘success’

As noted above, in recent years there has been a shift to focussing on success.

Initiatives focussing on success

While the DHET and universities themselves engage in a variety of policies and approaches to promote the success of students, there is a range of initiatives paying special attention to promoting student success.

⁸⁶ In a presentation to SAGEA (SA Graduate Employers' Association) in early 2020, VC of UFS and a member of USAF's Executive Committee, Prof Frances Petersen, cited throughput rates and least time to completion as central to student success. Prof Francis Petersen, presentation on "Student success and graduate employability" to SAGEA, President Hotel, Cape Town, 21 February 2020.

USAf

Universities South Africa (USAf) launched its 'Supporting Student Success Forum' in April 2020. As this research project was begun at a similar time, the intention was to work closely with this initiative to avoid duplication and to contribute to the scope, processes and findings.

While two members of the NBSPF are members of that Forum's advisory committee, little to no progress was made during 2020 and 2021 given the dramatic effects of COVID19 on the higher education sector. The NBSPF nonetheless intends to be involved when the process is finally underway – at which time we will decide how this research may intersect with those interests.

SAIDE's Siyaphumelela

Improving the functioning of the higher education system has been the imperative of the Siyaphumelela ('We Succeed') initiative. Launched in 2014 by the SA Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), this Kresge-funded initiative intends to 'broaden evidence-based postsecondary student success strategies across South Africa'. It largely works at an institutional level focussing on producing data and putting it to work in the interests of improving student success. Specifically, its goals include:

- creating 'a shared vocabulary and consensus on effective practices to improve student success'; and
- increasing 'the number of previously disadvantaged students who complete a quality postsecondary credential in South Africa'.⁸⁷

It works with (largely American) 'innovators from across the world, such as the University Innovation Alliance and Achieving the Dream'.

While applauding this initiative to strengthen the delivery of suitable, quality higher education, the BSP sector does not intervene in university systems; this research project therefore does not interface easily with the main work of Siyaphumelela. It participates actively in their various symposia and presentations however – and intends co-operating wherever common initiatives present themselves.

⁸⁷ Siyaphumelela website.

5.3 How do we know?

The narrow definition of student success is quantitative: how many students who entered university exited with a qualification. These throughput rates – and the times taken to complete qualifications – are an important measure of how the effectiveness of the higher education system is judged, as well as an indicator of the return on investment.

But, as noted variously above, this does not speak to the quality of education being offered – nor to the kinds of graduates being produced for the ‘greater good’ and/or for their securing economic opportunities.

This research has prompted a number of sub-enquiries into ways of identifying evidence of success.

Primary in this are academic outcomes, quantitatively measured; second is the attainment of suitable work/employment; and third, the most complex, is obtaining evidence of outcomes of psycho-social interventions offered by the bursary support organisations.

Facilitated and led by the researcher, three working groups comprising volunteers from member organisations of the NBSPF addressed these three outcomes. Each developed definitions, indicators and ways of counting. Not only did this ensure that the ideas were informed by the practices of the sector but it also set up a platform for piloting / implementation. For instance, four organisations have examined their academic outcomes through retrospectively reviewing their statistics, following the agreed definitions and ways of counting. In addition, at the time of writing, four organisations are piloting the measurement of psycho-social outcomes to see how feasible and effective this may be.

This evidence will enable organisations within the sector to

- identify the aspects of their work that may be the most effective;
- compare their students’ outcomes within the sector – to identify good practices;
- compare their students’ outcomes with those in the country at large – to benchmark outcomes; and
- report on their value-add to funders.

The outcomes of the three working groups are given in three sub-reports:

- ‘Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring academic outcomes – towards developing common usage / definitions’ (November 2020);
- ‘Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring employment outcomes – towards developing common usage / definitions’ (August 2020); and
- ‘Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector’ (November 2020).

In addition, a report on the analysis of the retrospective statistics has been produced: 'Academic outcomes of students supported by four bursary support provider organisations' (October 2021).

Whose outcomes

This research process is aware that what is being measured is from the point of view of the BSP sector. This begs the question about the relationship between the sector's interests and those of the students themselves; to what extent is there overlap – and divergence?

BSP organisations have criteria for what kinds of young people they want to support as well as what they think constitutes a successful graduate. These are informed by each organisation's values and/or by the kinds of psycho-social competences they think will help a young person transition from university to an adult world, ideally of work. This research, then, privileges these organisations' requirements of what they think will help young people, given their years of experience and, in some cases, their *in loco parentis* role.

Fortunately experience in the sector indicates that there is considerable overlap between the broad aims of the organisations (and their funders) and those of the students – namely for students to progress academically and achieve a qualification, accessing assistance when factors threaten to undermine this.⁸⁸ That some students resist some of the organisations' interventions / requirements is understood as either a dislike for some of their methods and requirements, while others are simply not interested in the academic programme at all. Ideally these students are not recruited by the organisations in the first instance – but where they are, the message about what is needed in order to continue to be supported is made clear.

In short, then, while organisations are receptive to hearing student's needs – especially individual needs not addressed by the broader programme offerings – and while they remain alive to various contextual changes, among students, in the higher education system and in the world of work, among others – they offer their programmes unapologetically, based on their experience of supporting students from under-resourced households.

It is their influence on student outcomes that we are trying to assess – and to identify which interventions may be more impactful than others, if this is at all possible.

⁸⁸ One organisation reported that when they asked their students what they wanted to learn, their responses often overlapped with the organisation's intentions.

The default

The BSP directors interviewed for this research project understand that the ‘success’ of students cannot simply be attributed to their intervention - that there are multiple factors at play, not least the students themselves.

That being said, most/all directors interviewed were certain that their support made a sometimes critical difference – how much and which elements were uncertain, given the difficulty of ever making such claims as well as the variables at play in each individual’s circumstances. But they were uniformly clear that

- while (full) funding was necessary it was not sufficient; and that
- the support offered made the difference to some of those who might otherwise have dropped out for personal, academic or financial reasons.

5.4 To count or not to count

There is much controversy about counting – from what is counted to whether it can be counted at all. And indeed the latter question has been particularly pressing regarding the possible assessment of psycho-social outcomes.

Academic development and higher education expert Ian Scott is critical of the ‘econometric approach’ which asserts that it is possible to quantify what each contributes; he argues that it is not possible to do this properly given the need to control for variables which cannot be done. When a control study is done, the sample is invariably small, making it methodologically unsound to generalise. He also posits that it is also very difficult to link improved results to narratives of support provided; that it is not possible to provide empirical proof. Noting that the big American studies have been shown not to be very effective, he nonetheless thought it important to quantify factors where this is possible – but warned that it took a long time for the academic development sector to have their issues understood. It is more important to assert what works and why, rather than how much of a contribution something makes.⁸⁹

This research entirely agrees with these points – particularly regarding quantity being at best, a partial measurement which must be supplemented by quality; and also one that risks making claims of causality that cannot be verified.

⁸⁹

Prof Ian Scott – skyped into Bursary Support Providers Forum, Johannesburg, 17 February 2020.

Implicit in the prevailing question of whether the sector make a difference, however – and where it does, to what extent a difference has been made – requires some measurement and comparison. In their reporting, many organisations have mobilised case studies of difficulty and success and will continue to do so. But these do not address the question of whether these supplementary civil society organisations are making a difference to student outcomes compared with those not receiving such support – information that is crucial for advocacy, raising funds etc. Narratives also do not provide material to compare outcomes within and between organisations to improve practices.

So the nettle has been grasped.

Terms regarding academic outcomes have been wrestled with and agreed to; what suitable employment might look like has been debated and agreed measures put in place. And psycho-social change has been tentatively but robustly engaged, resulting somewhat audaciously in eight ‘competencies’ for which indicators and ways of measuring have been proposed. This is currently being piloted to assess whether this is feasible and useful.

Understanding the limitations of measurement, then, this research has used mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative.

The quantitative aspect has been driven by the pressure for being able to make comparisons and benchmark outcomes, as well as by the need to somehow show any difference being made, beyond cherry-picked case studies. These findings bristle with caveats however.

This is complemented by qualitative methods and findings – as the enquiry has delved into what is offered and how, and what is understood to make the difference. This is not scientific; at best, it is analysis based on evidence. No doubt greater theoretical rigour could be brought to bear in a different kind of study.

5.5 Issues to do with measuring⁹⁰

There are a number of well-known issues related to measuring, the most obvious being:

- How do we reduce subjectivity?
- How do we know that it is our efforts that are making a/the difference?
- What do we do about unusual external factors?

And, for purposes of comparison and collective evidence:

- Are we measuring the same things as one another?

Reducing subjectivity and bias⁹¹

Subjectivity is invariably a factor in assessment, particularly where qualitative methods are used – no more so than when assessing people’s qualities or characteristics where objectivity is improbable.

The design of assessment tools is seldom culturally neutral, if indeed that is possible – and the view of both students in their self-reports and staff in their observations will inadvertently be reflected. While intuitive assessment can be a valuable source of information, it is inevitably an (unconscious) source of pre-judgements. These are possible to reduce – through conscious selection and use of tools and evidence – but not eliminate.

Mechanisms like collective collegial processes could include moderating one another’s assessment subjectivities and biases. We are proposing that the selection of multiple tools and processes for moderation will be good enough.

Some NBSPF members have clients / funders who require limited and specific services (e.g. one client/funder supports tutoring and another does not). This effectively provides internal control groups as each student will / will not receive the service depending on their funding source. So two students from similar backgrounds, doing the same/similar course, may get different services.

For this to work as a way of attributing any positive change to the intervention such that trends may be identified, however (and not just the product of individual students aptitudes) the groups need to be large enough, and time long enough etc.

⁹⁰ Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

⁹¹ Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

***Is it our efforts that are making a/the difference?*⁹²**

The question is how an organisation can ever know if it is their intervention that actually contributed to the changes in/ success of a student, given the myriad of other factors in the student's life. This is about causality and attribution.

***Control groups*⁹³**

A number of research methodologies – like randomised control trials – have control groups whose profiles are the same as the active groups but to whom the interventions are not given. In this way, any differences may be seen between the two groups and correlations drawn, attributing change⁹⁴ to various named factors.

While the most obvious control group are NSFAS-funded students (given the financial households from which they come),

- we are not certain whether their methods of calculating the statistics of the data sources we have found are comparable with ours; and
- they do not have data on psycho-social outcomes etc.

***Claiming causality*⁹⁵**

A softer way of claiming effect is by *correlating* an intervention with a change – which acknowledges that there may well have been other influences. So it could say something like 'Many /all / 83% of the people who underwent x seem to have y'. This moves from the cause-and-effect claim to a more situated one that looks for trends or larger swathes. We (hope we) have adopted this approach in this report.

The other ways of containing the influence of other factors is through

- measuring outcomes of specific interventions; and/or
- general questions about 'customer satisfaction' (though social desirability is an issue).

In response to a query about the difficulties of causality, an HEI senior student support expert xxx that generally claiming causality in this work is a myth!

He added that their data shows that comparing average of those who attended an intervention (like tutorials) with those how didn't and look at the frequency of attendance is about that is as far as you can go. But we all know that there are 20 other things that are affecting them.

- Prof Francois Strydom,
Student Development & Success,
UFS.

⁹² Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

⁹³ Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

⁹⁴ This can include managing to stay in the same place while those not offered services regress.

⁹⁵ Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

Only measure what you influence

Alongside the issue of attribution is that of only measuring what an organisation influences. For instance while the employment of an organisation's graduates may be tracked and described, unless that organisation assisted in accessing work, all they can say is that it is possible that the attributes the students' may have learned may have given them a competitive advantage. Similarly if an organisation wants to measure, for example, students' resilience as they progress through their degrees, the BSP must consciously offer ways in which this can be developed – before wanting to track and measure it.

Desired outcomes therefore need to inform programme design.

What if nothing had been done?

We cannot know if some students would have changed, survived etc had nothing been done at all. Most students are at a developmental stage when they are growing up and maturing – and in so doing, some will simply handle things better and do things differently. This may be stimulated / impacted by the sometimes quite dramatic change that going to university comprises.

While comparative survival /retention rates may argue that the NBSPF organisations are making an important difference, some students may well have survived and succeeded without support.

Variables

The other issue is how counting / measuring can be done across years that are often very different in character, given contextual changes and disruptions – which is obviously not unique to this sector.

External factors – like #Fees Must Fall protests, COVID19 lockdown, family incidents – will affect most people, in various ways and to various extents. People vary regarding their emotional responses and in the material resources available to them to manage these kinds of disruptions.

- For groups this is important in, for example, longitudinal studies; and
- for individuals, events can affect their personal survival/ progress.

In reporting on any measurements, contextual changes and disruptions, these must simply be named and the possible impacts described. Where they might impact the statistics themselves, a note embedded in the table /figure concerned should flag this influence.

Mitigating variables?

- **Measuring outcomes of specific interventions:** Collecting evidence from participants of an intervention – asking for information limited to that intervention – will limit variables. An example is a pre- and post-test⁹⁶ regarding what they knew and now know.

A slightly less controlled version is where a post-intervention assessment asks about their intentions to implement what they may have learned – followed later by an assessment that checks what they say they have implemented. (Their ability to do this may have had outside interferences, however – although these can be asked about.)

- **General questions:** The other way of finding out about any differences made is asking all students about the various offerings and their assessment of the differences each made to them. Social desirability and the confounding issues of measuring change of a group has been touched on above.

Comparing outcomes: apples with apples

As reported in some detail below, we have been at pains during this research project to resolve discrepancies in definitions, as they are used in a variety of ways by different bodies, both nationally and within the BSP sector, which has (and still does) render comparisons invidious.

In short, we understand ‘throughput’ to be the proportion of students who, having registered for the first time in the same year, went on to obtain an (undergraduate) qualification – no matter how long they took to do so.

This is different to the total number of students in any given calendar year that passed at the end of the year – no matter what academic year of study they are in. We call this the ‘year-on-year progression rate’. As throughput rates are invariably much lower than progression rates, this mis-naming (as the Minister did in the USAf quote above) can lead to an inflated idea of the outcomes of the higher education system as a whole.

And finally, both the ‘throughput’ and the ‘year-on-year progression’ rates are sometimes simply referred to as a ‘success rate’, again obscuring what is being counted.

⁹⁶ An example is the self-esteem form from ARISE (submitted by Tomorrow Trust) – given in Appendix E.

While we researched existing definitions, indicators and ways of measuring academic outcomes from the national bodies who regularly produce statistics – namely DHET, NSFAS and the CHE – this was not particularly fruitful. Having reviewed the CHE's *Vital Statistics* and, finally, the DHET's Data Dictionary (2019), we confirmed that our understanding of some important terms were different to theirs. Importantly our understanding of 'throughput' was more expansive than theirs – which limited those counted to only those who graduated within two years over minimum time. We do not include this limitation.

In terms of measuring psycho-social support / wellbeing, HE Health (previously HEAIDS) did not seem to have any information about what they might measure, or how – and we could not find any commonly used measures elsewhere. Perhaps this was a warning we should have taken heed of!

Fruit salad

A comparative study, then, cannot be done if there are factors that skew fair comparison. Apples must be compared with apples, as far as possible. And when something is pear, this should be acknowledged.

StudyTrust argues that the organisations in the BSP sector cannot honestly compare their results with those of, for instance, NSFAS students generally, as these organisations select 'the cream of the crop'. Even where students have mediocre matric results, he argues that they have survived a really challenging school system and are, therefore, in the top bracket. In addition these organisations select on the basis of things like expressed motivation and the 'bright eye' factor.

In addition there are differences within the sector, which make simple comparison difficult. For instance, some organisations recruit learners with matric results suitable for success in certain careers, while for others a social justice motivation is more important with a view to making a difference to the lives of youngsters from economically marginal households.

In addition some organisations do not recruit at the beginning of first year when there are the greatest risks of failure. Dell recruits in the middle of the year and some organisations recruit some students at other times during their degrees.

'Just over half of the respondents (52%) [of the alumni surveyed for this research] started receiving funding from a BSP organisation from the beginning of their first year – while another 17% started being supported during their first year. A third (31%) began to be supported in subsequent (2nd/3rd/4th) years. This goes to the opportunities organisations have to influence their beneficiaries – and the risks they do, or do not, take regarding

dropout and throughputs rates. REAP had the highest proportion of respondents starting at the beginning of first year (83%) followed by Students for a Better Future (71% - all of whom had been supported during their schooling).'⁹⁷

In their Impact report of 2019, when presenting their statistics, the **Tomorrow Trust** declared the definitions of the terms they were reporting on - as follows:

- **'Pass Rate** is defined as the number of students who completed the academic year and progressed to their next year of study. In other words they do not need to repeat the academic year.
- **Throughput** rate is defined as the percentage of students who passed their qualification in the minimum time required (*N*).
- **Dropout Rate** refers to the beneficiaries who left the Tertiary Programme in 2019 and did not continue pursuing their studies. This was either due to academic exclusion from the institution, or by Tomorrow Trust.
- **Dropoff Rate** refers to the beneficiaries who are no longer being support by the Tomorrow Trust Tertiary Programme, but are still studying at their respective institutions. This was either due to donors ceasing funding, a change of institution/course by the student or dismissal by the Tomorrow Trust due to poor academic performance.' (Tomorrow Trust, 2019)

Old Mutual Education Trust (OMET) uses the following terms in their 2019 annual report

- **'Dropped out** means a student dropped out mid-way in an academic year and therefore is out of the programme.
- **• Pass Continue** means the student meets all the academic requirements of the institution and is allowed to proceed to the following year of study.
- **• Suspended** means the student did not meet the institution's academic requirements to proceed to the following year of study and therefore has to repeat a year. The OMET's policy allows the student to repeat the year self-funded and come back onto the programme, the following year, having met the academic requirements to proceed to the next year of study.'⁹⁸

And in their 2018 annual report REAP 'classifies results as follows':

- **Pass** Student passes all courses registered for.
- **Proceed** Student passes 50% or more of the courses registered for including majors.
- **Fail** Student fails more than 50% of courses registered for or a major.
- **Withdrawn** Students who withdrew from REAP during the year for a variety of reasons, from obtaining an alternative bursary, to academic exclusion.

⁹⁷ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.
⁹⁸ Old Mutual Education Trust. Annual Report 2019.

You cannot measure what you do not record

Keeping data is central to being able to produce evidence – and it matters how it is kept, if certain questions are able to be asked of it.

Asked what changes they would make if they had all the money in the world, one of the organisations who are already really advanced in tracking and analysing data said they would ‘put more money into student record systems – so that better analysis of data is possible, for tracking and reporting.’⁹⁹

5.6 What kinds of evidence¹⁰⁰

There are various kinds of evidence.

Quantitative comparisons

Comparative data are a compelling way of showing that the work of these organisations makes a difference – especially comparisons with national stats in a particular field of study, entry cohort etc. The challenge is always whether like is being compared with like, however.

The next two slides are examples of the use of comparative data: (Kuper, 2018).

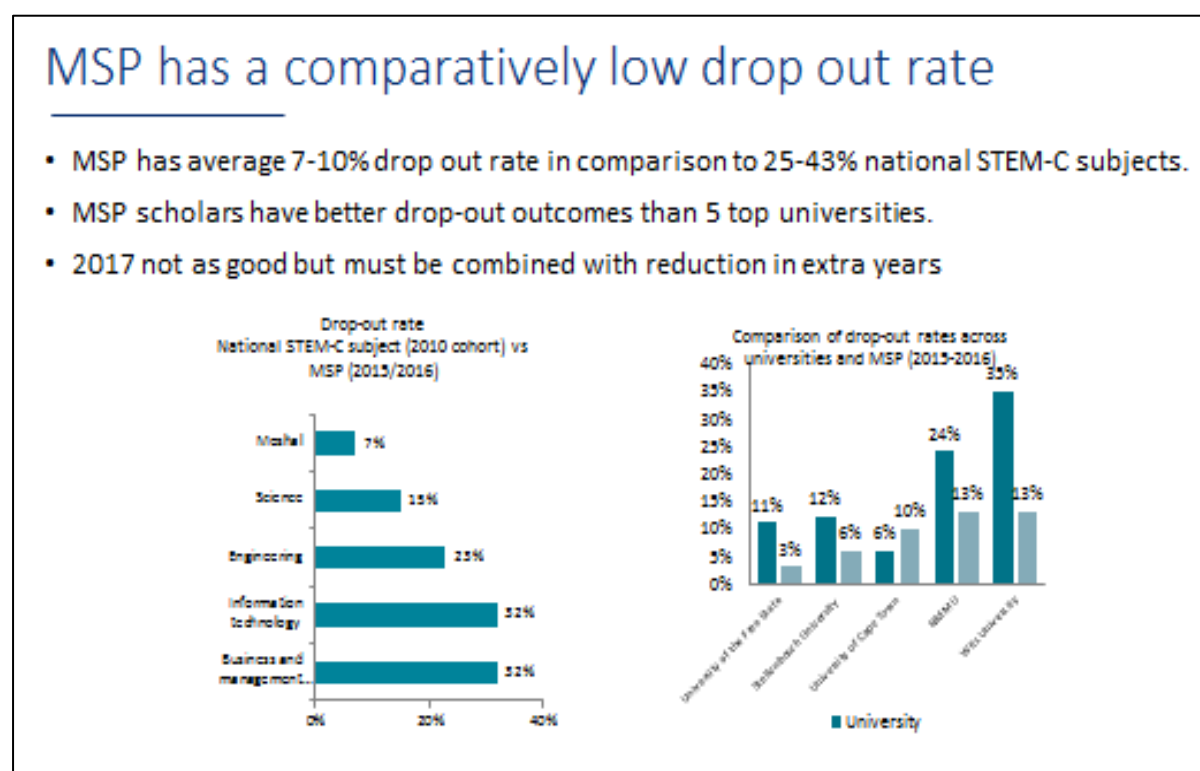


Figure 21: Moshal statistics – dropout rates

⁹⁹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

MSP students take less time to graduate

- 60% of MSP students graduated on time vs. 15-32% national STEM-C subjects
- MSP has better throughput outcomes than 5 top universities

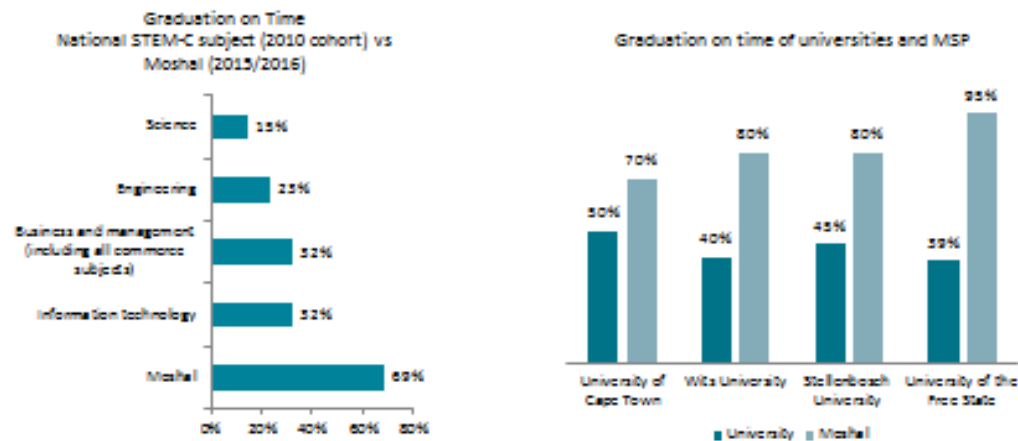


Figure 22: : Moshal statistics – time to graduation

Modelling the value of integrated support¹⁰¹

The same organisation uses data to model the various elements of wraparound support to argue for its value – comprising academic and psycho-social support PLUS employment support and training: (Kuper, 2018).

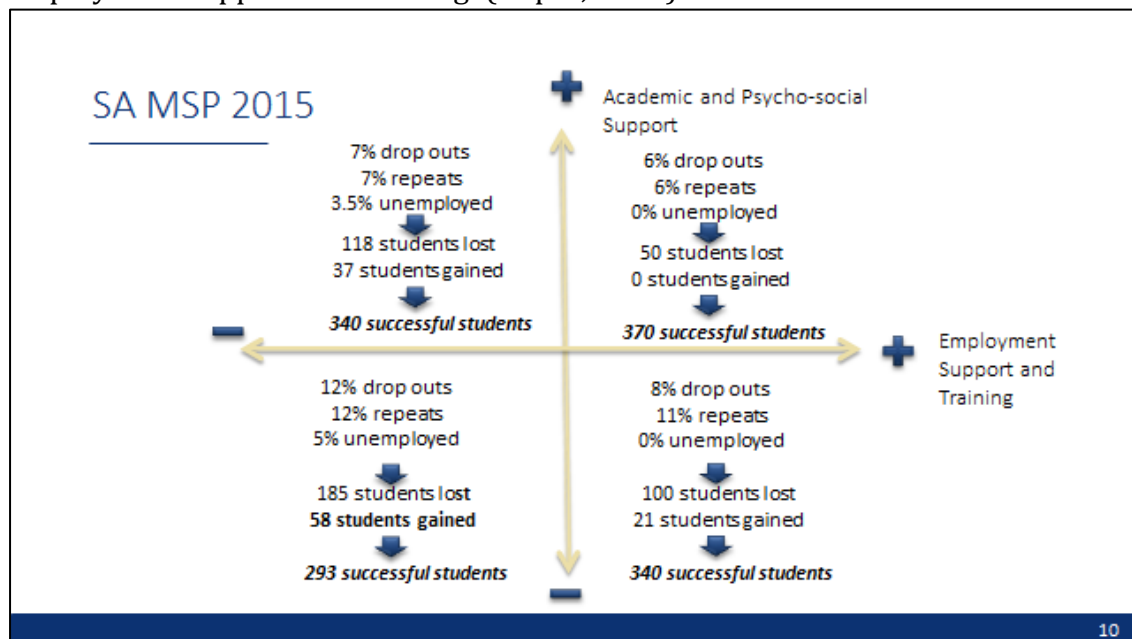


Figure 23: Moshal model

¹⁰¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Longitudinal studies¹⁰²

Longitudinal studies track the outcomes of students often from a (given set of) specific intake years. For example:

*'A series of tracking studies indicate clearly that REAP has had a major impact on the lives of our former students. By giving them an opportunity to further their studies and follow a promising career path, REAP has helped change the social and economic status of many.'*¹⁰³

While these claims can be made broadly as here, what this research is asking is whether they can be corroborated by evidence. What is the 'change the social and economic status' – and what proportion of a cohort is 'many'?

Again, while sentiments like the following are important, they do not satisfy funders who want to know the data that underpins the claim:

*'A large percentage of former REAP students have also actively sought to plough back into their communities. It seems the support and encouragement provided by REAP stirs a growing ambition to succeed and a desire to contribute to society.'*¹⁰⁴

Publishing and dissemination¹⁰⁵

Umthombo has published studies of their socio-economic impact and return on investment in academic journals:

- R G MacGregor, A J Ross G Zihindula. The socioeconomic impact of rural-origin graduates working as healthcare professionals in South Africa. *South African Family Practice* 2019; 61(5): 184-189, doi: 10.1080/20786190.2019.1647006
- R G MacGregor, G Zihindula, L Chola, A J Ross. The training of healthcare professionals: An expense or an investment? *South African Medical Journal* 2020;110(5):369-373. doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2020.v110i5.14221

This is possible as

- Umthombo founder, Andrew Ross, teaches at UKZN;
- they want to share their practices and contribute to debates about resourcing rural health internationally; and
- it gives them credibility with the Department of Health, the main employer of their graduates.

¹⁰² Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

¹⁰³ REAP website.

¹⁰⁴ REAP website.

¹⁰⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

*Stories / case studies*¹⁰⁶

In addition, as is the case with other organisations, Umthombo is intent on ‘telling their story’ through various ways in their annual report and through other media, including video. While stories – or case studies – are an often compelling form of evidence of the difference these organisations can make, they are clearly cherry-picked and don’t give an idea of the number of people affected in various ways.

Return on Investment (ROI)¹⁰⁷

The ultimate evidence for some funders is in the form of ‘How much did it cost to produce how many graduates / responsible citizens?’.

Examples

Umthombo’s article on ‘The training of healthcare professionals: An expense or an investment?’ presents the results of a thorough exercise to show the ROI on their training of Health Sciences students – replete with calculations and costs. Given the narrow set of work options and the knowable salaries of these careers, this organisation was particularly well-placed to do this.

A less specific example is seen in Career Wise’s undergraduate scholarship programme for the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust (charitable money) – run by the director herself. It is the ‘Rolls Royce’ of funding but they are not prescriptive on how the money is spent. The students’ needs are fully funded; this can be R150,000 per student per annum at UCT Medical School and less at other universities. High achieving learners are selected and the cohort graduation rate is 86%. The Director is clear that if the R15,000 per annum for wraparound support is excluded (so they only pay R135,000) they will get 50% to 60% of the result. She is clear that the extra R15,00 per student doubles the returns.¹⁰⁸

A sophisticated example – out of the reach of most organisations – is seen in the Moshal’s ROI model, an extension of the earlier model which presents an optimal use of resources. This asserts that, for the same funding, there will be more successful students (a better ROI) if fewer are supported with a better value-add package:

¹⁰⁶ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

¹⁰⁷ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

¹⁰⁸ Correction by Monique Adams, 29 March 21.

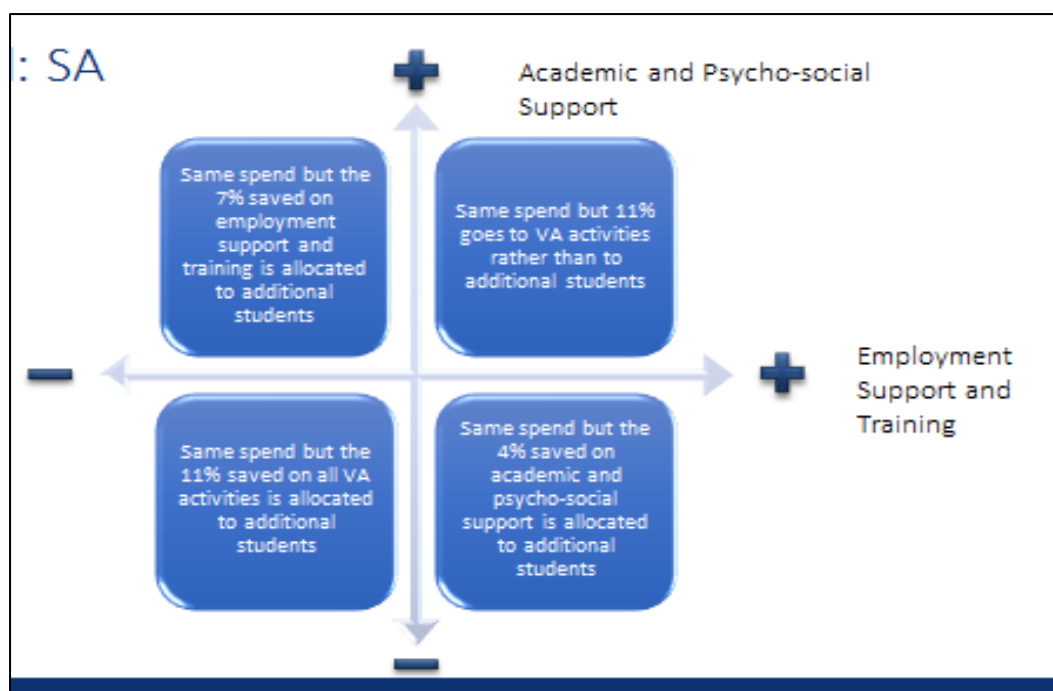


Figure 24: Moshal Return on Investment model

(Kuper, 2018).

5.7 Measuring outcomes

Academic / throughput

The report – ‘Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring academic outcomes – towards developing common usage / definitions’ – was finalised in November 2020. This was followed by a ‘how to’ guide: ‘Guidelines for organisations compiling selected retrospective stats: Throughput, time to completion and year-on-year progression rates’.

In developing a common understanding of how to measure and calculate the progress and outcomes of students supported NBSPF members, the intention was to enable organisations to compare outcomes with one another, confident that factors are being counted and weighed similarly within the sector – even if they do not match bodies from outside of the sector which do not measure things similarly, particularly DHET, the CHE and, ideally, NSFAS.

The terms defined – and used in agreed ways for doing calculations – are as follows:

Grouping students:

- start year
- cohort
- award cohort

Success - ongoing and ultimate

- Proceed/ progress
- Year-on-year progression rate
- Organisational success rate
- Throughput
- Cohort (longitudinal) studies

Time to completion

- Time to completion
- Complete in 'n'
- Complete in 'n+1'

Counting

- Extended curriculum programme
- Discretionary extension
- Programme (degree) change
- In-service training

Difficulties

- Failure rate/ repeat rate
- Withdrawn
- Dropout rate
- Dropoff rate

Four members of the NBSPF have recalculated their academic outcomes – throughput and time to completion for student cohorts that registered in 2014 and 2015 for; and year-on-year progression for students studying in 2017 – 2019. This has provided the opportunity to

- test our definitions and methods;
- compare their findings with one another; and
- compare their findings with national statistics, where this was possible.

Psycho-social wellbeing (Graduate competence)

Measuring psycho-social outcomes may provide BSP organisations with evidence regarding the extent to which their efforts may be making the intended differences to students – effectively optimising the students’ chances of success, broadly understood. It is about measuring the changes effected by the organisation’s interventions.

It could do this by

- monitoring an individual’s development;
- improving organisational practices;
- comparing effectiveness across organisations;
- informing final evaluations; and
- providing evidence for advocacy.

Authoritative reports – like evaluations and longitudinal studies etc – are valuable for reporting to funders, for advocacy efforts and to influence policy makers. They could include evidence that shows the return on investment, but may also include social justice commentaries on the importance of building engaged youth for the future.

The evidence could be hitched onto any academic success or employment measurements, making the claim that the various psycho-social offerings made a contribution to the number of people who graduated (in a given time) or who became employed (in a given time). Conversely psycho-social outcomes could/ should be measured as an end in themselves – i.e. not as a contribution to other goals.

What we did

A third working group of NBSPF volunteers, then, grasped the nettle of identifying psycho-social outcomes, as well as indicators for what is measured and ways of doing so. A substantive sub-report ‘Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector’ was completed in November 2020 – followed in May 2021 by a comprehensive list of the eight behavioural outcomes /competences to be assessed, as well as the indicators and rating scales by which to assess them. It is these that are being piloted at the time of writing.

While this process may produce evidence of (measured) change, it is also a developmental tool for both staff and students. Following baseline assessments done together, the staff member and student develop an individual development plan and set goals. These are monitored and assessed at least twice a year. In this way, staff’s interventions are more focussed and accountable and students take responsibility for their own goals and working towards their achievement, with the organisation’s support.

Measuring change

The method proposed for measuring psycho-social change rests on a before-and-after comparison of factors related to identified desirable outcomes– like ‘teamwork’ or ‘grit/tenacity’. As the evidence comprises students’ self-report, much of its value will lie in the design of the tools.

The proposed approach to measuring change comprises four facets:

1. **What is the desired outcome?**

In short, these are a core set of ‘graduate competences’ with options for organisations to supplement these to reflect their own interests. The assumption is that desired outcomes will vary in emphasis and type across organisations.

2. **Where does each person start?**

An initial assessment can be done which takes stock of each person’s (psycho-social) resources, providing a baseline from which any change can be measured (and from which a plan for their development can be pursued).

Alternatively general descriptors could be used as a baseline (for instance based on developmental theory and /or the organisation’s experience) – although this necessarily glosses over the specifics of each person’s developmental path and only general comments will be able to be made.

3. **What might be done to affect the desired change for that person?**

Interventions provided by each organisation – both for individuals and for groups of students – should be designed to realise the desired outcomes. While individuals will necessarily learn differently, a range of offerings into which the various psycho-social outcomes are purposefully woven would optimise the chances of these being realised.

4. **Where has each person got to (at the end/ a given time)?**

A subsequent assessment (in a form that allows comparison with the initial assessment) would take stock of their later (psycho-social) factors/resources, providing information that can be compared with the baseline and the desired outcomes. This would indicate if any change has occurred – in the intended direction or not, and the extent of this change. Alternatively a more generic measurement model is pursued through a questionnaire at the end of a given time period, with no attempt to match them to their individual baselines. Trends are then extracted and general comments made – though with less accuracy.

Some of the difficulties intrinsic to measuring psycho-social change are outlined in the 2020 substantive sub-report.¹⁰⁹ A comment on this is made in Appendix E.

¹⁰⁹ Sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.*

Work/ employment

As only a few organisations in the NBSPP support their alumni's accessing, and progression in employment / income-generating initiatives, the influence of most organisations over these outcomes is tenuous.

This excludes those organisations whose student support is funded as part of an employment pipeline (like Umthombo had been) or the few organisations like Moshal which measures its success in employment outcomes.

In 2018 Moshal claimed that the 'majority of the 2016 MSP graduates were offered employment within 3 months of graduation (83%) or paid internships (15%). Most received formal contracts (80%).'

(Kuper, 2018)

The report – 'Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring employment outcomes– towards developing common usage / definitions' – was finalised in August 2020. The variables in the world of work are many and varied and are likely to become more so over the next few years in the context of COVID19 and its aftermath. Measuring this outcome therefore has a range of caveats which, in the case of some organisations, would render this measurement fairly meaningless.¹¹⁰ These terms are therefore slightly blunter instruments than those in the companion 'academic outcomes' document – and each indicator may well need sub-analysis in order to properly describe the outcomes.

The terms defined are as follows:

- Employment within x months
- Starting salary
- Suitability of salary level in relation to qualification
- Relationship of work to qualification
- Underemployment
- Durability of employment
- Current salary
- Career progression
- Social mobility¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Sub-report: *Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring employment outcomes. Towards developing common usage / definitions. August 2020.*

¹¹¹ Sub-report: *Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring employment outcomes. Towards developing common usage / definitions. August 2020.*

Citizenship / public good

This third outcome has not been addressed directly. Rather, it has been included in the third working group which addressed the measuring of psycho-social outcomes.

In that report we suggest that while psycho-social interventions and paying attention to students' wellbeing is unapologetically instrumentalised towards realising academic success, it also asserts that some organisations also see the development of the person as an end in itself – and this is about the public good. In other words part of the efforts – and the impetus for the organisations doing this work – is to contribute to developing good adult citizens. This, in addition to skills acquired that might contribute to the economy, contribute to the public good.

SECTION B: COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT

6. WHAT IS 'WRAPAROUND' SUPPORT'?

The proposal for this research project posited that 'it is not clear if there is a shared understanding of the constituent parts of 'wraparound support' and proposed that this investigation would 'offer a full description of this, in relation to the barriers/ disadvantages they address'.¹¹²

In her address to the 2018 Siyaphumelela conference, then-Minister of Higher Education Naledi Pandor named the aspects of development and support necessary for promoting student success:

'our student development and support initiatives must enable us to address logistical issues, psycho-social issues and learning and teaching issues that research has shown to improve student success. Our initiatives must also support self-drive, initiative and innovation'.¹¹³

In so doing, Minister Pandor repeated the longstanding thesis that support needs to be comprehensive if it is to optimise the possibilities of success. It must include support for their academic work as well as material and psycho-social needs, broadly understood. It must also assist young people to become functional adults.

In a 2020 presentation on 'Student success and graduate employability', UFS rector Prof Francis Petersen asserted that 'students who have wraparound support perform better than those who do not', adding that 'wraparound support reduces the gap in least time to completion between black and white [students]'. He also noted that 'while appropriate financial support takes one worry away, other worries then emerge' – thus the need for comprehensive support which addresses issues as and when they arise. (Petersen, 2020)

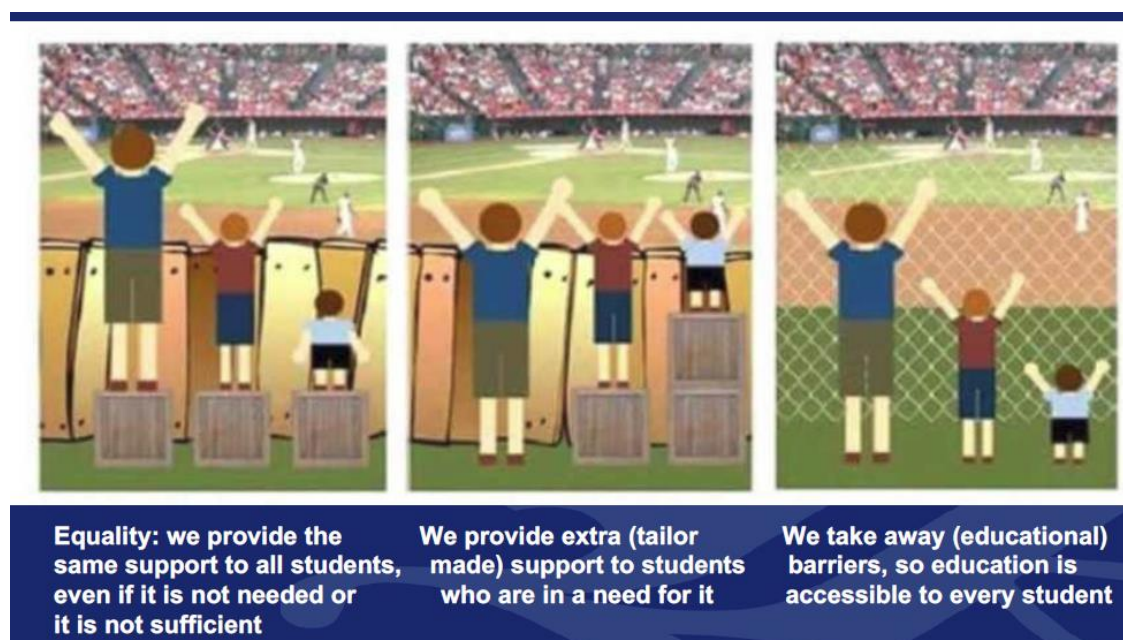
¹¹² Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

It elaborates:

'A comprehensive approach to 'wraparound support' might comprise the supplementation of all aspects of a student's life where disadvantage may mean they are less able to compete equally. This might include the provision of various forms of material support (including accommodation), medical support, information about self-management (nutrition etc); emotional and social support – as well as support in their academic endeavours. At the other end of the scale it could comprise providing only essential material support and assisting young people to manage emotionally and socially, leaving them to access the other aspects of wellbeing as all other students might. In identifying the elements, the research should also analyse what makes the difference and why.'

¹¹³ Siyaphumelela website.

Comprehensive support entails addressing individual issues as presented by each student – especially those of first generation students. It gives substance to the maxim that being ‘fair’ means treating people differently; that treating everyone the same effectively freezes inequalities as they are ¹¹⁴ – as seen in the graphic below.



This is echoed by Lewin and Mawoyo:

‘It should be recognised that every student may be impacted upon by non-academic factors that have a deep effect on their ability to engage academically. So [while] you want to treat [poor students] the same as everyone else because you want the same outcomes. But they are not the same.’
(Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

This is seen, for example, in the report arising from an evaluation of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders programme, in which the authors attribute the personal and academic impacts on students’ lives to the fact that

‘the support is person-centred, broad, and deep; the programme provides a caring community for anxious and lonely students; programme staff take on demanding advocacy roles. The programme’s comprehensive nature appeared to carry through into students’ stories: 73% of students cited multiple aspects of programme support in their stories. Most spoke of programme support as a whole package.’ (Singizi Consulting, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Prof Ian Scott – skyped into Bursary Support Providers Forum meeting, Johannesburg, 17 February 2020.

6.1 Constituent parts

‘Comprehensive’, ‘holistic’ or ‘wraparound’ support is generally understood to comprise the full range of supports a student may need to optimise their chances of success. This comprises

- financial, and
- academic, and
- psycho-social /emotional support

- and includes lifeskills / developmental / foundational skills.¹¹⁵

The Voices Unite authors identify three different levels of social support as being ‘emotional, instrumental and information’:

‘Emotional support denotes care and concern, while financial help and other resources the student receives is referred to as instrumental support.

Information support entails the sharing of information, guidance and counselling in a way that promotes self-sufficiency (Motsabi et al., 2020:192).’

(Voices Unite, 2021: 128)

They describe social support as ‘support that is available to an individual through social ties with other individuals, groups and the community’, and they suggest it is ‘able to act as a protective measure for first-year students as they navigate through different academic and social contexts. (Pather et al., 2017:163).’ (Voice Unite, 2021: 128) This is echoed by Lewin and Mawoyo:

‘Psychosocial support is a key service to support students’ wellbeing, especially in first year where many students battle to adjust to being away from home and to the demands of a university and its workload. ’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

As each student requires a different combination/dosage which may be different at different times, having a range of options accessible means that their particular vulnerabilities may be addressed and capacities built according to their individual needs.

‘All students battle with something at some stage. There is no cookie cutter wraparound support model. Some students fly even though they have no family support, while some middle class students stumble. Career Wise does not put people into boxes. Students at university are the top-end of those from schools, so we just have to maximise their abilities. After all, they survived 12 years of schooling! Young people also change over time given circumstance, broken relationships etc’.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ This could include a literacies like computer skills while writing and numeracy could be under academic support.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

While most BSPs address a range of factors, their offerings vary in form, extent and emphasis. In addition, while they all aim for student success – narrowly described as students graduating in a manageable time – their desired outcomes are not the same. For instance some also include access to employment and others, good citizenship. This means that within the sector there are differences in emphasis on each factor within the idea of comprehensive support.

6.2 The case for personal / psycho-social support¹¹⁷

While academic and financial support are well-established practices in promoting student success, the roles and forms of personal / psycho-social support are less assumed. Most acknowledge the role student wellbeing plays in academic performance, especially in the context of the challenges faced by first generation students in particular, but the possibility, form and location of the personal / psycho-social support that may be needed is not always agreed on. In addition evidence is increasingly being sought to confirm that these sometimes quite expensive services are worthwhile and are a good return on this investment. The cost of these kind of services are being weighed in their contribution to ‘success’.

There is a long and respectable legacy of a personal / psycho-social support offered by universities, both in this country and beyond, about which much has been written. It is improbable, however, that South African universities will ever be sufficiently resourced to provide the individual attention ideally needed by each student, particularly with the increased numbers of first generation students. Systematic developments may ease some of the need – and attention is being paid to this at some universities – but taking individual attention to scale is a tall order.

‘Young people need practical, hands-on, and often, face-to-face support with managed expectations. Psycho-social development is key and best done in person. The emotional support that young people need requires extensive personal interaction from mentors, coaches, classroom specialists and other experts. Accessible role models provide another powerful touch point.’
(Lucha Lunako, 2020)

¹¹⁷ Mucho of this section is taken from the sub-report *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector*. November 2020.

One of the ‘radical calls for action’ of local youth development NGO, Lucha Lunako is that ‘youth organisations and funders find solutions to the issue of how to scale high touch interventions’:

High touch interventions in certain areas will be required for best success, but can be challenging and expensive to implement and scale. Additionally, skills development and training cannot all be implemented on an IT platform, and longer term interventions, which will be required where foundations are most lacking, typically require more infrastructure and more resources. It is critical that we are able to find the correct blend of solutions and find ways to do deep, intentional work as well as deliver at scale.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020)

But they observed that:

‘The magnitude of the challenge in South Africa is broad and deep, and it is our observation that organisations that are successful in their outcomes are polarised on either side of the spectrum. One side of the spectrum is characterised by high volume, short term interventions focused on selecting the participants most likely to succeed from that intervention. The other side of this spectrum is mostly about low volume, long term, expensive, high touch interventions with youth that have potential, and where high impact is achieved, but scale is the trade-off.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020)

Making the case

The argument for psycho-social interventions is that they improve factors like retention and throughput and, perhaps,¹¹⁸ reduce the years to completion. They do this by mitigating the various factors that can undermine academic progress, particularly those exacerbated by resource-poor family and schooling backgrounds – and the sometimes anti- social contexts in which some children have grown up. That being said, most young people who are students, no matter their backgrounds, are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, with all that that entails.

Psycho-social interventions help students fit into, and navigate, the system – while also offering them support as they face personal obstacles and crises; and providing opportunities to develop and grow. This support is needed for all students, then, as they navigate the obstacles in their journeys to adulthood. (See box on page 116 below – regarding working with entry level professionals.)

¹¹⁸ This is difficult to know as some bursary support provider organisations exclude students on the basis of poor academic performance, while unsupported students are allowed to continue, thus increasing the extra years they take to complete, compared with the pared-down student cohort of the organisation.

*A means to an end or an end in itself?*¹¹⁹

While ‘psycho-social’ interventions have unashamedly been offered as a way of realising academic success, some organisations also prize the development of wellbeing, as well as the competencies to support the transition of graduates to the world of work, as ends in themselves.

As throughput is the gold standard by which the effectiveness of most organisations is judged, this has tended to eclipse the reporting on so-called ‘softer skills’ as outcomes in their own right (see box alongside which critiques this naming). This is not surprising as they are difficult to quantify / report on – and are often highly individualistic. In addition, attribution remains a perennial challenge and there is no quality control – like a degree-awarding institution – to verify the outcomes.

While BSPs – and the national impetus – have moved from a focus on access to

success, this is largely still narrowly understood as academic success. But even this is not an end in itself, as a qualification is meant to be a ticket to better opportunities, to a better life – and it is here that the ‘soft’ (psycho-social) skills are valued in their own right as they contribute to new graduates’ abilities to access and realise opportunities in the post-university world.

Psycho-social factors are therefore also a goal in their own right. Not only do they contribute to graduate competences but they are part of a larger project to promote the positive and productive participation of youth in broader society.

‘Soft skills generally include communication, personal habits, social skills, cognitive and emotional empathy, time management, teamwork, etc. Inputs into human development are often framed as secondary, with “hard” skills (the specific knowledge and abilities required for success in a job) being seen as the real need, without the acknowledgement that these cannot be learnt and developed without a foundation in place. In our view, there is nothing “soft” about being resilient, or mentally well, which leads us to conclude that developing this cannot be secondary either. It is essential that we reframe and rename the very concept of “soft skills” if we are to address the youth challenges which we face. ’

(Lucha Lunako, 2020)

¹¹⁹ Taken from sub-report: *Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector.* November 2020.

Providing psycho-social development for law graduates

That psycho-social support is valuable to a range of people – and not only for those from under-resourced backgrounds or only for undergraduate students – is seen in this example.

In 2020 Tomorrow Trust was commissioned by well-established law firm Cliff Dekker Hofmeyr, to run a work readiness workshop for 30 of the 35 individuals who had signed to join the law firm for their articles. Some were 'final year students, others completing a Masters and some working'. They were located around the country.

The law firm 'recognised that graduates are most vulnerable to pressures of industry and require additional tools to those that are available; and that graduates speak of balance but must re-align to integration'.

They identified the students' 'challenges' and needs as

- 'High anxiety, panic and stress
- Effective communication styles and managing assumptions on diversity & transformation
- Professional environment, EQ & leadership style
- Technical skills, work readiness'

Tomorrow Trust's approach to 'student wellness and work readiness' comprised:

- 'Building relationships
- Fostering social connections
- Creating safe spaces
- Role modelling behaviours
- Building skills
- Creating a sense of belonging'

After an initial orientation, the programme comprised:

- 'monthly sessions with a psychologist;
- access to telephonic support 24/7;
- mock performance evaluations; and
- a three-day workshop programme'



The post-intervention evaluation showed that the topics most appreciated were:

1. 'Personal & professional brand management
2. Communication & conflict management
3. Emotional intelligence & leadership style
4. Gratitude'

– and suggested that workshop topics going forward might be:

1. 'Financial Literacy
2. Ethical behaviour in the workplace
3. Law technical skills'

All participants affirmed that the programme should be offered to future cohorts – and 90% felt it had 'contributed to my overall personal and professional development' and 80% felt they were 'more prepared for their articles' (Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr & Tomorrow Trust, 2020).

While the profiles of these students are likely to be varied and their household incomes are not known, this programme for all entering articulated clerks will include graduates from middle-income households. Tomorrow Trust thus observes that support can make all the difference during this ordinary developmental phase of young people's lives. It would be interesting to do a longitudinal study of this cohort.

6.3 Who offers what

All bursary support providers have a menu of offerings, based on their estimation of what makes the difference and what their aims are for students – while also recognising that students have individual needs.

The following listing gives an idea of the services offered by seven bursary support providers, as represented by their directors.

Table 2: Services offered by seven bursary support providers as represented by their directors: 2020¹²⁰
(presented in descending order)

Service	No of organisations offering this (n=7)
Academic monitoring	7
Academic advice (course selection/ choices)	7
Psycho-social support	7
Lifeskills (inc SRH, diversity, conflict, nutrition etc)	7
Crisis intervention / support	7
Personal financial management (inc budgeting)	7
Career guidance and advice	6
Orientation / FYE	6
Study and IT skills	6
Academic support (inc tutoring)	5
Medical (including eyes)	5
Accommodation identification	5
Peer and leadership development	5
Alumni (networking etc)	5
Sport and recreation	4
Community service	4
Graduate placement	4
Job search	3
Advocacy / representation (on individual matters)	2
In-service training placement	2
Other: <i>Work Readiness</i>	1

Academic monitoring and advice and psycho-social-related services are offered by all seven – as is some form of financial advice. Activities related to future work/employment and community-related activities are offered by fewer organisations.

¹²⁰ Taken from sub-report: *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

Deciding which services to offer

As seen in the list above, not all organisations offer everything – although most require their students to participate in a core set of activities that they believe are useful for everyone. They base their choice of services on their expertise and experience and some have theories of support and youth development that underpin their choices. Some consult their students.

Participation in core activities at least is often a condition of receiving funding and some organisations monitor their beneficiaries' engagements quite closely, withdrawing funding where a student is 'non-compliant'.

Examples of approaches to what supports to offer are as follows:

- Moshal consults students regarding what they need but also has a very clear idea of what they think will make a difference and provides these interventions proactively.
- Tomorrow Trust deploys their professional understandings of stages of personal development in choosing what they offer students. Students are required to sign a contract which includes that they must engage monthly, attend all workshops and volunteer within the organisation's programmes.¹²¹
- REAP requires students to participate in a range of services based on the staff's experience plus an agenda of good citizenship. They reflect what they think students need at each stage of their university lives. While some services are compulsory, they are student-led inasmuch as they also respond to expressed needs.¹²²

Minimal core - students to decide

Three of the seven organisations offer a standard, light programme, relying on students to indicate if they need any other assistance. They understand help-seeking behaviour to be a skill in its own right which they encourage students to learn.

- **Career Wise** starts with the student's needs which are revealed within the context of ongoing relationships and trust between the student and staff; students say what they need or it will come up: *'We do not force students to disclose if they are not comfortable – but they must be open to advice ... like how to help themselves or where to go to get help.'*¹²³
- **Umthombo** offers a light support programme, accompanied by help when needed.
- **StudyTrust** offers the same (light) support across disciplines, as the 'principles and learning strategies are generic'.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

¹²² Interviews with Russell Davies and Emma Francis, 23& 24 April 2020

¹²³ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

¹²⁴ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

More directed approach

The other approach is that students don't know what they don't know – and that people tend not to do what is optional; that the BSP has a pretty good idea of what will make the difference and therefore requires compulsory participation in a larger range of activities.

Student consultations

Some organisations consult their students collectively regarding the services they need, either sporadically or on an ongoing basis, while others offer a light generic menu to which individual responses can be added.

Examples of recent consultations are as follows:

- As part of their new developmental approach, OMET have recently consulted students on what they need.
- Tomorrow Trust recently surveyed their students who confirmed that their workshop topics were useful but also added new ideas. 'When students have a say in what they want there is probably more buy-in.' In contrast, the organisation also provides some skills needed in the workplace as identified by corporates; they find that students only really value these once they are working, however.
- At the beginning of 2020 REAP decided that 'we should not be deciding for them' and constituted a student committee as a feedback mechanism so that the students could participate in deciding what they wanted. REAP consulted students on the brief of the student committee and how it should be set up after which students voted for reps at their own universities and three mostly senior students have been elected per institution.

6.4 What prevents students from using support services?

Apart from the activities that are compulsory, students may need to access additional services to assist them with particular issues. Where organisations are aware of these, they either provide these directly or refer them to services at their universities.

Interest

The assumption about support-seeking behaviour is that students are interested in, and motivated to, wanting to survive and even improve – and that this propels them to find out about and/or access services. This can either be through their BSP or directly through the university they are attending.

However, where students are required (e.g. by the BSPs) to access a university-based service – like student counselling or tutorials etc – their interest in attending may vary.

In a pilot project at Walter Sisulu University, REAP offered psycho-social/developmental support to any student who wanted it. This was entirely voluntary. Students were not selected by REAP, nor were they receiving any funding. The issue the BSP was testing was whether (NSFAS-funded) students would see the value in accessing this kind of support – and thus use these services.

The voluntary attendance turned out to be sporadic and did not grow over time. The arrangements were undermined by a range of contextual factors including staff and SRC wariness about this BSP working on campus at all, student unrest and staff strikes. The findings were therefore inconclusive and the issues of whether funding is the contracting mechanism remains unanswered.

More recently Tomorrow Trust began to work with NSFAS-funded students – providing no top-up funding and offering the same model of personal support to those they fund fully. This is an attempt to ascertain whether the personal support is valued in itself, whether students are interested when there is no additional funding and whether it makes a difference to those students' outcomes.

Ability

It is a truism that people who most need help are often those who do not seek it.

*'The students that exasperate us the most are the ones who do not ask for help and do not know what their issues are – but if we keep working with them, suddenly there is a click!'*¹²⁵

Some students simply do not know what they need – or even that they need assistance at all; others lack the ability to assert their needs. For some, the gap between what they need and what is standardly offered may simply not meet their need and therefore undermine their ability to benefit from what is offered. Some students may know what they need but are reluctant / opposed to engage in the opportunities provided.

Starting with the provider

Another reason given for the lack of uptake of services is that providers start with what they are interested in and can do – and that this may not be what students think they need.¹²⁶ Career Wise cautioned that

*'sometimes organisations provide things they think the students need – or what they would like to offer. There are a lot of well-intentioned people in the sector, but the sector must drill down to the students' needs and not what we think the students need.'*¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

¹²⁶ Prof Ian Scott. Research scoping meeting at REAP, 3 February 2020.

¹²⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

The problem is circular, however, as students cannot always know what they need, while ‘experts’ might well know – and are concerned with getting ‘results’ both for the students and for their funders.

Support offered by universities

Lewin and Mawoyo note that there is an assumption ‘that students will use services because they are available’ but that this is not always the case. ‘In addition to a lack of information about the kind of services available, poor rural students may be stigmatised for using some of the services, particularly when seemingly asking for help (Jones et al, 2008)’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). This stigma is also felt by some ‘black’ students who are not rural or poor – who see these services as remedial in some way. This is elaborated on below.

Support services offered by universities that are unused and under-used raise the inevitable question of why this is the case. For example in a context where students are known to struggle with assignment writing,¹²⁸ an under-used writing centre would need to find out why they are not flooded with students wanting assistance.

The nature of services

Some services are not offered in ways that are accessible to the very students they are trying to serve. This can be about institutional arrangements like opening hours and accessibility of venues; about students’ experiences of staff attitudes and approaches; and /or about the suitability of the services in relation to the students’ needs, among others.

Most BSPs make it their business to know how useful the services are at each university – particularly if they depend on these referrals to support their students’ academic outcomes.

Ideology

Some students will not access support services offered by their university as they are suspicious of the institution (or organisation) offering it. Others are resentful about the need for ‘support’, seeing this as implying a deficit model. This is exacerbated by the fact that most of the students whose schooling has not prepared them for university study and who thus need support are ‘black’, giving the impression that ‘black’ students are less able. Eminent student development expert Ian Scott notes that the way in which support is given can result in it looking like ‘a food queue for the poor or Black students’.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Personal conversation with UWC Writing Centre staff member, 2019.

¹²⁹ Prof Ian Scott – skyped into Bursary Support Providers Forum, Johannesburg, 17 February 2020.

Consulting students

While some universities consult students about the support services they may want and in what form, others do not. Although needs analyses assume that people are able to articulate their needs, consultation works at both a functional and symbolic level. Functionally the universities may indeed learn what and how services are wanted. But symbolically, asking students – and engaging with them seriously – means that services offered in response to expressed needs may have better uptake.

A university-based enquiry

(Taken from Galvaan, R, Crawford-Browne, S, Gamielien, F, Kleintjes, S; Krenzer, M. (2019.) *Report on the Faculty-based engagements with stakeholders: understanding “uMgowo”*. April 2019. Mental Health Working Group: Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town.)

In 2018 a working group comprising staff and students from UCT’s Health Sciences Faculty was established to identify ‘the barriers to promoting mental health and well-being within the Faculty’ and to suggest ‘what could turn this situation around’. Recognising that ‘common mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are high amongst students at universities including in South Africa’ they noted that

‘medical and health and rehabilitation students are prone to psychological distress, often in the form of depression, anxiety and burnout (Dryebye, Thomas & Shanafelt, 2005; Omigbodun, Odukogbe, Omigbodun, Yusuf, Bells & Olayemi, 2006)’

They understood that the ‘causes of mental health disorders and psychological disabilities are also multifactorial’ and that ‘studies have emphasised that personality factors and individual coping strategies play an integral role in building resilience to mental ill-health and psychological distress (Haight, Chibnall, Schindler & Slavin, 2012; Dyrbye, Thomas & Shanafelt, 2005).’

Accessing support

Accessing support was said to be difficult, however:

‘Students noted that the systems put in place to ask for support were not sufficiently user-friendly or available at times that are conducive to the faculty’s timetables. Students described that they needed to navigate between different offices to access support and that this caused stress as the availability of these services did not fit with the constraints of the timetable. For example, there was poor integration of systems for addressing student health and often times, students found that these protocols contradicted one another.’¹

'On the other hand, staff noted that the faculty does not make it apparent to students who is responsible for what procedures and how the system works. As a result, students often opt to find support elsewhere and at their own expense. Alternatively, the stress of navigating such a complex system may be too burdensome for students already coping with the impact on mental health problems on their (inter)personal resources, resulting in the student delaying or not entering the system, compounding the impact on their ability to work and study.'

'Very limited consideration is given for the contextual and situational aspects of students' lives. It also contributed to students' hesitance to seek support. This is particularly important given that many of the students were young adults and that this transition required nurturing. Little consideration is given to the fact that students are young people, adjusting to a new environment, often far from home, family and community support, or if from Cape Town, possibly light years away from familiar cultural supports and Ways of Being in the World.'

Possible solutions

'Reflecting on possible solutions, students shared examples such as:

- a support structure regarding the impact of the realities of becoming a health professional , for e.g. illness, disability, and death needed to be taught*
- a safe structure for a network of support is needed;*
- skills to identify warning signs of not coping easily, so you can seek help*
- more exposure and normalising of the stresses of becoming a health professional: open days regarding psychosocial distress, talks (with people who have had experiences, rather than as an intellectual exercise by lecturers).'*

It was indicated that there is a need for group-based, informal mental health support structures within curricula time for students on campus. Along these lines, it was expressed that if individual debriefing is required, this should be done by a third party and not the student's supervisor.'

6.5 The cost of providing wraparound support

Most organisations have a fee /cost for the provision of wraparound support. This is sometimes set by the donor while at other times organisations stipulate the cost in their funding proposals.

- 'Career Wise charges a bursary support fee which will be 10% of the overall expenditure disbursed for the students.'¹³⁰
- 'Currently REAP charges R22,000 / R23,000 per student per year.'¹³¹
- StudyTrust 'is putting all the students supported by SED money [mandatory company levies for Socio-Economic Development] onto their support programmes'. It uses 50% of the bursary management and administration fee received from corporate clients to cover the cost of bursary administration and 50% goes towards the student mentoring and support programme. Some corporate clients contribute an additional amount to cover the cost of holiday seminars.¹³²

It is against the cost of providing support that calculation about the return on investments are done. Umthombo included the following when the undertook their calculation"

'The analysis involved identifying all costs related to supporting UYDF students, as recorded in its books of accounts and administrative records. The costing was done across 6 major categories that were identified as the main cost centres, according to the UYDF model (Fig. 1). These were: (i) recruitment; (ii) educational support; (iii) mentorship; (iv) postgraduate support; (v) administration; and (vi) capital costs.'

They found

'Most of the graduates were medical doctors (n=79), 32 were nurses, 20 physiotherapists and 20 radiographers. ...The total cost of training all 254 graduates – estimated at ZAR186 million.

These 254 graduates are expected to generate ~ZAR15 billion in lifetime earnings, which would be equal to ZAR4 billion at current prices. The internal rate of return on this investment is 63%, and the income tax paid on future earnings will be ~ZAR4 billion, assuming a 20 - 30% tax rate.' (MacGregor, Zihindula, Chola & Ross, 2020)

This is not a light undertaking and careers in health sciences are perhaps more easily quantifiable than more generic and non-vocational qualifications.

¹³⁰ Career Wise website.

¹³¹ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

¹³² Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

6.6 Monitoring support

As all organisations are concerned with optimising their students' outcomes, they monitor their progress, both personal and academic. This is done in a variety of ways, using 'traffic light' systems to quickly identify students at risk, through case notes, and through periodic reviews of each student.

For example OMET's 'support intensity chart' (below) presents the organisation's idea of the intensity of support needed based on the student's various states of wellbeing.¹³³

Support Intensity Chart		
I am OK	I need some support	It's a challenging time (inherently or because of factors beyond our control)...
• Passing all courses • Have a balanced life • Goal driven • Self-motivated • Passionate about course • Have a plan beyond their university life • Has certainty about future • Has clarity	• Struggling with one or more modules which are not major(s) • Students working part-time for financial support • Family issues and disruptions • Students carrying modules from previous years • Failed a year before applying for the scholarship • Relationship issues • Socio-economic challenges beyond your control	• 50%-55% range for majors and or more than one course • Failed 2 or more modules • Students repeating final year • First year students • Family financial obligations in conjunction with academic scores 50%-55% • Barriers in the form of health challenges • Barriers in the form of socio-economic challenges • Accommodation safety and comfort concerns • General social or emotional disruptions that cause severe trauma • Courses that are extraordinarily challenging

Figure 25:
Support Intensity Chart – Old Mutual Education Trust¹³⁴

Some BSPs also assess their own services and offerings to ensure they are providing the best support they can, given their intentions and resources. One of the aims of this research project, then, is that the data collected is increasingly used for organisational improvement, discerning what makes the most difference to student outcomes.

¹³³ OMET 2019 annual report, p 15.

¹³⁴ OMET 2019 annual report, p 15.

Monitoring is undertaken in a variety of ways across organisations, and on a range of data collection platforms. Some are quite rudimentary and the data is used fairly mechanically; others are more well-developed. Asked what changes they would make if they had all the money in the world, the Career Wise director would ‘put more money into student record systems – so that better analysis of data – for tracking and reporting.’¹³⁵ They are among the leaders in data collection and analysis in the NBSPP.

Using technology’s to monitor students:

The Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders’ programme

(Taken from Singizi Consulting. (2016). *Dell Young Leaders case study. Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.*)

The evaluators of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders programme, report in some detail on the way in which technology is used as a ‘student tracking tools to tailor support’:

‘Technology is at the centre of programme management and the student-by-student tracking that enables timely and targeted intervention to help prevent students from falling off track. Technology – in conjunction with face-to-face student self-reporting – helps let programme staff know if a student needs grief counselling, is pregnant, depressed or at risk of failing a course. The Dell Young Leaders Admin Tool helps programme staff and students stay on task by storing detailed records of each student:staff interaction; staff then outline any next steps that need taking and the technology helps staff and students easily track completion of those steps. An integrated IT platform helps the programme team maintain and track student data across multiple fields (which reflect the areas of wrap-around supports).’

Their platform includes an early-warning system which categorises each student’s situation as ‘on track’, ‘monitor’ or ‘needs attention’ across a range of risk indicators in the areas described as ‘academic’, ‘situational’ and ‘financial’. The evaluators comment that ‘this system is particularly critical in the absence of early warning systems at the universities; this can mean that students do not realise they are at risk of not meeting the minimum requirements to take an exam or are about to be academically excluded until virtually the last moment.’

¹³⁵ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

What is unusual about this system, however, is that students input a lot of the data themselves:

'students use the Dell Young Leaders Connect student-facing platform to continually update information and complete on-line checking surveys each semester... Student responses feed into the Admin Tool, which automatically updates students' risk indicators and lets programme staff intervene promptly. [This also] helps students manage their academic and events calendars, as well as any tasks programme staff have requested they complete and report on.'

Technology is supplemented by face-to-face accessibility:

'This system works in tandem with face-to-face interactions with on-campus programme staff who offer individualised guidance and support and advocate on behalf of disadvantaged students in navigating university bureaucracy. Formal on-line check-ins happen once a semester but students can – and do – make additional appointments or simply drop in.'

The evaluators concluded that students reported that 'caring gestures by programme staff are what really made a difference to them. Clearly, it is not only about the services offered, but about how the programme offers them; it is about human warmth and relationship.'

7. WHAT UNIVERSITIES ARE DOING

Like bursary support providers, most universities have theories about what works – and therefore what supports they might offer, resources permitting. This research has not enquired into what services HEIs think are working at their universities, as this is a study in its own right. Suffice to say that there is a prevailing sense that there are not enough resources to address all students' needs and that the services are not ideal – and certainly they are unevenly provided across the HEI sector.

7.1 What they are offering

In their 2014 report on *Student Access and Success*, Lewin and Mawoyo note that the 'factors influencing access and success at university are complex and multi-dimensional' adding that 'there is ... a substantial range of programmes and activities within institutions aimed at student success. Many, but not all, of these programmes are linked to Academic Development departments within universities'. In summary:

'Many universities provide a full range of student support services to assist with social integration into university life and with the psychosocial aspects of engagement with academic life. These include various orientation programmes, counselling and career guidance programmes, peer support mechanisms within faculties and residences and other interventions related to life skills, as well as more practical services such as healthcare on campus (Jones et al, 2008).' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

They list two of the five 'major areas of work' in student support as

1. Transition and entry: centred on transition, admission and first-year experience.
2. Social support: clustered in programmes under the banners of psychosocial support and mentoring.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

They elaborate:

'Psychosocial support is a key service to support students' wellbeing, especially in first year where many students battle to adjust to being away from home and to the demands of a university and its workload.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

They (writing seven years ago) add that it is important to understand 'the link between students' psychosocial and academic needs' – and that, while 'there is a move towards integrating psychosocial and academic advisory services in some institutions, so that the work is complementary, ... this is not yet the norm.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

And indeed there is a range of literature that links the importance of psycho-social well-being and academic success, which exactly understands that the factors that undermine achievement are multi-factorial. This report supports the arguments that these are interdependent and that a combination of generic and customised services is what makes the difference. How these are offered, and to what extent, is a matter of opinion, however.

Overviews

I did not ask for, and therefore cannot report on, the full list of offerings of the seven HEIs interviewed; nor have I referred to the literature which might catalogue who offers what. There seemed little purpose as the intention is not to assess in detail the strengths and shortcomings of HEI offerings – so much as indicate the general state of affairs as a backdrop to the role BSP organisations might play.

In addition to academic support initiatives, most universities offer a range of support services to do with psycho-social and physical wellbeing. They include, among others,

- Student health/wellness
- Student counselling
- Disability
- HIV and AIDS
- LGBTQI+

These range considerably in resourcing, approach, operation and quality, however, – and some are invariably over-subscribed, making referral an exacting business.

Examples of overviews of three HEIs' offerings are as follows (and are elaborated on later)

UFS focuses on four of the 13 'high impact practices', all of which are offered very widely within the university and some of which are compulsory. They are:

1. UFSS – UFS Skills module (year-long and required)
2. ASTEP – Academic Student Tutorial Excellence Programme
3. Academic advising
4. Academic literacy (year-long, suggested)¹³⁶

NMU has recently re-designed their system to produce a Learning and Teaching Collab comprising four units – two of which are for academic staff and two for students, being

- counselling support /Emthonjeni; and
- academic support - comprising learning development, academic literacies especially for extended programme students; first year success / orientation programme; student coaching (not academic advising).

NMU also has a Student Life department which includes residences, healthcare etc. and which provides 'very good programmes for students' including leadership and social activities.¹³⁷

UCT's support comprises various layers:

- curriculum advice (academic) – which includes referring students to development advisors;
- development advisors – who address careers, values, options; also run really well curriculated courses where students learn from each other as well as from the staff; and
- peer mentorship – who are the ear on the ground and buddies; who provide older brother/sister companionship as well as simple advice and referrals to the right people. They work under guidance of the development advisors and academic advisors.¹³⁸

In addition there are units addressing student health, careers/ employment, among many others.

¹³⁶ Interview with Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹³⁷ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 21.

¹³⁸ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

Transition and entry

'When students have been admitted to university, they require guidance on where to find help for specific problems and how to adjust, manage independent learning and find their way around campus. All universities provide orientation programmes for first-time undergraduate students. These vary in their content and approach but mostly take place at the start of the academic year.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

While for many years national symposia and conversations have provided fora in which HEIs might learn from one another, the content and approach of orientation or first year experience (FYE) programmes are as varied as there are numbers of universities.

One of the main criticisms of orientation programmes has been that they are de-contextualised and information is unhelpfully front-loaded:

'Many respondents acknowledged that orientation programmes tend to be overloaded. Information provided at orientation is often de-contextualised and therefore not absorbed effectively. For example, an orientation programme focusing on how to access and use the library might be difficult for students who do not yet have an idea of what they might be using the library for and how library use may be important to their particular course.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

The first-year experience was introduced to attempt to address this. Spreading the various activities that have traditionally been provided during orientation across the first year,

'the FYE is also useful for students who may have missed the first two weeks of university due to late registration. The various FYE programmes include compulsory faculty-based first-year seminars that are credit bearing; skills programmes with a focus on academic and personal skills; on-line skills programmes that are available throughout the year which students can refer to as they need them; and student experience surveys.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

In the interviews with the seven HEIs conducted for this research, most FYE programmes seem to be offered over a full academic year.

- UKZN's orientation of first year students is done in groups: an initial welcome sessions; plus extended programme of sessions throughout the year, often offered at lunchtimes, in the evenings and weekends.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

- Wits has a university-wide FYE programme for all first year student which aims to onboard them quickly with essential skills; they also introduce graduate attributes in this programme. It is not compulsory, however, and of the approximately 5,800 first year students, 35%-50% attend the FYE programme.¹⁴⁰
- UFS offers UFSS – UFS Skills module (previously called UFS101) – which helps all students transition from school to university. This is a compulsory credit-bearing course, scaled to reach thousands of students. It is offered in addition to their module load and is not part of their degrees.¹⁴¹

Wellness / personal assessments

While not expressly canvassed during the interviews, the UKZN respondent commented that wellness assessments are completed by all UKZN students in the first two months of their first year (and medical students do so again in their 4th year). This provides information about immediate needs which are then addressed (as well as they can be, given resources). They also provide a profile of the students for future reference.¹⁴²

Social support

Social support is formally offered at universities through a number of mechanisms, the most common being peer mentors, senior mentors/ tutors, academic staff, and central services like student wellness/ health/ counselling etc. Again these are offered differently at each university – and can be experienced as more or less accessible.

There is also a range of activities which act as informal supports / sites for belonging, like living in residence, belonging to sports/ social clubs / religious groupings etc.

Mentors

Suggesting that ‘mentoring is a huge responsibility’, Lewin and Mawoyo noted that ‘several approaches to mentoring are being implemented, most of them focusing on the wellbeing of the student in social aspects’:

‘For it to work, universities offer mentor training before the mentors take on this role. It is also important that the mentors are not detrimentally affected in relation to their own academic progress. Academically strong students who also have good leadership skills are selected to be mentors for peer-based mentoring. Institutions that have the funding pay mentors, but in some institutions mentoring is based on a volunteer system.’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁴² Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

Mentoring is located and structured in a variety of ways across universities. Lewin and Mawoyo named the following:

- *'Residence-based, year-long mentoring run by facilitators employed by the university. This provides small group sessions on life skills, such as time management and coping with institutional requirements.'*
- *'Faculty-based peer mentoring where senior students are assigned as 'buddies' to first-year students, accompany them to orientation activities, and inform them of new events on campus.'*

Our overall understanding is a version of this – namely that there are peer mentors and senior mentors who have different roles (orientation, navigation, academic support) and are differently located (largely in residences or faculties).

- **Peer mentors** are usually of a similar age as the incoming student and often live or study in the same area. Their role is to support incoming students: to help them navigate the social, organisational and geographical aspects of university life. 'Mentoring aimed at providing first-year students with a 'buddy' to look up to and help show them the ropes during their first year at university has become a common feature within universities.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Some universities require that this is done voluntarily (with leadership training and CV building as the 'reward'), while other universities pay a small stipend.

- **Senior mentors** are more often located in faculties and play a more academic support role, some of them being actual tutors. They are usually formally contracted and paid a stipend.

As seen the figure below, the Voices Unite research describes mentor support as 'mostly intellectual, but members [students] who have supportive mentors also emphasised that their mentors provide social and psychological support across demographics.' (Voices Unite, 2021: 175). This 'pastoral' / psycho-social role of those offering academic support is seen in a number of examples – including academic staff themselves. The advent of 'academic advising' (below) seems to be a way of recognising the importance of this support closely located alongside the academic enterprise.



**Figure 26: Support offered by mentors
- Voices Unite survey respondents**

(Voices Unite, 2021: 175).

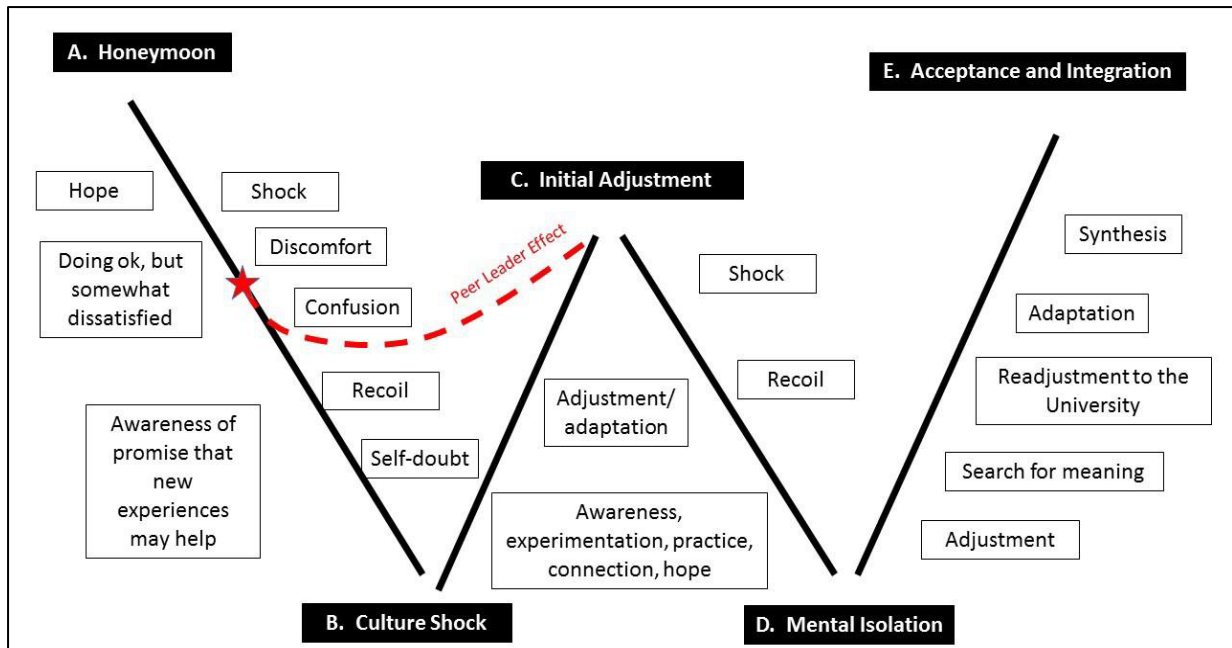
Lewin and Mawoyo named a third kind of mentor as ‘professional mentors consisting of retired professors who run sessions on work-based issues, such as engineering, for example’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014) - although our sense is that these are not commonly found.

A campus-wide mentoring programme: An example

Stellenbosch University’s FYE programme has an extensive, campus-wide mentor programme, comprising about 550 mentors and 42 head mentors . The roles of peer mentors are

- ‘first, closest, direct contact
- assist & support with psychosocial adjustment & transition
- applies mediated learning approach
- train-the-trainer’.

They are paid a stipend of R840 twice a year (April & September). The university claims this ‘smooths out the first trough experienced by new students’, mapping a typical journey as follows:



Student feedback affirmed the peer mentors' value, with three of the four questions scoring in the 90%s, being

- 'I could approach my mentor at any time if I had trouble with anything;
- During welcoming I had only positive experiences with my mentors; and
- Mentors made me feel at home'.
-

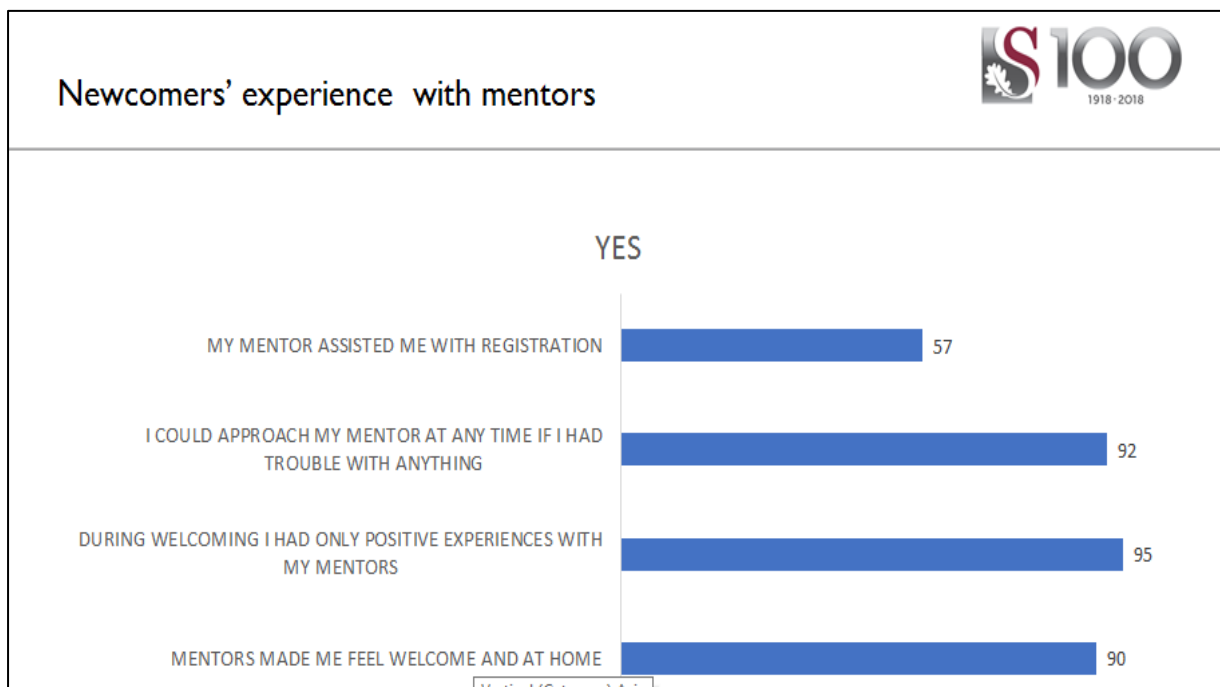


Figure 27:
Newcomers' experience of mentors – University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch University, 2019)

Feedback also affirmed the support from the senior students – the highest rating being for ‘senior students were mostly friendly and welcoming’. Over three quarters of the beneficiary students were comfortable to approach the senior mentors for help; and that senior students would address practices that allowed first years ‘to be treated improperly’.

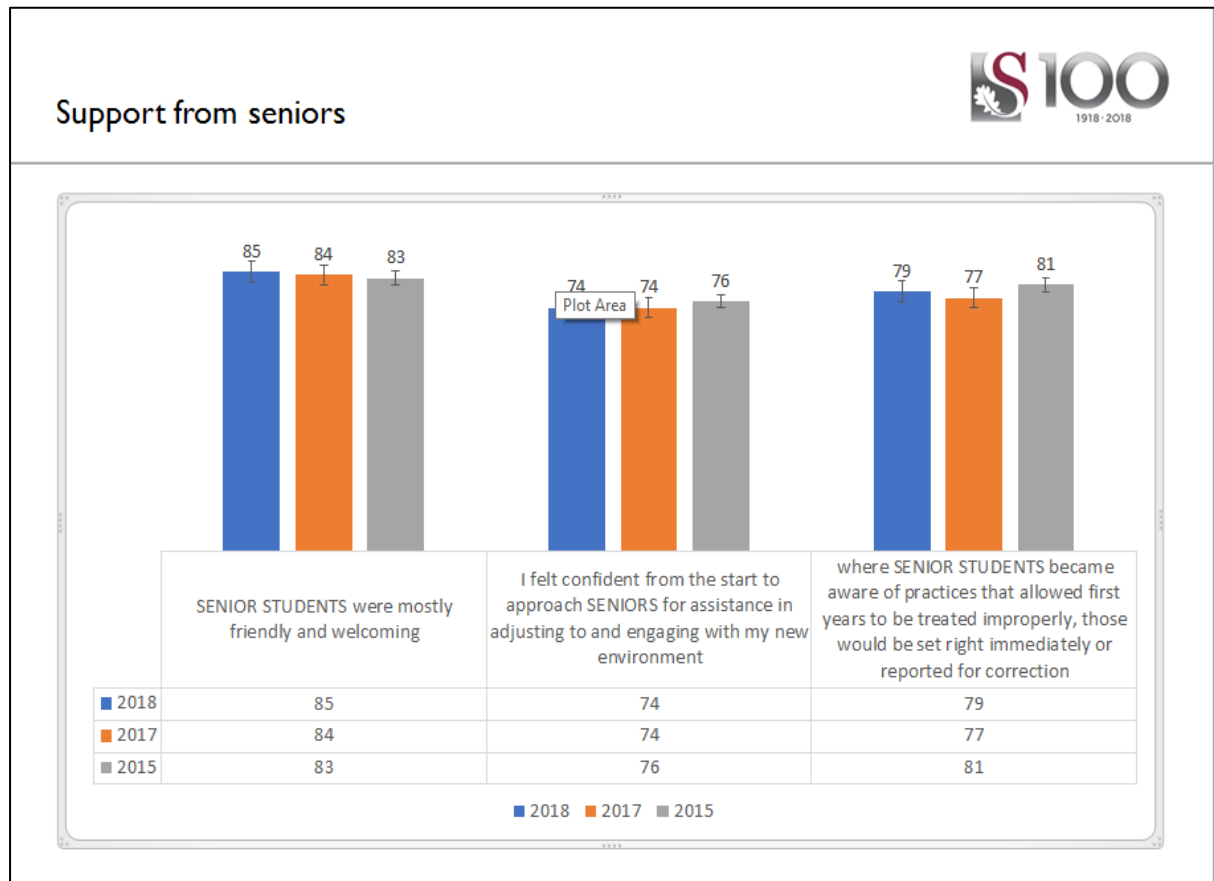


**Figure 28: Newcomers' experience of support from seniors
– University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch University, 2019)**

Academic advising

Academic advising is relatively new in South Africa. It draws on practices like those at Georgia State University where academic advising is reported to have made a significant difference to the retention and throughput of their (largely first generation) students.

Despite its name, academic advising is not to do with the curriculum and does not depend on providing advice, so much as hearing students' issues early and referring them to suitable resources – and developing services where they do not exist and will make a difference. It

- helps students to navigate the bureaucracy;
- links them to services; and
- uses data to identify stumbling blocks within the system e.g. students who were dropping out but needed a small amount of money to complete.¹⁴³

The UFS is leading a DHET national initiative to establish academic advising in the whole higher education system. In being a referral point to university services, they understand academic advising as a way of creating efficiencies so that students (especially first years) make use of all the supports the university has available. The ultimate aim is to help students align their education planning with their career planning and keep them on track. UFS is currently leading a seven-university pilot (inc Wits, NMU, MUT, UP, UCT) for this initiative.¹⁴⁴

The UFS reaches many, but not all, of their 42,000 students with academic advising, as it is not compulsory. They have found, however, that just one session has improved marks compared with those who did not have a session. They are trying to scale individual success coaching and are looking very carefully at a model. This partly depends on who is selected and how needs are identified. In 2020, UFS pivoted this service on-line.

Contact does not mean students have to check in every week; in fact such a spoon-feeding operation dampens independent development. The balance is in finding the best dosage.

- Prof Francois Strydom,
UFS

At UCT academic advising covers all the advising that is not mental health and is not to do with the curriculum. It comprises

'services in support of students. It takes them from where they are, and gives them the kinds of advice to help them to get to where they are going'.

It includes professional development, emotional development, time management; all things that support their academic agenda. Academic advising needs to

- have dedicated resources including staff;
- be both proactive and reactive to student needs;
- enable people to sit down with individual students; and
- be co-ordinated and integrated.

'If we do it right we end up reducing the need for mental health [support]; we cut it off at the pass before it gets to where students are dealing with mental health issues.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

At UCT the Commerce Faculty has professional advisors who do 'developmental advising'. This comprises lots of small group meetings facilitated by academics, postgraduates and (much-beloved and valuable) senior administrative staff (who students seek out when they have difficulties). This now comprises a credit-bearing course which includes course decisions and personal support – linked to career direction.¹⁴⁶

Postgraduates get a stipend and peer supporters get a 'UCT-plus' for CV building.

Developing academic advising in the UCT Commerce Faculty

The UCT Commerce Faculty recently received a three-year University Capacity Development Grant from DHET to develop academic advising.

Student development officers (SDO) do the advising that is not academic or to do with mental health. For instance when a student's academic progress has a 'red flag', the SDO with whom they have developed rapport helps the student think about what is happening, provides information, referrals etc. They also provide students with strategies for helping them to manage themselves.

While this is labour intensive and there are resource constraints, UCT thinks it is doable. (It is the standard American model e.g. Achieving the Dream.) The university has developed a model that allows scale-up at low cost while retaining high-intensity interaction with students who need it. This includes

- automated advising through their 'chat bot' - for students who simply need information or resources ('high tech');
- a curriculum of modules addressing 'career discovery' and 'step-up' (time management etc) – attended by groups of students and offered at scale for course credit (as at UFS); ('low touch'); and
- individualised help for anyone who needs it ('high touch').

UCT provides 'very good information' through their chat bots and helpdesks – though this is supplemented by the possibility of meeting with a person. There is also a single email address to which a problem can go; for instance a peer identified a student who had no food, and within an hour they had connected them to suitable resources. They have had fantastic outcomes – but there are also limitations.

If they had all the money in the world, the UCT interviewee would do 'exactly what they are trying to do, which is to provide more structured approach to academic advising'; 'to professionalise it and systemise it'. Their inclination is towards things that work in a co-ordinated fashion so that there is data flowing in both directions and feedback loops and referrals that flow in both directions etc.

(This model is not yet in the public domain.)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

Though their model sounds very similar, NMU has chosen to use the term ‘student coaching’ rather than ‘academic advising’. This entails supporting individual students to find their ways, helping them develop their academic plans etc.. The design of services needs to help the students navigate what is on offer in relation to their needs, with a view to providing a seamless approach.¹⁴⁸

Academic staff

While academic staff are meant to support students with the academic aspects of their lives, this can be done either minimally or more fully, offering advice, support and guidance as needed.

The ‘pastoral’ role of academic staff seems to remain an open question, however. While some staff naturally engage sympathetically with students, including on personal / psycho-social matters, others do not do so. Some universities have faculty-based structures that formally relieve the academic staff of this role (see ‘academic advising’ above) – while others simply hope students find their ways.

A ‘particularly interesting finding’ in the Voices Unite research, then, was the importance to some respondents of their lecturers, over a half of whom reported receiving some ‘psychological’ support and a third ‘social’ support (Voices Unite, 2021: 169):

‘Lecturers are rated as the 4th source of support for post-school students – higher overall than partners, mentors, grandparents, aunts, uncles and others. More than 2/3 Voices members who receive support from a lecturer rated the support as either ‘great’ or ‘incredible’. These findings demonstrate the importance of lecturers as a source of support at post-school institutions, particularly when it comes to intellectual support.’ (Voice Unite, 2021: 8)

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

LECTURERS



**Figure 29: Support offered by lecturers
- Voices Unite survey respondents**

(Voice Unite, 2021: 8)

That being said, the under-preparedness of some staff regarding the realities students bring with them was identified as needing to be addressed:

'Critically, staff development should be an integral component of efforts for effective student support at all levels (Jones et al, 2008:73).' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

What else some universities are doing

Wits provides wraparound support for the bursary-funded students supported by the interviewees. This includes psycho-social support and the 'enhancement of skills', especially graduate attributes. Staff are agile in responding to student needs, identifying gaps in the wraparound support offered and making the necessary adjustments. As a result of the support offered, these selected bursary recipients are reported to be top of their classes and have soft skills that the others do not have.¹⁴⁹

For instance, prior to COVID19, Wits did not offer digital literacy skills. They have now found that students do not know how to access or assess information – or how to interpret it.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021

NMU's approach is to work in a strategic and intentional way to secure the success of students; in doing so they work with the student's life cycle. For instance everything that is done before the first test is vital as they must 'catch them before they go down'. The connection with orientation and pre-university is really important as the moment a student gets a mark below their expectations, it becomes psychological. They get overwhelmed and may need counselling – while they continue to write their tests etc.¹⁵⁰

Students supported by NMU's VC Scholars Trust who do not maintain an average of 70% lose their bursaries. When they do not do well they get overwhelmed and easily discouraged and really need support. So even in second year some of these high achievers need to be seen more than might be expected.

UWC pays attention to first year students – after which they are left to cope and must present themselves if they need assistance. While there is support for students in need, there is not enough and the university would like to be able to offer more psycho-social support to students. They also need systems that would diagnose and refer early. They do offer peer support and mentoring, particularly in residences - some of which is paid and some is voluntary which then appears on the students' co-curricular transcripts.¹⁵¹

.. and then there was COVID19

In response to the increase in mental health issues related to the COVID19 lockdowns, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation has given additional funds to a couple of universities to ensure the necessary support is available. UFS has been offering students a 24-hour helpline through SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group) – but there has not been a huge uptake and the absorption is the same as face-to-face. Men do not use the service much at all.¹⁵²

From 2020, UKZN has had self-help content on-line to which counsellors can refer students to particular topics (and can monitor who looks at what) - but they can also engage with students on-line, which they like.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021

¹⁵¹ Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021

¹⁵² Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁵³ Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

The role of BSP organisations

One HEI informant affirmed the view that BSP organisations make a difference through their provision of psycho-social support; that they are close to students' personal development and enable them to cope. Students' location in a BSP organisation can also give students a sense of belonging to something bigger than the university.¹⁵⁴

Another interviewee commented that the socio-emotional support provided by BSP organisations is really valuable and is only going to become more important in the short- to medium-term.¹⁵⁵ As most of the contact with students is now virtual, they felt that student advisors (at BSP organisations and at HEIs) could each work with more students, thus extending the reach.¹⁵⁶

Leadership

'Leadership' seems to be a term used to cover a range of lifeskills needed for mastering and managing one's own life – rather than leading others/ projects etc. It is sometimes used in relation to those who are supporting others.

DUT has run group development sessions on leadership over weekends which were compulsory for house committee members, but voluntary for others. Despite ongoing marketing to the residence advisors (senior students, some employed part-time) of the value of this curriculum and how it will help them, they do not necessarily attend.¹⁵⁷

More recently DUT has launched a Student Leadership Academy, offering workshops on-line to 400 students at a time. Again this is compulsory for house committee members – and is offered to residence advisors who also need training and support, as do junior staff who interface with students. DUT would like to offer this to all students but as they do not have staff to do this work, they currently outsource this training to commercial training organisations. They would prefer to partner with BSP organisations and contract their expertise to develop the curriculum and facilitate the content of this leadership initiative. (DUT already partners with the NGO Peace Oasis to provide food parcels.)¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

Wits also has a Development and Leadership Unit which runs a variety of voluntary programmes – on personal development, critical enquiry, civic engagement, leadership development etc. This also includes entrepreneurship.¹⁵⁹

Food security

Only one university mentioned food security as a big issue. UFS asserted that students cannot be asked to perform if they are hungry. According to their Dietetics Department, 80% of UFS students are food insecure.

The UFS' on-line portal called 'Eat and succeed' has short videos developed by their Dietetics Department which advise on how to eat healthily on a budget (NSFAS = R27 a day for food) and without a kitchen. These are also broadcast on the student radio.

Commenting on the appalling scale of this problem, the UFS informant asserted the needs for there to be collective mobilisation around this issue; there needs to be a higher education feeding scheme. This would include 'having hard conversations about NSFAS money'.¹⁶⁰

In Indiana University – which, like UFS, is also in the middle of farmlands and cornfields – the hippest restaurant on campus uses only locally grown food – which promotes agriculture and market sustainability.

- Prof Francois Strydom,
UFS

While one of the bursary organisations gives Wits students food, the others provide pocket money which the students often send home.

Academic support /development

Support services that promote academic success have existed at some South African universities for over 40 years – but grew considerably with the increase in students from under-prepared schooling and for whom the language of the institution was invariably not their mother tongue.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

Most universities currently offer some form of academic support /development. These are located in separate units and/or mainstreamed into faculties; they are generic and/or subject specific; they are for everyone or only for those who are thought to need support. They have been innovative and brave, and have often been subjected to critique, from both staff and students.

Most BSPs look to the universities to provide their students with academic support. While some organisations pay for individual tutorials – and some run subject-based group tutorials - most depend on universities for this expertise.

What some universities are doing

UFS offers ASTEP – Academic Student **Tutorial** Excellence Programme – which is scaled to thousands of students. While this is not compulsory, they nudge students to participate as they create safe spaces. This is particularly the case for first years – adolescents with internal critical audiences in their heads – who typically will not ask questions in a big class and who feel alone. Tutorials provide a community where they can connect and reduce loneliness – which is a massive challenge. Ten years of longitudinal data has shown that these tutorials make a difference.¹⁶¹

UCT wants to develop a more professional tutorial system, part of which is to develop a psycho-social curriculum to train tutors in early identification and referral. They noted the importance of not placing a burden onto the tutors who are not capable of dealing with student issues – and of the value of tutors (and staff) being able to be clearer about what their roles and responsibilities are and are not. They want tutors to be able to refer students, which is a big part of the advising system.¹⁶²

At UFS, if a student is not proficient on the NBT, they are encouraged to attend a full-year **academic literacy module** (in addition to UFSS). This is incredibly important as the analytics work has shown that across all faculties, English competence is a massive predictor of success.¹⁶³

One HEI interviewee wants to move away from ‘academic support as a place where we send students to be fixed’ and would prefer to ask them what they need and provide this as much as possible.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 21.

¹⁶² Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 2021 July 21

¹⁶³ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

Moving away from a deficit model of academic development: An example

An example of an integrated, student-consulted academic development programme 'in a Commerce faculty at a relatively elite, historically white university in South Africa' is described in an article by Pym and Kapp: *Harnessing agency: towards a learning model for undergraduate students* (Pym & Kapp, 2013:272). The abstract summarises the findings as follows:

'The writers argue that the programme has managed to achieve good results in recent years by moving away from deficit models of academic development for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The article draws on five years of data to illustrate how students' home discourses have influenced their negotiations of institutional discourses. It is argued that many of the students have shown considerable agency in gaining admission to university despite their social backgrounds, but experience a crisis of confidence and self-esteem in the new environment.

The article describes how the new model of academic development has responded to this context by providing a more flexible approach to the curriculum, which attempts to harness students' agency as well as foster a sense of belonging to a learning community. Also described are the range of interventions that have been put in place specifically to develop a culture of learning and to promote social connectedness, identity and agency.' (Pym & Kapp:2013: 272)

This is endorsed by Lewin and Mawoyo, who noted that mainstreaming psycho-social issues alongside academic development initiatives are seen by some as effective.

'From their review of the literature, Jones et al suggest principles for addressing social integration into university as part of a 'package' of effective support to disadvantaged students. In particular, they suggest the need to integrate student support and academic work across an institution.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

And they add:

'The need for infusing adjustment issues into curricula, so that life skills taught are directly connected to academic experience, has shown to be successful in some contexts. Schreiber and Davidowitz (2012) describe a life skills development programme designed to support adjustment of students in a science foundation programme. It shows that addressing psychosocial issues such as coping with stress and managing workload directly, using small group methodologies, is successful when integrated into students' academic lives.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

Pre-enrolment – working in schools

Working in schools to help learners make decisions about what courses and work they might do, and how to access PSET (if suitable) was often mentioned by the HEI interviewees. UFS noted that working in the pre-enrolment space is invaluable for success; that it is a ‘very innovative space where there is a lot of work to be done’.¹⁶⁵

DUT noted that every year, ‘thousands of young people apply late and arrive and register for whatever is available – and fail’. Young people do not know what they want to do and do not know how to access post-school education and training (PSET). There is a great need for career guidance in schools.¹⁶⁶

The Wits interviewees – who work with funders and their students who are selected on basis of good matric marks – also find that students are generally underprepared for the massive transition to university and for the academic rigour required. They need a range of skills and competencies e.g. digital skills, academic writing, study skills, time management, mental health and wellbeing, resilience.¹⁶⁷

In addition, one interviewee noted that students often arrive with other peoples’ values; that they are trying to please other people, in the process of which they become distanced from what makes them tick.¹⁶⁸

Readiness and course selection

DUT’s marketing and recruitment department only tells learners about what DUT offers, not what career / work options are generally available. Young people do not know what they want to do and do not know how to access PSET. There is a great need for career guidance in schools; perhaps the BSP sector could work with schools.¹⁶⁹

The UFS finds that young people just do any course to get into university.¹⁷⁰ Research shows that disadvantaged students frequently end up in their 2nd and 3rd choice (not Medicine but Humanities which are low status / have low career prospects).¹⁷¹ UFS noted the work done by Trudy van Wyk on the national DHET career portal - Kheta – which has lots of videos on career options etc but which needs to be integrated into a programme. They thought that it is work that civil society could possibly take up.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁷² Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

Improving matric marks

Within their academic advising project, UFS runs a collaborative project with their recruitment department called 'Star of Stars'. This provides structured advising for Grade 12 learners in quintile 1,2 and 3 schools (who have applied to study at UFS), comprising regular check-ins with an advisor. Two to three years of data show that this 'close accompaniment' is producing learners with distinctions, despite their educational backgrounds. This is confirmation of the 'accompaniment' model that UFS understands some of the BSP organisations provide.¹⁷³

Work preparation

The other phase of student's lives that is gaining prominence is the post-university period. Along with the move to success, is a growth in initiatives that prepare students for employment / income generation.

UCT believes it is important for students to be able to marry the realities of the world of work with their own goals. Students mostly use an academic success lens – but they need to include other areas of what the world will be like when they leave university, and how to operate in society. It may be useful if the BSP sector could develop a really good curriculum with 'authentic outcomes' which would support students in producing proper CVs and provide opportunities for mock interviews.¹⁷⁴

UFS is taking employability work to scale by working with SAGEA (SA Graduate Employers Association). This includes having students develop Linked-In profiles – as people entering work are initially selected through algorithms which select purely on skills profiles. They value alumni talking with students about their profiles and their first jobs.¹⁷⁵

Laptops and data are vital for employability as technical skills are essential for employment; those who cannot use a laptop, who cannot do emails etc are unemployable. Working on a cell phone is not sufficient. UFS is grappling with convincing students that laptops are 'essential for work competence' as this can become a family issue; R6,000 is a lot of money and short-term gains often trumps the longer term views. Bursary support provider organisations are doing a good thing by giving laptops and data as part of package (though the laptops can still be sold!).¹⁷⁶

DHET has 180,000 unwanted laptops – as students want the R6,000 and not the laptop!

¹⁷³ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

Community engagement

Some universities offer a formal co-curriculum which recognises the students' contributions (including outreach initiatives) on a transcript which describes their various contributions alongside their degree.

Those offering peer support and mentoring at UWC, particularly in residences, have their experience included on a co-curricular transcript. This gives a description of the difference the peer supporters / mentors made to students, not just that they did it. There is an award ceremony for the students who help other students.¹⁷⁷

NMU has a well-established 'co-curriculum' programme which registers certain activities undertaken by students as eligible for their co-curricular record/ transcript. Examples are:

- buddy programme;
- mentoring in residences (which Student Services started but the residence managers have now registered);
- Social Work students who mentor (supervise) the student mentors as part of their work experience for their qualification. They are trained by Student Services.¹⁷⁸

The career service at UCT has developed 'UCT Plus' which includes community / development work that students have done on their CV.¹⁷⁹

Students at DUT are required to do community engagement, addressing problems in their local communities. This can include providing much-needed career guidance in their former schools. It is not clear if there is formal recognition for this, however.¹⁸⁰

There are no co-curricula transcripts at Wits. Staff's biggest struggle is that programmes are not compulsory and their efforts are not credited/ recognised.¹⁸¹

BSP organisations' encouragement of students' civic responsibility helps to prepare them holistically to 'pay back' to the community (not just for themselves and their families). Promoting this idea of students 'paying it forward' is part of their development as human beings.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

¹⁸² Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021.

7.2 How they are offered

Compulsory and accredited – or voluntary and unrecognised

Support offerings range from being compulsory and for credit (e.g. UFS, UCT Commerce Faculty, UKZN dental therapy and oral hygiene¹⁸³) to being entirely voluntary (Wits, NMU).

The UFS informant asserted that ‘our collective experience shows that particular things work’ and that we need to require things to be done as ‘people don’t do optional!’ ‘People do not naturally lean into things that are foreign’ – like psycho-social help is to first year students in particular. And first year students cannot self-identify their needs for services and assistance; the majority of them don’t know what they don’t know. They need to be required to do things over the year that gives a broad range of information, after which they can self-identify. These requirements either need to be compulsory or there needs to be some ‘heavy nudging’, which can result in good uptake. For example, UFS’ **ASTEP** – Academic Student Tutorial Excellence Programme – offered to thousands of students is not compulsory – but they nudge people to participate, given the data show that tutorials makes a difference.¹⁸⁴

UKZN Health Sciences College addresses senior students at the beginning of each year during class time, reminding them of the services available to them; that they access them voluntarily and uptake depends on them. However when students are at academic risk, Heads of departments (HODs) refer students for help which is compulsory and contracted. This includes weekly meeting with an academic officer, fortnightly counselling session and a series of workshops.¹⁸⁵

In the Engineering Faculty at NMU, mentoring is compulsory and is included in their weekly schedule. Students can work themselves out of this compulsory support based on the academic results of their first test averages. Those who do not do well, however, see the HOD who puts them on paths of suitable support.¹⁸⁶

Wits staff’s biggest struggle is that their programmes are not compulsory and their efforts are not credited/ recognised. While students are aware of the programme – 89% recognise the emails – there is low uptake. Staff would like institutional buy-in so that there is greater investment in their work – e.g. making it credit bearing.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ UKZN Health Science College has one SAQA accredited student support module mainstreamed into the dental therapy and oral hygiene curriculum.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

Providing structure and supportive spaces

Young people need structure. Lockdowns and on-line learning have changed learning and teaching forever; no university will go back to pure contact and there is going to be a blend. Within this 'new world', universities are going to have to think very carefully about how to create structure for students.¹⁸⁸

Many first year students at NMU are overly confident, so need structure. They also need to learn that it is OK to ask for support and help; that these are opportunities to grow and are not negative in any way. They need students to experience a conducive environment for learning and growth.¹⁸⁹

The bursary-supported students at Wits who are used to being part of the bursary grouping, miss the connection they have always had. These students who normally have a lot of face-to-face contact, are feeling isolated in the context of on-line support. As students need structure, human interaction and connection, these practitioners want everyone to get vaccinated so they can come back to campus!¹⁹⁰

UFS notes that isolation produces anxiety, followed by depression. Their tutorials create safe spaces for first years in particular, providing a community where they can connect so do not feel so alone. Creating small groups – even through WhatsApps – also reduces the feeling of being alone. That being said, the more individualised contact they have, the better as this helps to develop habits of a successful students within a disrupted state.¹⁹¹

At the beginning of the COVID19 lockdown, the UFS launched 'Keep calm and # learn on' which included 10 glossy pdf-format magazines comprising basic tips and skills plotted against the academic rhythm of the year.

The one thing that UCT does not provide is spaces for students with particular or special needs to talk with one another – e.g.

- single parents / students who have a baby while studying; or
- how students feel about receiving food security support.

These are issues that are not recognised.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁹² Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

In the absence of routine and structure, and few student-friends to talk to, BSP organisations are in a unique position to provide regular contact, routine and structure and to help students to develop the capacity to work independently. This is really valuable.¹⁹³

The importance of an integrated, student-centred system

UCT has almost too many services on offer – particularly for first years. It needs some ‘good thinking on integration and streamlining’.¹⁹⁴

NMU wants to consciously create a sense of belonging and community within a culture of care. This includes a network and systems that speak to each other – so that students can see what they need. It is important how policies and ideas are translated into practice; and that each roleplayer plays a significant role in an integrated system of student support / development (despite their function and KPAs).¹⁹⁵

NMU wants to adopt a ‘humanising pedagogy’ which sets up a framework for how staff ‘come alongside the student’ which is human rather than this skills-based. This requires that students understand their own stories so they are able to direct themselves; staff can only come alongside students if they know what they need. The staff do not carry students – although they will sometimes initiate actions like making appointment for them etc if needs be.¹⁹⁶

Tracking/ monitoring and effective referral

Tracking students’ progress and wellbeing is one way of identifying issues early and offering assistance. Without this, students are left to initiate requests for support/ assistance. Certainly early identification of support has to be a factor in reducing the ‘troughs’ of difficulty that can lead to dropping out and/or failure.

Although individual monitoring of students’ overall wellbeing seems improbable in a context in which universities have massively increased their student numbers, this is nonetheless proposed:

‘This work should be complemented by the development of formal monitoring and tracking systems, focusing on ‘at risk’ students and prioritising the first year of study. (Jones et al, 2008:73).’ (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

¹⁹³ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, UFS, 13 August 2021.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen, UCT, 21 July 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

And, remarkably, this is undertaken in some faculties and at some universities:
'At one institution, the link between psychosocial support and academic success is so strong that counsellors in residences can access the management information system to check student performance if students are experiencing psychosocial difficulties and seeking help for them.' (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014)

Monitoring, early detection and referral were identified as important by a number of the HEI informants. An example is UWC which has piloted a web-based survey – Making your Mark – funded by DHET's University Capacity Development Programme. This tracked students' academic progress with a view to identifying issues early – although it left the responsibility with the students and depended on them to upload their info. When issues were identified – be these poor academic results or personal issues that affected their results – the university engaged the students and referred them, but there was not adequate staffing to do the follow-up as thoroughly as needed. They still want to implement this university-wide, however.¹⁹⁷

7.3 What else could HEIs do

As this research did not set out to either catalogue or assess HEIs' students support initiatives – and as they are unevenly provided across the sector making any generalisations improbable – it would be invidious to make suggestions to HEIs about how they could improve their student support offerings. There is much to be done – of which university staff are all too aware.

Co-operate

The only suggestion which became apparent during the seven interviews with HEI student support staff is the need to reduce duplication. Universities seem to innovate and develop new approaches, systems and tools with little reference to what already exists within the sector – or what might or might not have worked.

While co-operation and sharing models and knowledge is replete with complications of various kinds, the suggestion is that this nettle is grasped and that more concerted attempts are made to share best practices, tools and information about what works and what does not. Despite the small sample of HEIs interviewed, the lack of references to one another's practices was striking. In addition, different names are used for similar activities.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021.

One interviewee noted that ‘the scale of the problem is so large we cannot afford not to talk to one another’ – and to share data, perhaps even to collaborate on research projects. While funding and scarce resources can undermine co-operation, cross-sector agreements on initiatives may well attract more funding than those competing for funding.¹⁹⁸

There are a number of well-established national fora at which these professionals share their insights. The hope is that the USAf’s Student Success Forum takes wings in 2022 – and provides a space which urges co-operation in the interests of optimising student success and the resources made available to do so.

Increase human resource for student support

The most commonly cited need expressed in the interviews with HEIs was to do with staffing. While technology is being employed at a number of universities – both as an information portal but also as a tracking system – the follow-up and individual personal attention that most interviewees felt that students need, is under-staffed. This is one area that, if attended to, could well make a difference.

UWC, DUT, UCT, Wits, UKZN and would all like extra staff to increase access to counselling and /or access to individual contact. Wits wants to in-source tutors/ lecturers to support students after hours when needed while UCT would like a number of professional advisors in each faculty to undertake developmental advising. They felt this would be a much better use of money rather than beefing up the Wellness section of the university.

- UWC noted that above that they track students’ progress but do not have sufficient staffing to do the follow-up as thoroughly as needed. They still want to implement this university-wide, however.¹⁹⁹
- DUT thought they need more psychologists as there are not enough sessions available to meet the needs. While students in residence have residence advisors (RAs) and house comms who are their first line of contact, there is no equivalent first-line support for the rest of the students.

One of the findings of the research with the Khayelitsha 100-UP Programme at UCT was that students were dismissive of the ‘old white lady’ [UCT professor, expert in student support] as a mentor – despite her being able to link them to the right resources and help them with navigating the system, which is what many students need.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, Senior Director: Student Development and Success, UFS. 13 August 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Prof Pamela Dube, UWC, 12 August 2021.

- At UCT, students are said not to always get the help they need when they are in crisis. The university is ‘really struggling to close the loop’ i.e. to ensure that referrals actually work and deliver solutions; that students’ problems are addressed. The university does not have a systematic feedback loop to know if the students were actually helped.

That being said, mature mentors and peer support get a mixed report from students. Some relationships do not ‘take off’.

- At Wits there is not sufficient staff capacity to serve all students one-on-one – as they do for the bursary-supported students. While they have a culture of developing rapport with the students and of an open door, there are only two counsellors.²⁰⁰
- The UKZN interviewees noted that there needs to be an increase in the staff:student ratio in their psycho-social department as students do not always get the help they need. They want each student to have personal connections so that they are more than just a student number and have a sense of identity and belonging. They have found that holding **groups sessions** – like a group advisory programme – reduces the need for individual sessions, however.²⁰¹

(Despite the general insufficiency of staff, however there is reported to be a fairly comprehensive support system in the Health Sciences College for the 7,000 undergraduate students (about 1,000 of whom are first years) – plus 2,500 postgraduate students. In addition to the four full-time student counsellors plus four sessional counsellors who support students doing clinical practice, the College also works with:

- residence advisors (who get free accommodation) – who are the first line of access and referral;
- peer wellness mentors (who receive stipends) – who provide ‘mental first aid’ especially to first years, at a ratio of 1:15; and
- class reps – who raise issues relating to academic programme, workload, timetable etc; and also refer students for support.)²⁰²

UKZN would like to provide counselling to students outside of timetabled times – like in the evenings.

Other issues

The evaluators of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders programme were more assertive than this researcher, making recommendations for what HEIs could do to support the success of particularly first generation students:

- *‘institute new support, or expand existing support, for needy students with basic items, such as food and toiletries, as well as accommodation and study items, such as photocopy monies.*

²⁰⁰ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

²⁰¹ Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

²⁰² Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 21.

- *prioritise tracking National Student Financial Aid Scheme students' graduation and employment rates.*
- *reassess policies and practices that inadvertently hinder disadvantaged students' success, such as a lack of access to residences, proactive outreach to and advocacy for disadvantaged students to access existing academic skills and support centres, and services that address crisis management as well as social integration and adaptation to university life.*
- *consider how they can better prepare graduates for employment with greater emphasis on career services and employer outreach generally.* (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

In addition they proposed that the Ministry of Higher Education and Training could do the following:

- *work to ensure students receive their National Student Financial Aid Scheme loan in time for their first term at university and eliminate the gap between what the loans cover and the full costs of attendance to enable the more disadvantaged students to complete.*
- *collaborate with higher education institutions to consider how they can offer students not just academic support, but situational and psychosocial support to help them successfully navigate university and manage challenges during their studies.*
- *consider tracking graduation and employment rates of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students.* (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

7.4 The distinctive roles of universities and bursary support providers

While the state is now providing financial support for all academically eligible students from households whose income is less than R350,000, this only addresses access. For universities, the challenge of producing academic success lies in the classroom and in the provision of academic and various student supports, including housing. This is an enormous undertaking for which many universities are under-resourced/ -prepared – although extraordinary and innovative practices are nonetheless found at institutional and departmental levels, implemented in a range of ways.

What universities and NSFAS cannot easily do, which BSP organisations can, is to provide ongoing individualised personal support to all the students to whom they are providing financial support. These organisations can provide

'A well-crafted combination of financial help and a student-centred system of academic, situational, psychosocial and career readiness support [to help] young people from historically disadvantaged schools and communities beat the odds to graduate from university, and find meaningful employment and pursue further study.' (Singizi Consulting, 2016: Foreword)

As its signature this relatively niche sector argues that student-centred, individual support improves the retention and throughput of students, as well as better prepares them for the adult world and employment. But their reach is not large; the organisations in the NBSPF serve just under 9,000 students nationally.

While universities provide some of these components to varying degrees – and some are innovating to find ways to scale the more impactful personal interventions – this research is assessing the extent to which the sustained comprehensive individualised support offered by BSPs actually improves the outcomes of the students they support.

Structural interventions

While bursary support providers can provide universities with feedback about student experiences, most do not intervene or advocate for systems change. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation evaluators support this position, recognising the value of immediate, direct provision alongside the longer-term systems interventions:

'Some criticise [civil society bodies] as lacking wide impact. In my view, such criticism fails to understand the process of systemic change in education. Firstly, positive systemic change is very hard to effect and usually takes a distressingly long time. Smaller-scale initiatives are thus essential for bringing hope and advancement to deserving people, and can have a significant impact on particular areas of life, individually or collectively. Secondly, system-wide interventions often fail to achieve their goals, most commonly because they are insufficiently rooted in sound knowledge and experience.' (Singizi Consulting: Foreword, 2016)

They nonetheless promote the role of BSPs providing insightful feedback:

'In this key respect, smaller-scale interventions – whether undertaken by private agencies or within educational institutions – are the crucial laboratories for analysing, researching and gaining practical experience in what it takes to overcome systemic obstacles. This role is invaluable in a world such as education where achievement is subject to such a wide range of factors and variables.' (Singizi Consulting: Foreword, 2016)

Five of the ten organisations who responded to the survey of BSPs to identify lessons from lockdown regarding wraparound support said they would represent students on individual matters or engage in advocacy on their behalf. Of these, one would do so on-line entirely, while the other four would adopt a blended approach, using a combination of virtual and face-to-face. Four will not change the frequency of representing students, while one proposes to represent students on individual matters more frequently. *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations.*

Only one of the seven BSP directors interviewed for this research thought that BSPs are well placed to 'intervene in /working with universities', citing Ian Scott's suggestion 'that they are the best placed to do so'.²⁰³ They have worked a bit with Wits' systems and they would be interested in seeing the NBSPP organisations 'doing more of this'.²⁰⁴ This was countered by another organisation which 'wouldn't underestimate the difficulty of changing these institutions – as there is not enough money, and there are entrenched cultures'.²⁰⁵

7.5 What HEIs think bursary support providers could do

The interviews with student support staff (both senior and practitioners) from the seven HEIs suggested that while the work of BSP organisations is appreciated, it is largely not in sights of most of these staff and is regarded as supplementary, as not integral to the larger student support /success approaches and systems. Most interviewees found it difficult to advise this sector on what they could be doing to most contribute to student success at their institution.

Perhaps typically, these seven HEIs had various relationships with, and awareness of, BSP organisations. The interviewees from one HEI focussed almost exclusively on supporting a (small) selection of funded students,²⁰⁶ while another wanted a 'symbiotic relationship with bursary organisations ... to be able to offer a seamless integrated approach to [all] students'.²⁰⁷ Others simply valued the supplementary role these organisations play; one HEI said that, as they do not get to all of the approx. 25,000 students, complementary services offered by BSP organisations are 'very welcome'.²⁰⁸ UKZN simply celebrated BSP organisations as 'sisters in arms' and urged them to 'keep doing what they are doing! It is so valuable.'²⁰⁹

NMU suggested that there are two ways in which BSP organisations could work with universities:

- as a service provider – based on the service the HEI required (e.g. the NMU Trust); and/or
- as a co-designer based on a rich negotiated understanding of working together to meet students' needs etc (e.g. Moshal and REAP). In this way, the university and the BSPs could work together to fill one others' gaps.

²⁰³ James Donald – from FGD with org directors, 5 November 2020.

²⁰⁴ James Donald – from FGD with org directors, 5 November 2020.

²⁰⁵ Interview with REAP director, Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Dave Jenkins and Ronelle Plaatjes, NMU, 18 August 2021.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Suzanne Stokes, UKZN, 13 August 2021.

As very few HEIs engage with BSP organisations as co-designers, however, BSPs could be commissioned in the first way – as service providers; alternatively they could simply be appreciated for supplementing the HEIs shortfall.

Suggestions made during interviews

The following is a summary of the suggestions the HEIs nonetheless made to the BSP sector during the interviews.

Readiness and course selection

There is a great need for **career guidance in schools** as young people do not know what they want to do and do not know how to access PSET. HEIs reported the many mismatches and failures that result from this.

BSP organisations could work in the pre-enrolment space. This could include

- integrating the national DHET career portal – Kheta – into a coherent programme;²¹⁰ and/or
- working with schools to provide career guidance.²¹¹

Personal support

Individual **one-on-one attention** – one of the signatures of the BSP sector’s offerings – is thought by most HEI interviewees to be invaluable. In addition to individual support, students need a range of skills and competencies e.g. digital skills, academic writing, study skills, time management, mental health and wellbeing, resilience.²¹²

In addition UCT wants to develop a psycho-social / developmental curriculum, linked to career and personal development. Getting faculties to accept this will be important. They also want to develop a psycho-social curriculum to train tutors in early identification and referral.²¹³

In the absence of extra staff, and as most of the contact with students is now virtual, BSP student advisors could each work with more students, thus extending the reach.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Interview with Prof Francois Strydom, Senior Director: Student Development and Success, UFS. 13 August 2021.

²¹¹ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

²¹² Interview with Neo Cindi and Mpho Thahale, Wits, 12 August 2021.

²¹³ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

²¹⁴ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

In terms of developing a curriculum, BSP organisations could use their knowledge of which interventions are successful, and contribute to developing a ‘personal and career development curriculum’. This curriculum ‘with authentic outcomes’ would include setting goals and planning to reach those goals; meeting deadlines; dealing with upsets and accepting that these arise; coping with failure and still sticking to goals; enabling flexibility to be open to change without giving up their dreams. It would also include support to produce proper CVs and provide opportunities for mock interviews.

This would include

- assisting with what to include in a curriculum;
- identifying what needs to be scaled up; and
- training people (e.g. stipended postgraduate students) to be professionals, to have empathy, to read between the lines, to ask the right questions.²¹⁵

Similarly, they could assist with the development of a curriculum for a ‘leadership programme’ for DUT and also facilitate the delivery of this. This is currently outsourced to commercial training organisations.²¹⁶

8. BURSARY SUPPORT PROVIDERS – WHO THEY ARE AND WHO THEY SUPPORT

While civil society BSP organisations are located outside of the higher education system and have little leverage for addressing systemic issues, they are well placed to ‘provide extra (tailor made) support to students who are in need of it’.²¹⁷

‘In the field of higher education development, there is a tension between the need for sector-wide reform, aimed at dealing with underlying systemic problems, and smaller scale, focused interventions put in place within education institutions or by concerned civil society bodies.’ (Singizi Consulting: Foreword, 2016)

Generally, then, we understand the role of these organisations to be one of service provision rather than of systems development.

²¹⁵ Interview with Dr Riashna Sithaldeen, UCT, 11 August 2021.

²¹⁶ Interview with Phumlani Mnyango, DUT, 11 August 2021.

²¹⁷ Adapted from powerpoint slide: Lies Korevaar, & Jacomijn Hofstra, ‘Recovery & Rehabilitation through Education.’ UCT Symposium, 24 March 2021.

8.1 Overview of the bursary support provider sector

The sector comprises a diverse set of organisation, bound together by offering financial and psycho-social support to university students, most of whom are from previously disadvantaged – and often still resource-scarce – households, and often poor schooling. The common intention of these organisations is to assist these students to complete their qualifications – and increasingly they are also looking to these graduates' employability.

Most BSPs

- are acutely aware of the implications of working with (mostly) first generation students;
- work in ways that encourage students to take charge of their lives and become independent adults;
- vary the amount and type of support offered, with some aspects being compulsory and some according to each student's needs; and
- require students to be committed and accountable.

Some organisations

- fully fund their students and advocate for the value of this;
- actively promote their students' access to various networks and networking (that middle class youth are deemed to already have); and
- require that students 'pay it forward' by helping others.²¹⁸

Diverse profiles

That being said, the character and modus operandi of these organisations differ quite markedly. In an exercise undertaken for this research in which the statistical data of four organisations were analysed retrospectively, their characters and modus operandi were mapped to ascertain whether or not there was enough similarity to make comparisons. The answer is that there was not.

Although only a small sample, the differences were considerable. The relatively constant criteria were household incomes; a focus on South African (as opposed to foreign) students; largely recruiting students in their first years of studying; and supporting very few students at private universities. The other factors were diverse, including their funding models, with a few being for-profit companies and some having guaranteed funding, while the rest fundraise. The categories canvassed were as follows.

²¹⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

- **Overall aim / character of the organisation** –brief descriptions of their aims
- **Recruitment & selection**
 - Stage of study: whether all students are recruited at the start of their first years or some are recruited later.
 - Selection criteria: which factors are used in selection– like household income, matric marks, geographical / demographic criteria.
- **Student profiles**
 - Nationality: whether only South Africans are supported, or others (e.g. from SADC) are included.
 - Geographical origins: whether students come only from a particular province or catchment area; or are only rural etc.
 - Household incomes: whether household income is a characteristic of the student profile – and if so, the annual income used in selection.
- **Study options**
 - Type of HEI: whether students may attend only public or also private universities; or chose from only a selection of universities.
 - Field focus: Whether all, or only certain, fields of study are supported – e.g. Health Sciences, STEM subjects etc.
 - Phase of study: whether students are only, or mostly, undergraduate – or whether some are postgraduates.
- **Support**
 - Financial: whether students get fully funded – i.e. they are not short of anything – or are partially funded and need to supplement their income.
 - Psycho-social: whether student participation in the support/offering is compulsory or not; whether it is comprehensive / 'light' etc.
 - Training for/ access to employment: whether any work readiness training or actual job search support are offered; or links are made with potential employers etc.

Some of these factors are elaborated on below, drawing from in-depth interviews with directors and senior staff of seven organisations²¹⁹ – which include the four in the exercise above.

²¹⁹ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

Overall aim / character of the organisations

All seven organisations aim to promote student success, which is largely about completing a qualification in as short a time as possible. For some, success has additional aspects and qualities, however. These include facilitating student access to HEIs, ensuring personal development, and promoting access to ‘well-paid jobs’ to ‘improve their financial situations’. In addition three of the seven expressly include producing ‘proactive’ or ‘ethically responsible citizens’.

Outcomes²²⁰

Their expressed outcomes are as follows:

- Career Wise: ‘maximise graduation rates’.²²¹
- Moshal: ‘good well-paid jobs and improve their financial situation, that of their families and hopefully that of their communities one day’.
Mission: ‘obtain sought-after university degrees, soft skills and values, that lead to successful and fulfilling professional careers and lives’.²²²
- OMET ‘ensure[s] the personal, academic and professional success of scholarship holders’.²²³
- REAP: Mission: ‘access higher education, graduate, sustain themselves and become ethically responsible citizens’.²²⁴
- Tomorrow Trust: ‘survive and thrive in the 21st century, our graduates are empowered to reach their full potential as self-sustaining and proactive members of society’.²²⁵
- Umthombo: ‘healthcare professionals needed by their communities.’²²⁶

Vision and values²²⁷

The public and individual ‘goods’ of a higher education qualification are highlighted in these organisations’ visions and values, whose refrain comprises making difference to others, be they family or the broader community:

- Moshal: ‘Scholarship recipients become **beacons of hope** to the other young people in their community, **inspiring them** to work harder and aim for the top.’
‘Vision: Moshal scholars using their university education and values to **make a major difference to their lives and the lives of their families**, their

²²⁰ Extracted from *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²²¹ Career Wise website.

²²² Moshal website.

²²³ OMET 2019 annual report.

²²⁴ REAP website.

²²⁵ Tomorrow Trust website.

²²⁶ Umthombo website.

²²⁷ Extracted from *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

communities and the wider world'.²²⁸

- OMET: Vision: 'To be a centre of excellence within the higher education student development space, contributing towards nurturing and empowering young people **for the upliftment of communities & society.**'

Values: Respect, integrity, accountability and pushing beyond boundaries for a future all South Africans can look forward to.'²²⁹

- REAP: 'Vision: To reduce rural poverty in South Africa by developing **self-sustaining, ethically responsible** graduates.'²³⁰
'REAP was started by the SACBC to address social justice issues. It is also about ethical citizenship and community service.'²³¹
- StudyTrust: 'students' technical and academic skills, preparing them for meaningful employment and to **become active contributors to the economy**'.²³²
- Tomorrow Trust: 'Vision: Our vision is for a just tomorrow. A society with conscious and holistically educated leaders; where all children, including the orphaned and vulnerable, have a real chance of success in academics and life. We believe in a HAND UP that **empowers and emancipates South African youths from poverty**, rather than a HAND OUT that keeps them entrenched in charity.'²³³

8.2 Student profile

Number of students supported

The 25 organisations in the NBSPF have been supporting about 9,000 students in any given year. In 2021, 17 of these organisations reported their student numbers as follows:

**Table 3:
Number of students supported in 2021
by 17 of the 23 organisations in the NBSPF**

Total students supported	6,607
High school	64
TVET	300
University students - undergraduate	5,742
University students - postgraduate	501

The number of students supported in 2020 by each of the seven organisations interviewed ranged from 103 to about 2,000.

²²⁸ Moshal website.

²²⁹ OMET 2019 annual report.

²³⁰ REAP website.

²³¹ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

²³² StudyTrust website.

²³³ Tomorrow Trust website.

**Table 4: Number of students supported
by seven bursary support providers: 2020**

	Current no. of students
Career Wise	±2,000
Moshal	487
OMET	143
REAP	510
StudyTrust	±1,000
Tomorrow Trust	at university 103 (at school 1,070)
Umthombo	184 (usually ±240)

Income

The sector has largely supported students whose financially under-resourced households fell within the NSFAS funded brackets – R122,00 per annum until 2017, then R350 0000 from 2018.

Recently some students from the ‘missing middle’ have been included – i.e. ‘those students who come from working class households that do not qualify for the National Student Finance Aid Scheme (NSFAS) while at the same time, they cannot afford higher education’. (SANews.gov.za, 2021).

Of the seven organisations interviewed

- two (Moshal and REAP) support students from households whose incomes are consistent with the (original) NSFAS criteria – under R122,000 a year; and
- two (Umthombo and StudyTrust) also support students in higher income brackets – one according to funders’ requirements where some ‘allow up to R750,000 combined family income per annum’.²³⁴
- For three organisations (Career Wise, OMET and Tomorrow Trust), household income is not a criteria, and they may well include students in the ‘missing middle’.

²³⁴ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 20.

Income affecting offering?

Asked if the wraparound support needs differ across student from different income brackets, only one of seven organisation interviewed said it would. Their programme is slightly unusual, however, inasmuch as they provide scholarships to top-achieving union members and their families and household incomes vary considerably. They note that their incomes

'will shape the support around students' needs as they will not all be the same', noting that some are 'first generation students and may need better academic writing support – and support where they do not have the cultural capital from their backgrounds that helps to navigate higher education'.²³⁵

Complementing this, one organisation who had an assignment to work with a full final year Law class (from a variety of backgrounds) found that their model was equally valuable to middle class student, who *'valued all three components , one-on-one, workshops, board review'.²³⁶*

Age²³⁷

Most students were under 25 years old when they began to be supported by the seven organisations interviewed. Four organisations occasionally include students who are a little older, with one noting that with 'free fees', 'some older students are also applying – recruited through the universities' financial aid offices'. They 'also recruit unemployed matriculants who are at community centres attending skills programmes'.²³⁸

Another organisation noted that the decision to only recruit young people under 24 was based on their view that older students did not manage well.²³⁹ This is in contrast to the organisation which has found that the few students who have been many years out of school are 'remarkable'²⁴⁰ – and another, that they were often 'more committed'.²⁴¹

Asked if there are any differences in the needs of students straight out of school and those who have been out for a number of years, most said there was not. One thought that *'some may have forgotten some of their academic skills'.²⁴²*

²³⁵ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 20.

²³⁶ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²³⁷ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²³⁸ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

²³⁹ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

²⁴¹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

²⁴² *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

Gender²⁴³

Four of the seven organisations interviewed try to balance the numbers of men and women they recruit, while one focusses on women. Gender is not a criteria for two organisations.

Four organisations have more women than men students, two of whom have 59% and 65% women.²⁴⁴

One BSP which had slightly fewer women than men despite attempts to balance numbers, wondered if their recent move to an on-line application system was a factor – that perhaps women applicants had different access to IT in their households.

Interview with REAP

'Race'²⁴⁵

While two of the organisations who access B-BBEE funding necessarily include 'race' as a selection criteria (in these aspects of their work), another includes it when a client/funder requires them to do so.

None of the other seven organisations interviewed includes 'race' in selection – but the intersection of financially under-resourced households and 'race' means that over 80% of all students are 'black African'. The other students are 'coloured' or 'Indian', with a very small number being 'white'.

Nationality²⁴⁶

Three organisations support people from other parts of Africa,²⁴⁷ with two expressly supporting those who are refugees/asylum seekers.²⁴⁸ Two of the three organisations are expressly funded for this purpose.^{249, 250} The numbers are not large however.

²⁴³ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²⁴⁴ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

²⁴⁵ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²⁴⁶ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²⁴⁷ Career Wise, Moshal and StudyTrust.

²⁴⁸ Moshal, StudyTrust.

²⁴⁹ Career Wise has a client who (mostly) selects students from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi themselves – to be supported at South African universities. Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

²⁵⁰ Since 2014 StudyTrust has been the South African implementing partners of the UNHCR for the Albert Einstein Scholarship for Refugees which 'helps refugees worldwide to access higher education'. StudyTrust website, accessed April 2020.

*Areas from which students come*²⁵¹

Six of the seven BSPs interviewed select students from around the country, while one only recruits students from KZN and the Eastern Cape.

Two organisations only recruit and select students from the rural areas and they confirmed that the students' rural origins influenced the kinds of services provided.²⁵² one ensures that full material /financial support is in place as, '*while peri-urban poor people may be able to make a plan if money is short, rural students have no networks*'.²⁵³ Another organisation observed that the 'reality is that the majority [of their students] are from deep rural or under-resourced areas and had mostly been taught in mother tongue, [but that] the challenges were the same for everyone'.²⁵⁴

*Schooling*²⁵⁵

Two organisations recruit only from rural schools. The rest recruit across the board.

Matric results

Five of the seven organisations use matric marks as a criterion in selection. Of the other two (who do not use marks in selection), one does so only in some cases, while the other requires students to access university by themselves, using the universities' acceptance as a proxy for matric marks.

'The Dell Young Leaders bursary does not select for academic performance beyond the academic threshold that enrolment in a top-tier university requires. In other words, Dell Young Leaders are not all top scorers on matric or the National Benchmark Tests. JvR Psychometric analysis found ... cognitive ability does not appear to be linked to academic success at university, once students have met the entrance requirements for a professional degree programme. The analysis concluded that additional measures of cognitive ability were not likely to add value to the selection process.'

(Singizi Consulting, 2016)

²⁵¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

²⁵² REAP thinks there is a need for "more emphasis on adjustment and assimilation". While some students are "happy to escape their rural isolation" others have not lived away from home and from their support structures, are shy and homesick and have not had to cope with multilingualism, etc. Also rural students may not have had the same access to technology and are less familiar with urban workplace cultures, both of which influence what the organisation does in work readiness interventions.' Interviews with Russell Davies & Emma Francis, 23&24 April 2020.

²⁵³ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

²⁵⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

None selects 'mostly high achievers (over 70%)' Two organisations are actively wary of students with good matric marks as they crash when they experience difficulty while those who get 65% '*may have encountered some kind of failure so have developed some coping skills to deal with failure*'. Another attributes the preponderance of dropouts among those with good matric marks to their registering for the difficult courses at 'elite' universities.

The students who are ultimately selected are a 'combination of high and medium-level achievers (55% and above)'.

Four organisations do not think there is a reliable correlation between school marks and success at university, however. None of the organisations use students school marks to make assumptions on the kinds of (different) the support they may might need.

8.3 Recruiting and selecting students – a variable in success

A wide variety of recruitment and selection approaches and criteria are used across these seven organisations.

Many have an internet presence through which they recruit; many rely on referral, sometimes through quite formal networks but also including word of mouth from current students and alumni. Two organisations recruit concertedly through partner organisations, one of whom will only accept applications which originated in this way. Another recruits a small portion of its students from its support programme for school learners.²⁵⁶

Some recruit students at the beginning of – and some during – their university qualifications. Some do both.

While all hold personal interviews to select students, they engage in the selection process with different degrees of intensity and use a diverse range of assessment tools. In terms of selection criteria,

- all require that the student is in financial need;
- the quality of the matric marks are regarded differently across organisations;
- most have requirements of personal attributes; and
- some require that the student accesses a place at a university by themselves.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

²⁵⁷ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Recruitment methods²⁵⁸

Most organisations advertise their offerings on their **websites** – while **informal referral**, including word of mouth, is an important source of applicants for a number of organisations.

- One organisation accesses applicants from their own ‘pipeline’ of the students they have supported at school – although only 15% of their students ultimately come from this source. The rest come from word of mouth.²⁵⁹
- Another organisation relies on referrals to their on-line application system – by alumni, university financial aid offices, various academic staff and Catholic networks. Of the applicants who met the minimum criteria, those referred by current students, community members, community organisations, friends and school had the highest success rates. The lowest were from the church, the internet and the universities.²⁶⁰

Two organisations work concertedly with **partner organisations** to recruit suitable students.

- One only accepts applications which originated through partner organisations. They believe accepting unsolicited applications gives ‘*false hope*’ and that ‘*by narrowing the pipeline, applicants may have had a 1 in 5 chance of getting in, rather than a 1 in 20 chance.*’ They liaise with selected NGOs, schools, municipalities etc. who identify suitable applicants – some of whom ‘*have attended 40 Saturday morning schools in a year*’.²⁶¹
- Another organisation liaises with local schools and hospitals as well as municipalities and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) regarding their career days. But as distances are large and hospitals are busy, they increasingly use social media and are considering using radio to tell students’ stories (what they needed, where they studied and what the job entails.)²⁶²

Selection criteria²⁶³

While all organisations require that the student is in **financial need**, as noted above, the upper limits for this vary.

- **Matric marks** are regarded differently by organisations, as already noted above. The mandate of one organisation ‘*is not to take top-of-the-class academically*’ though they include academic criteria if a donor/partner has specific requirements – while others look for marks that ‘*show potential*’. The organisation which offers a scholarship (OMET) selects only ‘*academically top students*’.

²⁵⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

²⁶¹ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

²⁶² Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

²⁶³ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

- Some take note of **NBT scores** (e.g. Moshal); others actively do not.
- Most have requirements of **personal attributes** e.g. ‘the student’s attitude and determination to succeed and make a difference’.

Income: Of the seven organisations interviewed

- two selected students from households whose incomes are consistent with the (original) NSFAS criteria – under R122,000 a year;²⁶⁴ and
- two also support students in higher income brackets²⁶⁵ – one according to funders’ requirements where some ‘allowing up to R750,000 combined family income per annum’.²⁶⁶
- For three organisations²⁶⁷, household income is not a criteria, and they may well include students in the ‘missing middle’.
- One organisation which focussed on orphans and vulnerable children noted that 90% of their students fall within the ‘risk profile’ and ‘70% are very vulnerable’.²⁶⁸

In addition, organisations select students with **particular personal qualities** – for example:

- ‘highly-motivated, determined and tenacious’ (Moshal)
- ‘with potential and determination to study’ (StudyTrust)
- ‘academically able young people’ (REAP).

Five organisations serve **particular constituencies** – so students must come from these:

- matriculants from poor households and rural schools (REAP)
- rural youth from poor households (Umthombo)
- orphaned and vulnerable children (Tomorrow Trust)
- the members and dependents of certain trade unions (Old Mutual’s business partners) (OMET).

And increasingly where organisation are contracting with mines or renewable energy plants, the students must come from the catchment area around the facilities.

²⁶⁴ (Moshal and REAP.)

²⁶⁵ Umthombo and StudyTrust.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

²⁶⁷ Career Wise, OMET and Tomorrow Trust.

²⁶⁸ Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

Selection process²⁶⁹

- All applicants are shortlisted on the basis of their application – and all do personal interviews, although to varying intensities.
- One organisation has held regional selection camps lasting two days, where formal and informal observation is done. Asked what they would reduce if needs be, however, they would cut these camps as they are learning they can select virtually. In 2021 selection was all on-line using WhatsApp.²⁷⁰
- In contrast another organisation *‘doesn’t spend a lot of time on selection’*; they mainly assess if the person can articulate why they want to study and why they have chosen a particular course; and that they are *‘open to being supported and they understand what they are getting themselves into’*.²⁷¹

Umthombo Youth Development Programme includes the potential employer – the local hospital – in the selection of applicants and in the interview, as the hospital identified the skills needed and invited youth to apply with a view to their being eligible to fill their staffing gap.

The BSP uses the hospital’s application form and selection criteria and co-ordinates the process.-

In 2019 REAP had unusually high failure and withdrawal rates (due to non-compliance) among students being supported at the two Free State universities. This was partly attributed to the selection process and criteria.

With the advent in 2019 of the exclusive use of an on-line applications, there were not have enough applicants for the 40 spaces available, so the organisation invited students to apply who had been identified through the Financial Aid offices.

The sense is that the slightly less successful outcomes can be partly attributed to

- the invited students possibly having different motivations; they had not been ‘hungry’ to look for extra money / a bursary in the first instance; and
- accepting people who did not meet all of the organisation’s criteria (i.e. people with slightly lower marks than the required average of 55% in grade 11 and 12).²⁷²

²⁶⁹ ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

²⁷¹ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

²⁷² Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 20

Use of assessment tools

Some of the better funded organisations use assessment tools – particularly psychometric tests – to assist with the actual selection process. For example Moshal uses assessment tools quite extensively, as follows:

- Brainwaves – helps identify the degree they should be applying for etc.
- DAT (Differentiated Aptitude Test) – spatial, engineering comprehension and reading (most of which come back below average/ average).
- CNT (Complex Navigational Tool) – how someone receives, packages and uses information, particularly important for engineers and CAs, but not for doctors.

Asked what they would do if they had more money, they ‘would love to do Strength finder and MBTI for ALL students’. They are currently only assessing the final year students (given that the cost is R5,000 per student).²⁷³

The evaluators of the Michael and Susan Dell Foundations’ Young Leaders programme observed that the organisation’s selection processes had improved, as seen in the increase in qualities the organisation had identified as supporting success within the profile of young people they were intent on serving. The psychometric profiling showed that the selection process had resulted in

‘just the cohort the programme seeks to serve: youth who have experienced high levels of adversity and have adopted risk-mitigating strategies, such as persistence.’
(Singizi Consulting, 2016)

They elaborate:

‘Psychometric profiling suggests that student selection process refinements have been positive, as newer student cohorts score slightly higher than earlier cohorts on emotional intelligence and positive personality attributes, desirable factors that may provide a buffer for students. In addition, evaluation found a relatively smaller number of students flagged as academically ‘struggling’ from the 2013 and 2014 student cohorts as compared to earlier cohorts.’ (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

²⁷³

Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 20 – amended 6 April 2021

8.4 Study options

*Phase of study and education sectors*²⁷⁴

While all seven organisations (whose directors were interviewed for this research) support students doing undergraduate studies at universities,

- four also support a few postgraduate students;
- one had worked in TVET colleges (StudyTrust)– and one is about to start doing so (REAP); and
- three also work in schools, with one doing the majority of their work there (Tomorrow Trust - 91,5%).

*Which universities?*²⁷⁵

There is a range of reasons why organisations choose to support students at various universities – from perceptions of their offering a better chance of success to internal operational reasons.

- Four organisations work at any (public/state) university in the country (Career Wise, OMET, StudyTrust, Umthombo). One noted that ‘some universities don’t seem to have the same status but are doing amazing work’ adding, however, ‘that the poor responsiveness of some universities is very hard..... Sometimes students are at really poor universities that are badly managed.’²⁷⁶
- Following this point, one organisation would ‘prefer not to fund students at some [universities] where the quality of the degrees is very poor – e.g. Limpopo.’²⁷⁷
- One organisation works at only ten universities, all of which were HWUs and none are universities of technology – their rationale being ‘Return on investment: what is going to get the student the best paid job to break the cycle of poverty’.²⁷⁸
- Another works only at universities in Gauteng and the Western Cape (plus Rhodes) - for operational /staff deployment reasons.²⁷⁹
- One has reduced the number of universities at which they work from 16 to now only recruiting for six – partly for operational reasons but also as the articulation gap is less accentuated at these six.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ Extracted from ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.’

²⁷⁵ Extracted from ‘Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.’

²⁷⁶ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 20.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

The for-profit organisation is required by their clients to support students at **private universities** (*'as they can't get into a state university'*) – but they discourage this. They find these universities are varied, very expensive, the results are not always good and it is not clear how employable the graduates are.²⁸¹

Another organisation – not part of the seven – works only at the universities of Cape Town and Pretoria, chosen on the basis of core criteria that requires that the universities:

- 'enrol sufficient numbers of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students;
- have functioning academic, situational (psychosocial) and financial student support services;
- possess strong credibility with employers in its professional programmes;
- have leadership buy-in for the Dell Young Leaders programme.' (Singizi Consulting, 2016)

While this support model expressly relies on referral to existing systems, organisations supporting students at universities which do not have these 'functioning academic, situational (psychosocial) and financial student support services' invariably offer a mixed model of provision and referral. This is an example of the difference in risk and cost implications within the sector.

Field focus ²⁸²

Four of the seven organisations focus on supporting particular courses / fields / streams – largely informed by possible employment and donor specifications. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and Health Sciences predominate.

Career Wise	Engineering, IT, Finance– but not exclusively
Moshal	STEM, Commerce, Law, IT, Medicine
StudyTrust	STEM – 'but with a growing number in other areas as we gain new grants from the renewable energy sector'. ²⁸³
Umthombo	Health Sciences, particularly disciplines that the Department of Health employs.

²⁸¹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

²⁸² Extracted from *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²⁸³ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

The reasons for these choice of fields are as follows:

- Career Wise has some corporate clients who specify the field of study, wanting a pipeline for employment and work-back contracts. However other clients are philanthropic and/or or run community-based schemes and 46students may pursue whatever fields they want to.
- StudyTrust's 'new grants from the renewable energy sector' means that 'geographic area trumps study programme in selection'.²⁸⁴
- Umthombo had its origins in focussing on the Health Sciences, as their intention was to recruit students from rural households as a potential supply for health professionals who might work in rural areas.

Asked whether having a particular focus shapes the kind of supports they provide, or the way they provide them, two organisations said it did not, while the following two said that it did:

- Moshal runs boot camps for all first years which comprise five solid days of Maths. They also offer training in English literacy.
- Umthombo recognises that Health Science students have very full timetables and are often located in health sites, not on campus – so they provide 'quite a light offering, of necessity'.²⁸⁵

Asked if they had considered focussing on fields in which there is more likely to be employment, one director whose organisation funds most fields of study commented that they had tried to do so 'but struggled to get enough [rural] students which would allow them to select them on the basis of the fields they are interested in'. He attributed this to their 'recruitment methodology (on-line and working with faculties)' which had resulted in fewer eligible applicants.²⁸⁶

8.5 Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

While all of these BSP organisations support university students from financially disadvantaged households and often poor schooling, like universities, their student profiles differ from one another. Some also channel students into particular institutions and fields of study while others do not.

When making comparisons, then it is important that these factors are foregrounded to avoid reaching unfounded conclusions.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

9. RESOURCES IN THE BURSARY SUPPORT PROVIDER SECTOR

9.1 Funding

Funding sources

Organisations in the NBSPP are funded in three different ways.

- A few are for-profit organisations.
- Some are funded by a dedicated source – like a company²⁸⁷ (through their Corporate Social Investment (CSI) portfolios); or by a single philanthropist sometimes in the form of a foundation.²⁸⁸
- The others must fundraise from local and foreign donors.

Cutting across these three categories are those that

- access funding from NSFAS to support their students; and
- take on contracts to provide services for students funded by corporates.

Support to NSFAS-funded students²⁸⁹

All seven organisations support NSFAS-funded students. One organisation (REAP) only supports students funded by NSFAS, while the other six also support students funded from other sources.

Moshal fully funds students who NSFAS does not fund like

- those who need extra time beyond the one extra year (N+1) ;
- those whose NSFAS applications backfired (e.g. they did not submit all their documents);
- postgraduate students; and
- foreign students.

While OMET recently considered no longer selecting candidates who qualified for NSFAS funding, they decided against it as *'the exclusion of NSFAS beneficiaries would deny a significant portion of dependents of union members access to OMET student support'*. They decided to continue *'either fully funding or co-funding with NSFAS, as is practice with other scholarship providers'*.

- Leonie, Sampson, OMET director

²⁸⁷ Old Mutual Education Trust, Allan Gray and HCI Foundation.

²⁸⁸ Moshal Scholarship Program and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation√.

²⁸⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Table 5: Seven organisations' approaches to NSFAS-funded students – as selection criterion and the resulting student cohort ²⁹⁰

	Support NSFAS-funded students		Some are not NSFAS-funded		Do not work with NSFAS-funded students	
	Selectn	Actual	Selectn	Actual	Selectn	Actual
Career Wise	√	√	√	√		
Moshal	√	65-70%	√	√		
OMET	√	16%	√	√ (most)		
REAP	√	100%				
StudyTrust	√	90%	√	√		
Tomorrow Trust	√ (very few)	√ (very few)	√	√		
Umthombo	√	97%	√	3%		

The lack of control over NSFAS' delivery and the negative effect this has on students was a worry for some:

- *'More difficult to manage [students who are partially funded by NSFAS], as we have no control over NSFAS payments.'*²⁹¹
- They act as *'a go-between with NSFAS and makes sure they can eat when allowances are late'*.²⁹²
- While one director thought that the BSP sector could/should consider providing support to NSFAS-funded students en masse, they added that it would be *'fraught with danger as students are not paid on time'* – citing that at the time of the interview (mid-April 2020) some of their students had still not received money from NSFAS.²⁹³

Changes to support model

We asked those directors who work with NSFAS-funded students

- whether they had changed their support model at all, following the changes in the NSFAS funding – and if so, what they were; and
- whether they thought the changes still produced a good enough service.

Three organisations²⁹⁴ did not make any changes to their support model, noting that they already (only) offer what students want, so the change in funding made no difference.

²⁹⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

²⁹¹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

²⁹² Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

²⁹³ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

²⁹⁴ Career Wise, Moshal, StudyTrust.

Shifts in funding²⁹⁵

The increase in the means test for accessing NSFAS funding to a household income of R350,000 per annum – and the conversion from a loan to a grant – has produced the perceptions that funding of undergraduate education has been completely addressed. One director indicated that ‘the higher education problem’ is now being seen as more systemic – to do with pedagogies and university cultures, rather than individual support.²⁹⁶

And indeed funders increasingly want to know if the support that BSPs offer really makes a difference and at what price tag – as these allocations are in competition with other issues like early childhood development (ECD) or postgraduate studies.²⁹⁷

Another director commented that it is ‘difficult to convince funders that wraparound support makes a difference, that finance alone is not the solution – but this is not generally understood’. Having published some detailed analyses on the positive return on investment achieved through his organisation’s support, he tells funders that ‘mentoring improves [success rates] from 50% to 90%’. He is of the opinion that the DHET understands this but does not have the funding – and looks forward to the NBSPF doing some advocacy once the stats are available.²⁹⁸

Many of the directors commented that there is an increase in requests for evidence to show that their work is making a difference – thus this research.

Future funding²⁹⁹

Asked whether they thought the economic situation produced by COVID19 will further change the appetite for funding wraparound support – and if so, in what ways – the directors thought that funding will become tighter and requests for evidence of the difference that support might make is becoming more frequent.

²⁹⁵ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

²⁹⁶ Interviews with Russell Davies & Emma Francis, 23&24 April 2020.

²⁹⁷ Interviews with Russell Davies & Emma Francis, 23&24 April 2020.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

²⁹⁹ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

The for-profit organisation thought that some clients might reduce new funding, but did not think they would withdraw current support.³⁰⁰ This was echoed by a NPO director whose reported that ‘most are sticking to their financial commitments for this year, though a few have reduced’. Their Board (which includes finance people) is ‘starting to see a world where revenue streams from companies are stopping, so they have asked [the organisation] to reign back the budget this year quite aggressively, by 15%. They have also reduced fundraising targets to almost zero’. He commented that the organisation ‘is going to have to do more with less – but will also adopt a ‘wait and see’ approach.’³⁰¹

The two organisations which do not need to fundraise have different views:

- The director of a corporate-funded BSP thought that funding would be volatile – that funders would react this year, but may change again once COVID19 is over.³⁰²
- Commenting on the double impact of ‘first NSFAS and then COVID’, the BSP funded by a single philanthropist was more pessimistic, suggesting that funders are going to ‘tighten their belts’.³⁰³

B-BBEE – a way forward?

Having a B-BBEE (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment) rating gives South African companies an advantage when bidding for work. Part of maintaining this rating requires that they spend the monies – which are in the following funds:

- Socio-Economic Development (SED): companies are required to spend 1% of their post-tax profit on social development expenditure.
- Skills Development (SD): tuition plus 8% admin costs are eligible to be funded by this fund.³⁰⁴
- Enterprise Development (ED).³⁰⁵

The corporate-based organisation echoed this - that ‘B-BBEE is a big conversation in the finance industry, as companies want to maintain their B-BBEE status as it goes toward getting business; so companies will want to spend’. She is not sure if it is ‘part of a solution for the sector’ however.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁰ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁰¹ Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

³⁰² Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

³⁰³ Interview with Jodi Bailey & Nokuthula Zama, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³⁰⁴ Some companies thought support was not an eligible category but, on being asked by REAP, a DTI commissioner in Feb 2020 interpreted the rules as that providing support for students IS eligible for funding.

³⁰⁵ interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

³⁰⁶ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

Four of the seven organisations interviewed affirmed that this system may well provide sustainable funding going forward – subject to any rule changes within the policy. There is a general sense that there is – and will be – a lot of money in this system;³⁰⁷ one director commented that this would still be the case even if the funding shrinks by 10% to 30%.³⁰⁸

Each student may only be funded by one fund – not all three. One director thought that the Skills Development Fund is a good option as it is a levy and not taken from company profits which may suffer in the next while.³⁰⁹ Another director thought that the revised BEE Skills Development (SD) element will have a positive impact on student funding made available by the corporate sector; from December 2019 companies may earn BEE points by investing in the skills development of any black South African – including students in formal study programmes offered by institutions of higher learning. Previously SD spend was reserved for black employees of the company.³¹⁰

One director asserted the need to promote the value-add that BSP organisations can offer to these companies;³¹¹ and this was echoed by another:

‘Some education is needed around this [to the companies who need to spend their B-BBEE monies], which points out that these bursary support organisations can help to produce a pipeline of skilled workers in their fields if these corporations support undergraduate education ... as most organisations use their B-BBEE to fund their human capital development’.

In addition, she thought it a good source of funding for students who, for some reason, do not qualify for NSFAS funding.³¹²

Some warned of the onerous paperwork required when accessing B-BBEE funding, suggesting that this somewhat undermined the policy as a future funding source:

‘The B-BBEE reporting requirements are very exacting and will not suit everyone ... B-BBEE is really tough - very hard and intricate paperwork’

– adding that ‘verification agencies in CSI are fairly relaxed, while in SD they are draconian!’³¹³ Others thought it was completely manageable (one with a lot of students funded by this source³¹⁴ and two with only a few³¹⁵).

³⁰⁷ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

³⁰⁸ Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

³⁰⁹ interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

³¹⁰ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

³¹¹ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

³¹² Interview with Jodi Bailey & Nokuthula Zama, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³¹³ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

³¹⁴ Career Wise.

³¹⁵ Tomorrow Trust and REAP.

One director noted that ‘companies and organisations must have decent systems’ as the expenditure is ‘rigorously audited’, as is the bursary organisation who dispenses their money.³¹⁶ Noting that ‘lots of companies are maximising their B-BBEE points’ she concluded that ‘whether this is a significant alternate form of funding for the sector depends on whether the bursary organisations have capacity to do this’ adding that NGOs ‘have not had the same levels of financial accountability’ [as for-profit organisations]. She does not think it is ‘a saviour for the sector’.³¹⁷

Impact of funding uncertainty on the service offering³¹⁸

The directors were asked if they envisaged any changes to their offerings given the context of increasing funding uncertainty – beginning with the NSFAS increase and exacerbated by the economic effects of COVID19.

The for-profit organisation and the two not-for-profits who do not fundraise all said they will continue with no changes this year (2021) – though the for-profit organisation thought that ‘NSFAS will have to allow for repeat years’ which they do not ordinarily do.³¹⁹

Two of the four other NPOs also thought they would continue as usual – although one thought they would have to be more cautious going forward. The other two have reduced/stopped recruiting new students in order to be able to fund the students to whom they are already committed.

Four organisations thought that they might need to reduce their student numbers if funding is reduced, while the two organisations who have secure funding did not envisage that this would arise. One organisation thought the state’s Skills Development funding would still be available – and may even increase numbers.

³¹⁶ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³¹⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³¹⁸ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

³¹⁹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020. NSFAS does not allow a student to repeat.

9.2 Human resources

Staffing

The staff compositions and arrangements vary markedly across organisations – including the profiles and numbers of frontline staff who interact with students. Among the seven organisations interviewed, the staff:student ratio for all staff ranged from 1:21 to 1:100 – while frontline staff who work directly with students ranged from 1:34 to 1:300.³²⁰

To interact with students over often large geographical areas, organisations arrange their staffing in one of two ways:

- staff work centrally and travel periodically to the universities around the country;³²¹ or
- staff are located around the country.³²²

Frontline staff³²³

The profile of those who interact with students differs quite markedly across organisations.

- Career Wise – professional bursary managers who manage the clients as well as the students, with assistance from their support staff .
- OMET – two dedicated staff whose roles in supporting students are being developed. This is alongside the current re-orientation of the organisation’s approach from being scholarship administrators (seconded from their parent body) to being a development organisation.
- REAP – student development advisors (SDAs) who are aged 25 – 35, young enough to identify but old enough to have authority. They are ‘big sister/ brother/ mentor’ and walk alongside students. They are social work or psychology graduates and are selected (partly) on the basis of language matching with the students.
- StudyTrust – senior mentors, as well as campus co-ordinators on each campus. These are senior students who have the same employment conditions as students paid by the university. They are usually from social work, sociology etc; and are not necessarily StudyTrust students.
- Tomorrow Trust – three clinical psychologists provide student support.

³²⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff”. October 2020.

³²¹ OMET, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust, Career Wise.

³²² Moshal, REAP, Umthombo.

³²³ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff”. October 2020.

- Umthombo – (part-time) local mentors who are allocated to each campus, managing as many students as feasible. The student manager oversees them – and sometimes directly mentors (often senior) students where there is no mentor. Mentors are recruited through networking and are selected on the basis of ‘heart’; they are occasionally selected on the basis of discipline e.g. Pharmacy at Rhodes. They only receive initial training to align them to Umthombo, but no mentoring training. They meet together once a year and share among themselves (e.g. about ‘difficult students’) in a peer learning approach.

Workplace mentors

Workplace mentoring is offered over and above the standard frontline offerings. This is usually by an outsider who supports the students but also brokers their access to the world of work or a particular sector/profession. They are usually volunteers and can be alumni, from corporates associated with the bursary organisation.

Five of the seven organisations have mentoring programmes but they have met with varied success. They are very labour intensive and working with alumni is not always easy. Most are on their second or third attempt at running a programme.³²⁴

Alumni

Among the seven organisations interviewed, the number of alumni ranged from 286 (an organisation that has been operating for seven years) to ‘into the thousands’ of an organisation that has been operating for 20 years.

Alumni can play a number of important roles both during and after students’ university lives. They can

- signal that completing a degree is possible for people from similar backgrounds;
- provide mentoring – and even subject tutoring – during their degrees; and
- advise students about workplaces generally, or fields of work in particular. Some may mentor graduates as they enter their first job / engage in entrepreneurial activities.

One organisation has an active alumni programme – with incentives to continue to engage with them:

“We are in contact with about 50% of our alumni and about 20% are still active participants in the programme. We are on a big drive to re-connect with alumni.”

- Moshal country director

³²⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff”. October 2020.

Five organisations have contact with their alumni, while two have only ‘some contact’. They mentioned the difficulty of keeping up-to-date contact details and the increasingly poor response from alumni as times goes on.³²⁵

*Lockdown lessons: Alumni*³²⁶

- All ten organisations surveyed regarding lessons from lockdown network with their alumni.
- Two will promote networking with alumni entirely on-line, while one will continue to do so face-to-face. The rest all opted to communicate with alumni through a combination of virtual and face-to-face.
- Nearly half (four of ten) thought that the ‘results have been better working on-line’ while seven thought that working on-line is ‘a more effective use of time’ and three that it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
- One organisation will not change the frequency of their offering, while most – seven organisations – propose to facilitate networking with their alumni more frequently.

*Peer mentors*³²⁷

Of the seven BSPs whose directors were interviewed,

- four have formal peer mentoring systems on each campus, comprising senior students who volunteer to support junior students;
- one has group but not individual mentoring; while
- two have informal peer support initiatives.

The work mostly comprises helping newly-arrived students navigate the university and assisting with orientation processes. Some mentors are only required to be provide assistance at the beginning of the year (although they may continue informally), while others sustain this throughout the year, working both with the student and providing practical assistance at workshops and camps.

The group mentoring is co-ordinated by a nominated senior student – and attended by a staff member.

Some (often faculty-based) mentors are required to provide academic support – although some do this informally.

³²⁵ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

³²⁶ *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

³²⁷ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

Selection & remuneration

Students volunteer to be mentors – but some staff also approach students, using selection criteria.³²⁸ Most link students on the basis of the courses/faculties. Most train their peer buddies and some give them certificates and publically acknowledges their work.³²⁹ None of these seven organisations seem to pay peer mentors.

Asked whether paid peers might be one way of increasing the reach of these organisations, one organisation thought this would make it scalable and good for NSFAS-funded students: *‘Having a peer buddy would certainly reduce the high NSFAS dropout in first year’* as *‘the support they get from one another is really important’*. Selecting and training empathetic people as peer supporters would be important – and their work could be linked to a certificate and prestige.³³⁰

Given the increase of peer support systems at some universities there is a risk that *‘students complain they are being mentored too much!’*.³³¹ One organisation has tried to have their peer buddies included in the university-run peer buddy programme – but with little success, the sense being that the universities are holding it as *‘their product’*.³³²

The two who have an informal approach to peer support leave the initiative with the students, once they have provide the initial link.

- One believes that *‘nudge interventions’* and *‘natural relationships’* are most effective. They encourage student to raise issues early before they get too big or deadlines are upon them. (Career Wise)
- Students look out for one another like family – e.g. they will send a message to a staff member about another student who needs help. (Tomorrow Trust)

Academic tutors³³³

While most BSPs refer their students to the university academic support systems, some commission tutors to provide academic tutoring. Some pay for this while others do not. One organisation reported that while some mentors have simply added tutoring voluntarily to their role, they have never asked to be paid for this tutoring.

³²⁸ Moshal and REAP

³²⁹ e.g. REAP, StudyTrust

³³⁰ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³³¹ StudyTrust.

³³² REAP.

³³³ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

9.3 Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

The time is ripe for BSPs to be able to make the case for the difference that comprehensives support makes to student success and throughput. This research is one attempt to do so.

As funding shrinks – as undergraduate education is perceived to be addressed by NSFAS and is reallocated to other issues – donor-funded BSPs might consider:

- look to other sources of funding, like renewal energy plants which have community obligations as well as funding provided through programmes;
- doing more contractual work e.g. to CSI bursary schemes – or even HEIs themselves.

The all-important individual attention paid to students is partly dependent on their employing sufficient staff such that the staff:student ratio is manageable.

As discussed below, online and group modalities may be a subsidiary way of reaching students sufficiently frequently and personally for early diagnosis. There needs to be enough staff time for them to do follow-up, however.

10. OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT OFFERED BY BURSARY SUPPORT PROVIDERS

10.1 Models of support

Models of support would typically describe

- the aspects of student life that are being supported (material, psycho-social academic);
- in what ways these are offered (modalities);
- how much of each is offered (dosage); and
- what is compulsory and what is voluntary.

The models employed by organisations in the NBSPF differ more than one might expect. While they all include financial and personal support, the dosages and modalities vary markedly, as does the requirements for participation.

The breadth of the models are also different. While all organisations support students while they are at an HEI, some also do pre-enrolment work with school learners while others work concertedly with graduates in relation to employment/work.

Asked if they ever prioritise developing ‘good people’ over academic success, Career Wise commented that ‘It depends what their clients (and employers) are looking for. Some want personal qualities to manage engineers; others want technically excellent engineers.’

Some organisations base their psycho-social support models on theories of youth development and /or psycho-social support; others develop their own theories and models, based on years of experience; while some are required to implement models provided by their funders or partners.

A taxonomy of what is offered by the seven BSPs whose directors/senior staff were interviewed for this research is given below in section 12.2 ‘Personal support and development’.

BSP services in relation to those offered at each HEI³³⁴

BSPs offer what is effectively supplementary support to students within a heterogeneous higher education system. The question was therefore whether they shape their offering so that they only supplement what each university offers – or whether they offer a consistent programme no matter what each university offers.

Four of the seven organisations offer consistent services to students across different kinds of universities, while one does ‘a bit’. One of the four noted that ‘most of the universities [we] work at have similar services to one another’.³³⁵ The organisation which supplements university services ‘a bit’ tweaks their offering to supplement shortfalls e.g. the ‘fairly good careers offices’. In addition, their staff audit the university training and direct students to those they think are really good, rather than duplicate.³³⁶

Two organisations prefer their offerings to be in relation to those offered at the institutions.

- One commented that students at institutions which offer more than others simply ‘get more bang for their buck’. The organisation does not step in and put on workshops where there is no service; rather they give students tips.³³⁷
- The other encourages students to find support in the university first, after which they provides the necessary supports.³³⁸

³³⁴ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

³³⁵ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

³³⁶ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³³⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³³⁸ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

The impact of COVID19 lockdowns

As this research took place during the 18 months from March 2020 which saw the first COVID19-related lockdown, related closures of universities and a turn to massive on-line learning – directors were asked if they were making any changes to the wraparound support model during the lockdown / university closures; and if yes, whether any of these might be replicable going forward.

They were asked:

- about their existing on-line /distance model of support – and whether these were feasible for lockdown conditions; and
- if they were making any changes to the wraparound support model during the lockdown / university closures; and if yes, whether any of these might be replicable going forward.

In addition, a survey of members of the NBSPPF was held three months into the first lockdown to which ten organisations responded (seven of whom were also the directors who had been interviewed for this research). Looking for lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered, it asked about the effects of the lockdown/on-line experience on their support models going forward.³³⁹

In short the overall finding was that most organisations will include on-line interactions as a way of offering quite a few of their services going forward, mostly in a blended way, combining on-line with face-to-face – and that they see the efficiencies in doing so without undermining the service. Offering services virtually will allow them to do so more frequently and, some said, flexibly – while some added that it helped overcome geographical limitations.³⁴⁰ This went beyond one-on-one consultations to offering group development sessions and tutorials. One BSP reported that turnout had improved and students could watch recorded sessions if they were unable to attend – or if they wanted to watch it again.

³³⁹ They were asked if they offer various elements of support virtually /on-line only; through a combination of virtually and face-to-face; or only face-to-face. If virtually, the reason for this was probed. Was it because results have been better working on-line; it is a more effective use of time; it is a more effective use of funds? Finally they were asked if the frequency of offering the service might change, and if so whether this would be less often; or more often. A sub-report outlines the findings in detail. *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

³⁴⁰ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

While connectivity issues were frequently mentioned, overall this experience has enabled BSPs to review their modus operandi and to pilot new methods of offering some of the services that comprise the holistic support they offer.³⁴¹

The value was balanced by some concerns, however:

'It is still very difficult to read body language and gauge expression when discussing an issue virtually. Students are also less open as there are family members in close proximity, at home. This might change when back in res though.'

In addition students often do other things while in an online forum and are not concentrating.

*'There is still a need for face-to-face services as the human element in our programmes cannot be substituted. People thrive through social interactions and connections and that ought to be conveyed in some of the interventions and services we offer to our students.'*³⁴²

The particular effects of COVID19-related lockdowns on each service are mentioned in the relevant sections below. The responses of both the seven directors interviewed and the ten respondents to the COVID19 survey are interspersed with the descriptions of their services as they had been.

This research has been undertaken at a time of significant fluidity, rendering some of the responses and information acutely time-sensitive. The changes in practice developed during lockdown are increasingly being regarded as affecting the previous modus operandi, and there is little doubt that they will shift some practices as a 'new normal' is devised.

Insights into the value of BSPs – and what difference this makes

The variety in the models of support across organisations is consistent with their differing aims and intended outcomes. While the common foundation of financial and personal support is firmly intact, the breadth, dosage and approaches differ, sometimes quite markedly, as do the theories that underpin their work.

³⁴¹ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

³⁴² Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Most BSPs have found that the changes they have made to continue to offer services during the COVID19-related lockdowns to be more time- and cost-efficient, while still delivering suitable services to students. They will be using these experiences to review their models. This is another element of significant contextual in which the research is undertaken.

10.2 Overview of services offered

As said, BSPs offer financial support – plus various other forms of material support (see 10.3) – as well as a range of personal support and development services (104 – 1-xxx)

Personal support and development services

The following services have been offered by the seven interviewed organisations. (They were chosen from a list provided.)

Table 6: Non-financial services offered by seven bursary support providers: 2020

Service	No. of organisations offering this (n=7)
Academic monitoring	7
Academic advice (course selection/ choices)	7
Psycho-social support	7
Lifeskills (inc SRH, diversity, conflict, nutrition etc)	7
Crisis intervention / support	7
Personal financial management (inc budgeting)	7
Career guidance and advice	6
Orientation / FYE	6
Study and IT skills	6
Academic support (inc tutoring)	5
Medical (including eyes)	5
Accommodation identification	5
Peer and leadership development	5
Alumni (networking etc)	5
Sport and recreation	4
Community service	4
Graduate placement	4
Job search	3
Advocacy / representation (on individual matters)	2
In-service training placement	2
Other: <i>Work Readiness</i>	1

The BSP organisations either

- provide the service themselves, or
- insource someone/ an organisation to offer it on their behalf, or
- refer the students to an existing service at the university, and sometimes at another NPO.

A few organisations pay for students to access professional services. These are elaborated on in some detail in the sections below.

Asked about the non-financial support they received from their BSPs, three quarters of the 250 alumni surveyed in mid-2020 rated the following non-financial services as 'very' or 'quite valuable'.

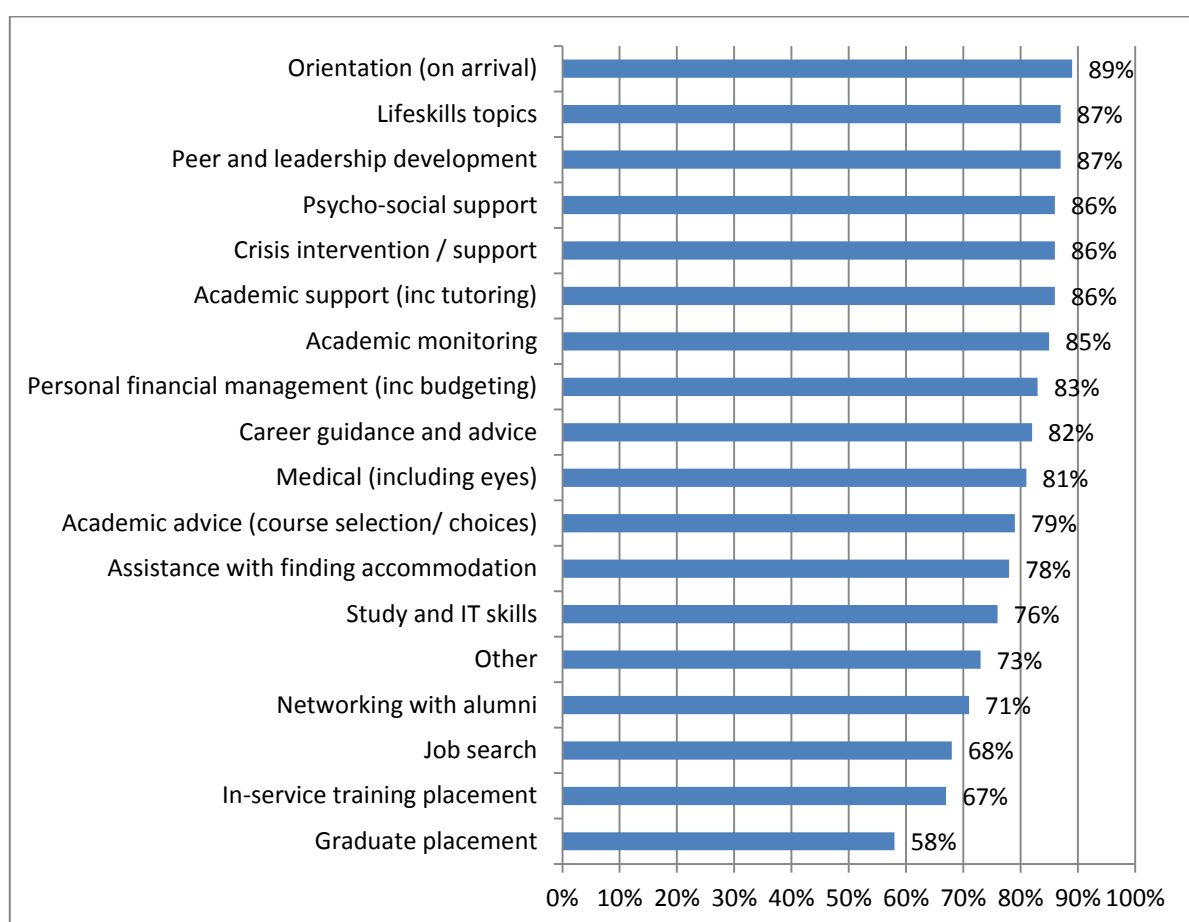


Figure 30: Proportion of those who accessed a service who found it 'very valuable' or 'quite valuable'

- Interpersonal /psycho-social / development services were the most cited: orientation (89%), life skills topics (87%), peer and leadership development (87%), psycho-social support (86%) and crisis intervention (86%).
- Academic support (86%) and monitoring (85%) followed.
- Advice about finances (83%), careers (82%) and course selection 79% were next – along with assistance with accessing medical services (81%) and accommodation (78%).
- 76% valued IT and study skills.’³⁴³

10.3 Dosage and uptake

*Services used by students*³⁴⁴

The seven directors were asked

- which services are being taken up / used by the students and which are not;
- and why they thought this was the case (including financial obligation)?

They were also asked if anything had changed about usage over the last three years. These questions were not answered in much detail.

Three who had light offerings responsive to student needs commented on the general sense that students are getting what they want so participate in what is offered. Two organisations³⁴⁵ attributed the high levels of student compliance with the lightness of their offering – one commenting that ‘students must feel they getting something they want’ while they should also know ‘that we have your back and are not here to judge you’.³⁴⁶

*Poor uptake*³⁴⁷

Two described situations in which students either did not take up their offering in the way the organisation intended, or did not comply.

Tomorrow Trust – which has an integrated holistic programme about which they are confident - reported on two experiences regarding uptake:

- Students are required to sign a contract which includes that they must engage monthly, attend all workshops and volunteer within the organisation’s programmes. Some students have ‘walked away – given that they didn’t want to engage in the way [the organisation] required’.

³⁴³ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.

³⁴⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁴⁵ Career Wise and StudyTrust

³⁴⁶ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁴⁷ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

- Students who don't comply/ attend workshops self-regulate, once they have had to score themselves – e.g. on workshop attendance - at the 'board review'.
- *'A while ago a group of 15 from our school programme were given full bursaries – then dropped out of university. Three reapplied two years later to do different courses at different institutions as they had 'made a mistake'. They were again given full bursaries, but they all dropped out again. We do not understand this.'*³⁴⁸

Another organisation reported on students' poor uptake of one-on-one sessions at a poorly-resourced university at which they had not worked before. This was a pilot project offering personal support only – and no financial support. There was minimal orientation / alignment to the organisation and staff were easily overwhelmed (by the campus disruptions and the nature of the work) and did not actively engage the students. (REAP)

These examples underscores the point, made elsewhere, that the value of one-on-one sessions is not immediately obvious to many students and is often appreciated retrospectively. Hence the requirement by some organisations that attendance is not discretionary.

10.4 Considerations of how services are offered

Working with young people in South Africa – particularly those who are first generation university students – requires consideration of a variety of social factors, if services are to be accessible and acceptable.

Addressing 'race'³⁴⁹

While 'race' is not a determining factor in the selection of students, it can be a consideration in the way in which services are offered. Four of the seven organisations interviewed thought that the 'race' of the person offering a service can influence who participates in it. Inevitably, some services offered at HEIs by some 'white' staff are not found to be hospitable.

Tomorrow Trust sees students 'as a resource to one another' and 'talk overtly about difference; really challenge students to move them out of their comfort zones'.
- Stacey Rontiris

³⁴⁸ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

³⁴⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

One organisation was sensitive to the fact that the senior management are all ‘white’ and ‘*all the frontline staff are ‘black’’* and that their staff have ‘*not had ‘honest conversations’ across races – so sometimes reproduce stereotypes*’. One organisation felt it was important for (particularly ‘white’) staff to tell their own stories to surface assumptions made.³⁵⁰

That being said, none of the seven organisations interviewed reported ‘race’ as being a challenging issue in interactions and workshops.

Contradictory positions are seen in the ‘race’ of psychologists: one director noted that ‘*students prefer to be counselled by someone of the same race (language) as they understand where the student comes from*’ while the other observed that ‘*sometimes black students like talking to a non-black person – especially as ‘psychology’ is seen by some as unacceptable*’.

Asked if they ever used ‘race’ overtly as a resource for learning (e.g. for the workplace) a number said they did, in workshops on diversity and in encouraging students to actively mix beyond their language group. One organisation uses an ‘*asset-based approach – always thinking about what can we learn and gain*’.³⁵¹

Tomorrow Trust always has a small number of ‘white’ students and has “*found this always brings an interesting dimension to workshops*”; for instance most students had assumed that a ‘white’ student was privileged “*but she was far from it, and they were surprised.*”¹ Another organisation reports that when a ‘white perspective’ is mentioned, students are often surprised as it does not match their stereotypes.

Mono-cultural student groupings and contexts are a challenge, given these students’ limited experience of other South African cultures/ languages. While one organisation actively encourages students to make friends beyond their own group, cosmopolitan provinces like Gauteng offer easier opportunities to do so.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁵¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁵² Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Addressing gender

Given the prevalence of unequal gender relations in the country, the directors were asked if their organisations do any overt gender work / messaging. Although they mostly say they do not, almost all cited examples of gender being addressed in some way – as a topic but also with respect to the gendered needs of students given the nature of South African society.

At least three BSPs thought they probably needed to pay more attention to gender issues. Quite apart from the foundational work to address ubiquitous and unhelpful gendered behaviours, one organisation commented that ‘many students, especially from conservative rural communities, express prejudice towards those with non-conforming gender and sexual orientations’.³⁵³ And one director expressed a concern that ‘*more and more girls are not ambitious in their own right; they are more ambitious to get a good husband. Sex and relationships has been commodified.*’³⁵⁴

Examples of gender-related initiatives are workshops on gender-based violence, stereotypes, sex, dating, sexual harassment, relationships and diversity, gender in the workplace, *ethical values around non-violence and gender equality*; and self-defence classes. Some organisations mainstream gender – e.g. ‘*as leadership quality; make it values based*’.³⁵⁵

Easing access for men

While one organisation noted that ‘*all students struggle to utilise campus counselling services because of stigma*’, some organisations noted that men still seem to regard asking for help as a weakness. That being said, men are reported to be using the services of private psychologists offered by one BSP.

An organisation with only one male staff member³⁵⁶ links any troubled male students with male alumni. As most male students do not have a male role-model (in their households), another organisation³⁵⁷ has been wondering about a male mentoring programme. Their current approach of getting corporate funders themselves to be mentors is working quite well, especially with male students. Peer support from senior students is another option being pursued.

³⁵³ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020 – and amended 8 April 2021

³⁵⁴ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

³⁵⁶ OMET.

³⁵⁷ Tomorrow Trust.

Some organisations noted that the predominance of women staff may well be an obstacle to men seeking help. One thought that their staff are ‘reasonably progressive - so will promote gender equality’ while another added that ‘more and more LGBTI / students are identifying as ‘trans’ which is new for staff’.³⁵⁸

Supporting foreign nationals

One organisation funds foreign nationals to the same amounts as they fund everyone else, though they subsidise the costs that NSFAS would pay for South Africans and also pay their medical aid, given that they cannot access state-funded health services. They have an immigration lawyer to help them obtain the required paperwork.³⁵⁹

While one organisation offers support in language where necessary, the other two just include foreign nationals with the South African students – although one organisation says they ‘find it harder to get them to talk about their holistic wellbeing’

Foreign nationals’ participation rates in workshops is high and they generally do very well academically, but find it harder to find employment.³⁶⁰

Recognising differences in schooling

No BSPs separate students on the basis of their differently resourced schooling backgrounds, though some offer supplementary assistance as needed.

While recognising that rural students may have language and IT deficits, one organisation simply reassures them that extended adjustment periods are normal and that they will catch up – and that they are responsible for doing so. They encourage these students to help themselves by:

- advising them to watch English TV, listen to English radio etc.; and

One organisation has some students who have attended private schools and have better English and computer skills than most students who come from under-resourced schools. So while some have never touched a laptop, others are doing coding. They accommodate this by offering two streams at the boot camp.

- Moshal country director

³⁵⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

- telling them to use YouTube to teach themselves IT skills; that there ‘are no shortcuts; that the info is there and they must catch up; they must practice’. They do not send them on a course nor do they think it necessary to have an older student help them.³⁶¹

The academic outcomes of this organisation tend to be above average.

Another organisation is “aware that we may need to offer something different to children from poorer schools” – possibly a mentor (an alumnus) with the same background to show that “I’ve made it and it is possible – and this is how you navigate this.”¹

- OMET director

Students’ relationships with their BSPs

Asked whether it was important that beneficiaries identified with the organisation, the seven directors’ responses were evenly spread across three answers:

- No it does not matter at all:³⁶²

‘Would rather that their students identify with the university they are at. We are an adjunct, to support them as they need it.’

- Yes – the organisation becomes like ‘a family’ and this is a resource to them:³⁶³

‘Belonging to the family is part of what we offer. As a sense of support; someone who cares for them and helps them transition from their difficult backgrounds.’

- Yes – inasmuch as relationships between everyone is important for their development:³⁶⁴

‘Yes, but only insofar as it supports the work –i.e. develops allegiances among alumni to work with the students.’

Insights in the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

While BSPs all seem to recognise the complexities that students’ backgrounds present – both local and South African more broadly – each seems to navigate it in their own ways. Some have an asset-based approach – overtly using the experiences as learning resources – and some intervene proactively where they want to make a difference (e.g. on gender-related issues). Despite falling broadly within a social justice frame, most BSPs do not advocate on these issues, nor do they prioritise them over the main business of academic progress and individual development, however.

³⁶¹ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁶² Career Wise, StudyTrust.

³⁶³ Moshal, REAP.

³⁶⁴ OMET, Tomorrow Trust.

11. MATERIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY BSPs

11.1 Types of material support provided³⁶⁵

All organisations offer material / financial support. Table 6 below lists the types of material support provided – paid for either by the corporates / institutions who fund their students, or from each organisation’s own (fundraised) coffers. The table does not include NSFAS’ contributions – e.g. towards tuition, books, laptop etc. – on which some organisations depend and provide a top-up. That a BSP funds an item, then, may not mean they are solely responsible for paying for it.

**Table 7: Types of material support provided
by seven bursary support providers: 2020**

	Career Wise	Moshal	OMET	REAP	StudyTrust	Tomorrow Trust	Umthombo
Tuition fees (registration, course, exam)	x	x	x		x	x	x
Food and accommodation	x - generous	x	x		x	x	x
Academic materials (books / printed materials)	x - generous	x	x		x	x	x
Laptop	x	x	x	x	x	x	(x)
Data / connectivity		x	x		x		(x)
Technical equipment		x		x	x	x	x
Living allowance (inc toiletries etc)		x		x	x	x	x
Local transport		x			x	x	x
Travel home	some			x	x		
Medical		x		x (eyes)		(x)	
University clubs and societies		x		x	x		
Seed funding for small business							
Other: Stationery allowance twice a year		x					

³⁶⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

In summary: six of the seven organisations interviewed pay towards their students'

- tuition fees (registration, course, exam); and
- food and accommodation; and
- academic materials (books / printed materials); and
- laptop.

The amounts received by students (from the organisation and NSFAS combined) vary, however – and students are not necessarily fully / sufficiently funded.

The rest of the items are offered by between one and five organisations.

11.2 Financial support provided³⁶⁶

While all organisations offer a basic package of some kind, five of the seven organisations interviewed customise their offering according to each student's needs, two doing so according to the funder's specifications. One organisation provides the same package to everyone.

Table 8: Financial support provided by seven bursary support providers: 2020

	Career Wise	Moshal	OMET	REAP	StudyTrust	Tomorrow Trust	Umtombo
Provides financial support							
Yes – all students	x	x	x	x	x		x
Yes - most						x	
No							
Other							
Financial packages							
Standard package to all				x			
Customised: student's need		x	x		x	x	x
Customised: donor specifications	x				x		
Other:							

³⁶⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Conditions

For many organisations, continuing to fund a student is dependent on their doing academically well enough – and, in some cases, also complying with their codes of conduct.

*'You are adults – manage it! If you don't pass you don't get more money!'*³⁶⁷

Umthombo is the only organisation that includes a reciprocal condition which requires that students work back the number of years funded – or they must pay back the money.³⁶⁸ They do this in a health setting in a rural area.³⁶⁹

Full or partial funding³⁷⁰

Three of the seven directors felt strongly that full funding is essential if these students are to have a real chance of succeeding; that worrying about money is unhelpfully distracting.

- 'Giving someone part funding is setting them up for failure.'³⁷¹
- 'If they wait three months for their first food allowance [as is the case with some NSFAS-funded students] or for their lease to be signed, some students may drop out.'³⁷²
- 'The right money at the right time' so students aren't left to plug the gaps. When money is short, students fixate on this which is counterproductive. It is patronising to suggest that 'they get too much' if they are fully funded. Complete funding should be economical i.e. increase the return on investment.'³⁷³

There is a sense that some 'full funding' is only just sufficient - whereas other 'full funding' enables students to participate more fully in student life.

Moshal added that while full funding is necessary, it is not sufficient;

'Just because students are fully funded does not mean they will necessarily fly!'

-- and that there also needs to be wraparound support.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁶⁸ Of their graduates: 192 have completed the work-back contracts, 65% of whom are still working in rural areas. Of the other 244: some doing internship and community service; some are still working back (either rural or in public sector) a few have bought themselves out (working in private). 8 are AWOL.

³⁶⁹ Umthombo is finding, however, that after six years of study plus an internship plus community service, doctors want to move on. There is also an increased interest in becoming specialists. In addition, the Department of Health who is the primary employer of Umthombo graduates, increasingly has no vacancies, despite Umthombo's close relationship with their rural facilities and the express design of the programme to provide this customised pipeline.

³⁷⁰ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

³⁷¹ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³⁷² Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

³⁷³ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

OMET currently provides partial financial support up to R65,000 per annum for all expenses. This will cover costs at some universities but not at those that are more expensive. While 20 students are also funded by NSFAS and 20 by Skills Development / SETAs, the rest get the balance of the funds needed from their family, or from the university.

As OMET often loses students to full-cost scholarships offered by other funders, they are considering whether to reduce the numbers of students and provide full-cost scholarships. If they had more money they would certainly do so *'so that students have nothing to worry about'*.³⁷⁵

*Fully funded – NSFAS plus top-up?*³⁷⁶

As noted in Table 5 above, all seven organisations support some NSFAS-funded students – with one organisation only taking on those who have NSFAS funding.

Moshal is currently piloting the provision of partial funding to complement NSFAS funding; about 65% to 70% of their students are funded in this way. They would like this to be closer to 90% but they are not expanding yet, as they are not sure that NSFAS' 'free fees' is sustainable.³⁷⁷

Career Wise finds that top-up schemes produce difficulties as NSFAS monies arrive late and the top-up funding they are given (by BSPs) is often not enough to set up their rooms, buy their books and get a laptop at the beginning of a year. Instead, Career Wise provides students with a big cash amount along with financial education on what this has to cover. Second year students talk to first years about what kinds of expenses they are likely to have. As seen in Table 6 above, they do not cover everything as they maintain that the students are still their parents' dependents and they are still responsible for medical and clothes etc. In addition they actively discourage them sending money home: *'The bursary is not a salary for sharing with others.'*³⁷⁸

The majority of StudyTrust's funders are 'not interested in providing top-up over and above NSFAS, but want to fund them fully' – e.g. their 101 Investec-funded students would have qualified for NSFAS funding, but Investec wants to fund fully. When one funder wanted to reduce their funding, StudyTrust asked their students to apply for NSFAS but they did not do so as they thought they would be double-dipping.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

³⁷⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁷⁷ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

The contractual capacity of funding³⁸⁰

Directors were asked about the extent to which the simple fact of being given material support acts as a ‘contracting’ mechanism with students – and what might happen to their relationships with students if they did not offer financial support. This was to test the idea of whether this sector could support NSFAS-funded students without any financial top-ups.

Three organisations³⁸¹ said that providing students with what they want is a contracting mechanism in itself ; that it produces ‘compliance’ as students actually want what is on offer.

*‘Moshal tries to have students for minimal time as they are busy – residential camps and half-day workshops; offer good food, interesting material etc. Moshal has cut back on the interventions ...– what they do is really well thought out and really valuable to the students and it’s on this basis that they get compliance.’*³⁸²

Career Wise finds that the top-up (to NSFAS funding) serves to contract students – as does Umthombo who note that ‘the money is important for contracting with the student’ as ‘newly arrived students think they have things sorted, so are unlikely to want support without money’. They added that ‘once they have started, they realise they also need [personal]support’.³⁸³

REAP and Tomorrow Trust said that the top-up / money had not always served to contract students, however. *‘Some students voluntarily withdrew as the requirements were too onerous – suggesting it is easier to say goodbye to R600 than a full bursary’*.³⁸⁴

Piloting support with no top-ups

In 2017/8 REAP piloted an initiative to learn about ‘*how you entice students without money*’³⁸⁵ – in the form of an initiative offering support to students funded by NSFAS but offering no extra funding. Outlined in the box below, this pilot was not entirely successful and would need to be offered more rigorously if this option – of only offering personal/psycho-social support – is thought to be feasible going forward.

³⁸⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁸¹ Moshal, StudyTrust, Career Wise.

³⁸² Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

³⁸³ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Emma Francis, 23 April 2020.

³⁸⁵ Interview with Gavin MacGregor, 13&14 October 2020.

In 2020, Tomorrow Trust also piloted the provision to six NSFAS-funded students of personal support without any top-up funding. Recruited from the learners who the organisation had supported while at school, these students opted to access the personal support offered despite no offer of extra funding. At the time of writing they had participated fully. Five others chose not to participate on these terms.

One organisation – REAP – undertook a pilot project at an HBU (at which they had not worked before) to provide only personal support to NSFAS-funded students. The pilot entailed changing their longstanding implementation model in a number of ways. A number of lessons were learned.

- Anyone who was NSFAS-funded could participate. The recruitment and selection process was very loose, and there was no sense of ‘being selected’ or having any obligation.
- The offering comprised more group work than individual one-on-ones. Among its merits were that this was certainly more cost-effective (reaches more students and peer learning) although there were some limitations. Staff held some one-on-ones on request but also in response to observations during group work.
- The students who did engage chose to attend group events rather than one-on-one sessions, however.
- Very little technology was used (this was pre-COVID19) – which raises the interesting question of what difference this might have made.

Contextual factors were important:

- REAP had not worked at the university before – a poorly-resourced, lethargic institution with work stoppages and student protests.
- REAP staff were located at the university and battled to engage with / address the contextual issues – and with the nature of the students.

While not conclusive, the finding was that while there were numerous disruptive contextual factors – including the general university climate, lack of co-operation from staff, hostility from the SRC – it was definitely more difficult to stabilise a continuous relationship with students where there was no financial incentive to contract some form of obligation.

Insights in the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

Some BSPs feel that anything short of full funding is not worth doing – while others fund what they can, leaving the student to find balance. While the case for full funding is convincing, we are not aware of any hard evidence for this, and understand this approach to be these organisations’ theories of practice, based on their convictions and experience. I did not hear a case being made for partial funding, however (e.g. that a little to a lot of people is better than a lot to a few people) – and understand it, rather, to be circumstantial, i.e. that there is not sufficient funding available. These organisations could give a lot to a fewer people, however – but assume the (funders’) imperative for high students numbers and/or lower cost per student is an overarching concern.

One of the challenges facing the sector is the extent to which funding is or is not contractual. This is particularly important going forward for those who may need to depending on a different kinds of funding arrangements where they are not seen as the source of funding but, rather, as a services provider.

12. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY BSPS

The section below that addresses the measuring of both academic and psycho-social outcomes points to

- the predominant interest in academic success; and
- the instrumentalising of the provision of personal supports to this end.

But alongside an increasing interest in assisting graduates to be work-ready, is an interest in the psycho-social aspects of the support producing ends in themselves – namely confident, flexible, socially-able young adults.

12.1 Academic monitoring and support³⁸⁶

Services that support academic success are prioritised by the majority of the seven organisations.

Monitoring progress and providing advice (on course selection etc) is prioritised by everyone, while only one organisation does not engage with decisions about what to study (career guidance and advice).

³⁸⁶ *Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.*

**Table 9: Academic support
provided by seven bursary support providers: 2020**

Service	No. of organisations offering this (n=7)
Academic monitoring	7
Academic advice (course selection/ choices)	7
Career guidance and advice	6
Study and IT skills	6
Academic support (inc tutoring)	5
Medical (including eyes)	5

Direct academic support – which depends on the subject expertise of the universities themselves – is offered by five organisations, although this is supplemented by study and IT skills, offered by all but one organisation. Five organisations also pay attention to medical care including eyesight which, unaddressed, can directly undermine academic performance.

*Lockdown adjustments: Academic advice (course choices)*³⁸⁷

- Six of the ten organisations surveyed about the lessons to be learned from COVID19-related lockdowns offer academic advice, or advice about course choices.
- They do so through a combination of virtual and face-to-face interactions. All will (also) provide some advice on-line as is ‘a more effective use’ of time and money.
- Four organisations propose to offer academic advice more frequently – given the ease of doing so.

One organisation noted that ‘if the advice is being given to new awards still at school, it makes sense to do this on-line as they will be scattered all over the country thus making it practically difficult for this to happen face-to-face. If it is given to current students, it is offered as part of our normal psycho-social support which will take place in a blended fashion. This also applies to academic monitoring.’

Direct academic support

Of the five organisations who ensure their students access academic support, two simply refer students to the university’s services – following up with the student to check on progress. Some pay tutors as needed, two doing so reluctantly or only when a funder makes allowances for this. Two others expect other students/ peer buddies or alumni to provide academic support.

One organisation notes that their ‘allowances are generous and some students pay for private tutoring themselves from this resource’.

³⁸⁷ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Lockdown adjustments

Academic support (including tutoring) – individual³⁸⁸

- Eight of the ten organisations surveyed about the lessons to be learned from COVID19-related lockdowns offer academic support (including tutoring) individually.
- Six organisations will provide individual academic support through a combination of virtual and face-to-face while one will do so solely on-line and one will continue to do so entirely face-to-face.
- Six organisations think that offering academic support on-line is ‘a more ‘effective use of time’ and five think it is a better use of money. One organisation will include on-line as it has produced better results.
- Perhaps given the circumstances, five propose to offer individual academic support more frequently, while three do not.

One organisation noted that *‘our current experience of on-line academic support or tutoring for students on an on-line basis has been positive. This has the advantage of students being able to access a tutor no matter where he/she is based in the country as opposed to finding someone close to them physically. We plan to continue with this model where appropriate.’*

Academic support (including tutoring) – in groups³⁸⁹

- Six of the ten organisations offer academic support in groups.
- Five of these do so on-line, with one noting that this has been a new venture for them.
- One organisation thinks that on-line has produced better results – while five will include virtual media as it is ‘a more effective use of time’ and four as it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
- Five propose to offer academic support in groups more frequently, while one will not.

Study and IT skills³⁹⁰

- Five of the ten organisations surveyed offer study and IT skills.
- Four propose to do so in a combination of virtual and face-to-face, while one will continue to offer these skills face-to-face.
- Four think offering study and IT skills on-line is a more effective use of time, while two feel it is ‘a more effective use of funds’.
- All five said that they will consider offering these skills more frequently.

³⁸⁸ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

³⁸⁹ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

³⁹⁰ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

REAP has used these COVID19 circumstances to accelerate an intended interest in supporting academic work.

Having identified the fields with which students generally struggle, they clustered students into study groups of five, based on their faculty and academic year. Some groups straddle institutions.

They have commissioned tutors who are strong in each subject from among their senior students. (This both counts towards their community service and attracts a modest fee.) Working in Google Classroom, the tutors present, and answers questions, regarding the material offered on-line by the university. And while not the original plan, REAP has also asked some alumni to be tutors (most of whom graduated within the last three years).

Study groups are held fortnightly: two-hour sessions comprising 30 minutes with the student development advisor (SDA), followed by 90 mins with the tutor. The SDA facilitates the session and monitors quality.

This is also meant to help students to organise their studying and to promote peer support, whereby stronger students help those who are battling. They can also divide the work such that each person prepares a particular chapter and presents it to the others. Anecdotally it appears that students are working with one another, meeting between study groups.

It is not yet known what difference these students – or their tutors - think has been made.

Academic monitoring³⁹¹

Academic progress is monitored by the BSPs in some of the following ways:

- two organisations³⁹² use a ‘traffic light system’ which identifies students at risk;
- one of these organisations³⁹³ has a ‘Response to Intervention’ framework which prioritises academic performance in assessing how students are doing;
- a third organisation monitors academic progress through individual sessions and invokes a system of ‘close academic monitoring’ when students are at risk.

³⁹¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁹² Moshal and StudyTrust.

³⁹³ StudyTrust.

*Lockdown adjustments: Academic monitoring*³⁹⁴

- Eight of the ten organisations surveyed will offer academic monitoring in a blended fashion through a combination of virtual and face-to-face, while one will continue to offer it face-to-face.
- Two organisations thought that on-line has produced ‘better results’ – and seven that it is ‘a more ‘effective use of time’.
- Five will not change the frequency of their offering, while four propose to offer academic monitoring more frequently.

One organisation noted that academic monitoring provides the opportunity to ‘celebrate and have tough conversations in person’.

*Medical support (including eyes)*³⁹⁵

Two organisations make sure that students access eye tests as needed, while another has practitioners who offer medical support pro bono.

One BSP has a sponsor who pays for student medical aid membership while another pays the medical aid of foreign nationals as they cannot access state-funded health services.

Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

While some universities actively track all students’ progress and refer them to supports and provide oversight where they are battling – this does not happen across all department, faculties or universities. Even where some processes are put in place for easy access, there is sometimes/ often not sufficient staffing to follow-up one each student who is battling.

Tomorrow Trust noted that ‘while psychological support is extremely important it is not a foolproof method. While our interventions often prevent students from failing completely and result in increased academic performance, we do still often see students fail a module, needing to repeat modules and an increase in duration of studies. We understand that failure is part of the process and we do not use this as a reason to dismiss students, but rather as a tool to overcome challenges and approach life with a growth mind-set.’

³⁹⁴ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations.* (July 2020)

³⁹⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

So while BSPs are not subject experts, they can monitor their students' progress, refer them or assistance (or provide) AND follow up to see if they have improved. This individual support can also address personal issues that may be the cause for poor academic performance. The hope is that the advent of 'academic advising' will provide this in the those universities where this takes off. While and where this is not the case, however, the BSPs play an invaluable role in monitoring progress and ensuring that students access the support they need, wherever possible.

Organising online academic support, especially in groups, can be cost-efficient while also reducing isolation. This may well be an aspect of the COVID19 lockdowns that is included in BSP's modalities going forward.

12.2 Personal support and development

This research will argue that a varied menu of personal supports is what makes a/ the difference. It provides core support that each BSP regards as foundational – plus customised assistance based on each student's needs. What is on offer, how and how much varies considerably across BSPs, however. While one-on-one consultations are considered the bedrock of this offering – and is the last thing that most BSP directors who give up or change – thereafter what is one offer varies across organisations.

Table 10: Personal support and development provided by seven bursary support providers: 2020

Service	No. of organisations offering this (n=7)
Psycho-social support	7
Lifeskills (inc SRH, diversity, conflict, nutrition etc)	7
Crisis intervention / support	7
Personal financial management (inc budgeting)	7
Orientation / FYE	6
Accommodation identification	5
Peer and leadership development	5
Sport and recreation	4
Advocacy / representation (on individual matters)	2

Psycho-social support³⁹⁶

All seven organisations provide psycho-social support – mostly through one-on-one sessions, but also through group sessions. While compulsory in most BSPs, these one-on-one sessions are led by students' needs, providing a structured time to check how students are doing mentally, socially, physically and academically. All seven directors asserted that one-on-one support makes the biggest difference, some commenting:

- *'Personal relationships with students [are the most important]– NSFAS and universities don't offer this.'*³⁹⁷
- *'Anecdotally, final year students (and alumni) say that the SDAs' [student development advisors] role in supporting and holding them accountable – not letting them get away with mediocrity – made all the difference. They did not appreciate this at the time and thought the SDA irritating – but realised in the end that this made all the difference.'*³⁹⁸

The following examples, from two quite different organisations, illustrate the centrality of this support:

- **Tomorrow Trust's** wraparound support model is comprehensive and includes 'a lot of psycho-social support – but this is matched by high expectations of the students' participation in monthly meetings with psychologists and 80% attendance at workshops.' These are compulsory throughout their degree as they are an opportunity to pick up early warning signals.

In addition Tomorrow Trust requires that their students rate themselves with respect to a number of (unchanging) factors and to present these self-assessments at a bi-annual 'Board Review'. This is 'not the safest environment' and the students are required 'to answer for themselves' which the organisation feels is part of the preparation for the working world.

- **Umthombo's** mentoring is 'the backbone of Umthombo's success'. Locally-sourced adult mentors are in loco parentis but do not 'mummy' the students; they are someone to whom students can speak and relate to, who helps them negotiate university, monitors their academic progress etc.. Monthly face-to-face meetings are compulsory and students' food allowances are withheld if they do not attend. Umthombo also encourages students to meet together monthly to provide support / 'family'. 'One student is appointed as co-ordinator – and sometimes a bit of money is provided to convene it. Mentors go to these sessions. Sometimes it works well and sometimes not.'

³⁹⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

Other BSPs see their students less often, however. Their approach is to leave it to the students to approach them if they need support, seeing the development of help-seeking behaviour as an invaluable lifeskill.

That being said, all seven directors say that psycho-social interactions are indispensable to what makes the difference, with one adding that *'personal development – individual sessions and workshops - is not a competence that gets offered anywhere else, while things like careers, counselling, wellness etc are available at the HEI/elsewhere.'*³⁹⁹

Two BSPs⁴⁰⁰ also noted the importance of holding students to account through these psycho-social sessions; while two other organisations would increase the intensity of their offerings if they could.

In a later focus group discussion the directors were asked if the NBSPF organisations are positively impacting completion, whether they are also impacting **quality – and if so what that looks like?** What difference does it make: to the students' prospects? To society? ⁴⁰¹

Five organisations suggested that their psycho-social support makes a difference in two ways. Firstly it supports students personally when they are not managing, helping them to keep on track and not drop out. But secondly, and importantly, these organisations assert that their interventions contribute to producing well-rounded people with social competencies that they might not otherwise have developed. In the words of one organisation their aim 'is maximum graduate rates PLUS skills for their lives (so they are employable)'.⁴⁰²

They comment that the positive differences made are a product of a number of things – perhaps the central one being the simple fact of 'someone showing an interest in them'⁴⁰³. That this attention makes a difference was underscored by another director⁴⁰⁴ who cited Thomas L. Friedman's reporting of the findings of an American poll of 'more than one million American workers, students, educators, and employers'.⁴⁰⁵

'Successful students had one or more teachers who were mentors and took a real interest in their aspirations, and they had an internship related to what they were learning in school'.

³⁹⁹ Tomorrow Trust.

⁴⁰⁰ REAP, Umthombo.

⁴⁰¹ From focus group discussion with six organisational directors – 5 November 20: Organisations were Career Wise, Moshal Scholarship Program, REAP, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust, Umthombo Youth Development Foundation .

⁴⁰² Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

⁴⁰³ Interview with Gavin MacGregor 25 March 2021.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with James Donald, 15 April 2020.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas L. Friedman. *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*. Published November 22nd 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Citing Brandon Busteed, the executive director of Gallup’s education division, the author reported that ‘the most engaged employees consistently attributed their success in the workplace to having had a professor or professors who cared about them as a person’, or ‘a mentor who encouraged their goals and dreams’ or ‘an internship where they applied what they were learning’. Those workers, he found, ‘were twice as likely to be engaged with their work and thriving in their overall well-being.’⁴⁰⁶

Evaluators of the Moshal Scholarship Program found that their scholars ‘show significantly higher results on wellbeing indicators than students on many scholarship programmes’. While they do not give evidence of this comparative claim, they attribute this success to the psycho-social support they receive through the programme, though it is not clear how they are measured (Kuper, 2018):

Is the psychosocial support effective?



- MSP scholars have access to a wide range of psycho-social support – individualised attention and solutions.
- MSP Scholars show significantly higher results on well-being indicators than students on many scholarship programmes:
 - More motivated
 - More positive
 - More optimistic
 - Less depressed
 - Less anxious and stressed
- The positive emotional effects of psycho-social support are more visible in scholars with below average financial support

Crucially, none of the seven organisations would cut this aspect of the support model if reductions were necessary. This is repeated in responses to other questions, where it is clear that individual psycho-social support is untouchable, even though the frequency and intensity differs across organisations.

⁴⁰⁶ Thomas L. Friedman. *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*. Published November 22nd 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

All organisations offer lifeskills in some form, often starting at camps and workshops during the orientation process. This continues throughout students' time at university, however, often designed to support the stage they are in. Not only are they important for survival and success as university but are portable - some would argue that they are essential - to employability.

Examples of activities are as follows:

- **Tomorrow Trust** offers lifeskills through individual sessions as well as workshops, which focus on personal development e.g. conflict resolution, reducing anxiety etc..
- **OMET** holds Regional Student Support Workshops which focus on mental wellbeing, motivational talks (by alumni), how to manage examination stress and fostering a sense of community and relationship building between scholarship holders. The feedback received has been mainly positive with students adding additional topics for inclusion.
- **Umthombo** holds an annual end-of-year imbizo for all students at which issues are workshopped e.g. relationships, abuse of power relations; financial management (debt/credit); professionalism; social media – sometimes teenage pregnancy.

Umthombo has always been interested in developing additional lifeskills related to medical practice – to make empathetic health care workers.

Lifeskills are also embedded in the one-on-one psycho-social sessions mentioned above. Only two of the seven organisations identified lifeskills as contributing to 'making the difference', however.

Given additional resources, some organisations would

- add financial literacy for everyone;
- 'improve FYE / navigation skills etc. by having all junior students mentored by a senior student';
- promote 'opportunities for exposure to the wider world, broadening of life perspectives – through recreation'.

Tomorrow Trust's monthly 'holistic workshops' are 'an important aspect of the psycho-social component. These ... are focused on equipping students with the skills required to build insight, self-awareness and engage in interpersonal relationships with maturity and compassion. Through these workshops, we hope to empower our students to approach life with new perspective and self-confidence as one key aspect of unlocking their potential.'

Tomorrow Trust and REAP would use extra funding to expose students to other ways in the world.

One would promote "*opportunities for exposure to the wider world, broadening of life perspectives – through recreation*" while the other would "*love to give them an opportunity to travel overseas – to attend a leadership programme ...[as] South Africans need to see other parts of the world and meet other kinds*

Lockdown adjustments:

Lifeskills

Nine of the ten BSPs surveyed in 2020 about lessons from lockdown offer lifeskills to their students (described in the questionnaire as including, among others, 'sexual and reproductive health (SRH), diversity, conflict, nutrition and personal financial management').

- Six will continue to do so use both approaches using a blended approach of on-line and face-to face. Two will do so only face-to face while one will only offer lifeskills virtually.
- Of the seven who have included a virtual element:
 - two think that the 'results have been better working on-line';
 - five think it is a 'more effective use of time'; and
 - four think it is a 'more effective use of funds'.
- Six of the ten BSPs think they will offer lifeskills more often, perhaps in shorter/smaller pieces; while two did not think the intensity will change. (One did not comment.)

Peer and leadership development

- Eight of the ten BSPs offer peer and leadership development.
- All have opted to do this through a combination of virtual and face-to-face.
- Four think that working on-line has produced better results; six that it is a 'more effective use of time' and three that it is a 'more effective use of funds'.
- Six organisations propose to offer peer and leadership development 'more frequently' – perhaps through shorter sessions – while two will not change from their current frequency.

Career Wise reported on their new initiative offering Mindfulness and Resilience Training:

'At the beginning of the 2020 academic year we offered full-day workshops ... to train them in the concepts of mindfulness and building resilience. At the time, we promised the students that we will hold short refresher workshops mid-year. As we were unable to do this physically, we have just offered them on an on-line basis. The initial feedback is that this has worked well, and we plan to continue to offer these 'refresher' sessions as we head into the second semester. This may well be something we continue to do into the future as it will be time and cost saving.'

Crisis intervention / support⁴⁰⁸

All seven directors say their organisations provide crisis intervention / support. One has a 24-hour hotline while another supplements the interventions offered by their student support staff by brokering access to their parent body's counselling support.

Orientation / FYE⁴⁰⁹

Six of the seven organisations interviewed run their own orientation processes, invariably in addition to those run by the universities. Historically most have run these as weekend camps, while provide orientation with a 'lighter touch' comprising meetings with new students to introduce them to staff / their mentors and orientate them to the organisation's rules and offerings.

Two organisations⁴¹⁰ also run a boot camp of five days on foundational academic competences, like maths and English.⁴¹¹

Lockdown adjustments: Orientation / FYE

- Nine of the ten BSPs surveyed regarding lessons from lockdown offer an orientation or First Year Experience (FYE) programme.
- In the context of COVID19 lockdowns, three of the nine opted to offer these through a combination of virtual and face-to-face – while six said that, when possible, they will continue with the face-to-face mode (often characterised by residential weekends).
- Of those who have included a virtual element, two thought it would be 'a more effective use of time' and another two that it would be as 'a more effective use of funds'.
- Seven will retain the frequency with which they offer an orientation /FYE programme before COVID19 (presumably annually near the beginning of the year) – while the others did not comment.

⁴⁰⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁰⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴¹⁰ Moshal, OMET.

⁴¹¹ Moshal.

Staffing⁴¹²

Students supported by six organisations have a consistent support person, while in the seventh organisation only some do.⁴¹³

These organisations believe that continuity fosters trust – and chose to have a consistent support person for the following reasons:

- The continuity of relationships means there is a better chance of students disclosing, build a relationship of trust. It is not something REAP would lightly change.
- Following a needs assessment in 2019 OMET found that students find it very useful to message someone they know, including over the weekends. The same person often stays with them throughout their careers.
- Each student is allocated to one of Tomorrow Trust's three psychologists (one of whom is 'black', one 'coloured' and one 'white') who provide their support for the whole time. They would not change this as students who are marginal need someone to work with consistently to help them to believe in themselves; to support them, as well as *'hold them to a high standard, as a middle class parent would. ... Our whole intervention is to help them work out what they can do and how they will get there'*.⁴¹⁴

Asked why they chose this model and whether they might change it, the seventh BSP, StudyTrust, said they would not change it as the 'light touch contributes to students enjoying it and so they participate actively. Individual attention is balanced with group activities – they learn from staff and their peers.'

- Murray Hofmeyr,
Director of Study Trust

Consistency was the most frequently mentioned quality of the role of advisor, supporter, co-ordinator that were thought to be important for this role. In an evaluation of Moshal, the authors foregrounded four aspects of this role:

'Consistent (most frequently mentioned): regular communication, available.

Encourager/motivator: encourages, motivates, focuses on the positive.

Confidante: Maintains confidentiality at all times.

Connector: Links up to other MSP scholars; links up to services for academic and emotional support.' (Kuper, 2018)

⁴¹² Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴¹³ StudyTrust.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

Crucially, individual psycho-social support is a non-negotiable aspect of personal support. Even though the frequency and intensity differs across organisations it is thought – by directors and alumni (and HEI staff above) – to make the crucial difference. In addition to the actual personal coaching, it allow for early detection, customised support and follow-up to referrals, among others. Individual support can include group work – and this may be an area that is further developed, as it would reduce isolation and invoke other students to be resources for one another.

All organisations offer lifeskills in some form throughout students' time at university, often designed to support the stage groups of students are in. Not only are they important for survival and success as university but are portable - some would argue that they are essential - to employability. Perhaps those who have not already done so could map workplace competencies (which could comprise the eight indicators being proposed below to measure psycho-social outcomes) onto their lifeskills programmes. This might lift the low ranking of importance off lifeskills given by BSP directors- where only two of the seven identified lifeskills as contributing to 'making the difference'.

It certainly seems possible to provide some of this support on-line – which would retain quality while increasing efficiency (increase reach and use of time). Some organisations note the loss of information obtained from being in the same room as a student and will opt for a blended model. This might include the way orientation / FYE processes are offered to newly arrived first year students.

12.3 Community service⁴¹⁵

Local NGO Lucha Lunako underscored the importance of community and support structures, for receiving but also offering support:

'We believe that development requires engagement with a network and an ecosystem. This infers that individual potential cannot be reached or developed to capacity in isolation. We advocate that community and support structures are essential to healthy development. ... We furthermore believe that the full development of self cannot be attained without active involvement in communities through active citizenry, community involvement and giving back of yourself to a community.' (Lucha Lunako, 2020).

⁴¹⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Four of the seven organisations interviewed require their students to do community services of some sort:

- Philanthropist Martin Moshal requires students to *‘pay it forward, wherever and whenever you have the opportunity to help others. It doesn’t have to be in money. It can be in time, advice or effort...’*
- As part of its Catholic ethos, REAP requires students to do three days’ community service every year, ideally in the community from which they come. Being a peer buddy for younger students, being a member of the student committee or providing tutoring also count towards their community service, however.
- Tomorrow Trust students are required to ‘give back’ 10 hours to the younger groups within the organisation’s Grade R to Grade 12 programme, either through the Saturday School or during the Holiday School programme. They may run specific activities or assist learners with their scholastic work, or with mentoring and support. In so doing, they become ‘motivators and role models to the younger students while learning the wonder of making a positive impact on another’s life – and gaining valuable life skills which contribute to their overall development’.
- Umthombo students are required to do four weeks’ holiday work each year at the local hospitals through which they were recruited. As they are mentored during this time, this also becomes work experience for them.

These compliment the co-curricular / acknowledgement of services provided by students that some HEIs are offering – both also as community service but as a CV building exercise.

Commenting on the values that they promote, two BSP directors said the following:

- ‘REAP tries to inculcate a spirit of service of ‘paying it forward’. They are ‘nervous of motivational speakers who are aspirational and tell REAP graduates how much money they can make etc.’⁴¹⁶
- ‘Values are very important.’ This director tells students when they are choosing an opportunity (work/ bursary) to ‘not focus on the money but on the kind of opportunity they might be getting, the experience they might gain; whether or not they will be promoted’ etc.⁴¹⁷

Lockdown adjustments: Community service

No-one raised the issue of how community service would be affected by lockdowns - though there is no doubt that during the stricter lockdowns no in-person services could be offered.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

While it may well be that not all BSPs require that their students engage in some form of community service, it reflects the social justice ethos of many of these organisations. This research supports the impulse of these initiatives but also recognises the important for students to have a sense of agency, that they can make a difference in others' lives as the BSPs may have in their lives.

12.4 Work readiness, job search and graduate placement

Most BSPs either explicitly or implicitly understand that obtaining a qualification is a ticket to 'white collar' / middle class / professional employment or, increasingly, income generation. Ideally a post-school qualification is one way of breaking the cycle of poverty. Statistics regarding the better prospects of those with a post-school qualification compared those with only matric have been given above – though the inclusion of graduates in youth unemployment is an issue, likely to be exacerbated by the economic downturns in South Africa caused by recession and COVID19 lockdowns.

Preparation for accessing work (employment / income generating opportunities) is addressed in considerably diverse ways within the sector, though often quite minimally. As BSPs focus on access and success at universities, intervening before and after the period at university is not always a priority. While BSPs offer various work readiness inputs – typically CV writing, interview skills etc – mapping the outcome of graduates actually accessing employment / income generating opportunities is not common.

That being said, a few BSPs pay considerable attention to the ultimate post-university destinations of their graduates. For some, employment of their graduates is a measureable outcome on which they are required to account to their donors.

Table 11: Work readiness, job search and graduate placement supports provided by seven bursary support providers: 2020⁴¹⁸

Service	No. of organisations offering this (n=7)
Career guidance and advice	6
Alumni (networking etc)	5
Graduate placement	4
Job search	3
In-service training placement	2
Other: <i>Work Readiness</i>	1

⁴¹⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Career guidance and advice⁴¹⁹

Career guidance and advice usually takes place before a young person enters university – though advice on aspects of their academic programme, including course changes, can take place during their studies.

It is not clear what form the career guidance and advice offered by these six organisations takes, however. They would certainly alert potential students to their options during the bursary application process – though this is invariably informed by any limitations regarding the fields and universities each BSP chooses to support. There is no information on what they may do beyond this, however.

This may be an area for further investigation as it is clear that some of the dropouts are caused by a mismatch between students and the fields/courses pursued.

Lockdown adjustments: Career guidance and advice

No-one raised the issue of how the offering of career guidance and advice is being affected by lockdowns – though this advice may be easy enough to offer on-line. Referrals to university information and people/ resources will be more difficult in complete lockdown however – though going forward a blended approach may well be feasible.

Work readiness, job search and graduate placement

Work readiness is the process of assisting students with skills and insights to enable them to apply for employment. It tends to focus less on preparing them to pursue income generating opportunities in which they may be interested. Typically it includes CV writing, developing a profile, and honing interviewing skills. It can include some job search strategies. It does not include supporting students to find internships/ placements or actual jobs.

⁴¹⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Work readiness

We omitted to include '**work readiness**' in the list of service from which to choose – but anecdotally it seems that many BSPs do some work readiness with their final year students; fewer engage in job search and placement.

An example of work readiness skills taken from a BSP's website is as follows:

*'Our programmes complement students' technical and academic skills, preparing them for meaningful employment and to become active contributors to the economy. We host workshops and seminars to equip tertiary students for academic success and the world of work. In teams, students solve real-life problems – learning to collaborate, gather around a common purpose, communicate effectively and think critically and creatively.'*⁴²⁰

If their resources were reduced, two organisations thought they might offer less work readiness, referring their students to the university's offering instead.

Job search and graduate placement

Three of the seven organisations interviewed support **job search**, while four say they offer **graduate placement**. One organisation works very purposefully on graduate placement, while the students supported by two organisations are sponsored by companies ostensibly as part of their staff recruitment pipeline. One supports placements on an ad hoc basis.

With more resources, one organisation who was producing graduates for an employment pipeline, would increase '*the skills they need to be competitive – although it is not clear what the additional skills are that they are looking for! Are work-attractive skills agility, stress management etc?*' Another noted that while '*graduate placement and job search support has not been a formal part of their work (although ad hoc support has been provided) this might change with the new strategy*' they are currently developing.

⁴²⁰

StudyTrust website.

Moshal allocates three staff to graduate placement, performing some of the roles of a placement agency.

They actively engage employers, asking them to provide internships, job shadowing, mentors and to participate in mock interviews, etc. They also introduce the Moshal brand to these partners and invite them to events and networks where they introduce students to clients – who then recognise the Moshal value-add and brand. In so doing, Moshal provides a foot in the door.

The organisation prides itself that employers *'assume Moshal students will be the best in their pool! Companies.... know they arrive at the workplace better prepared.'* One partner employer opens their grad [recruitment] programme one week early and only interviews Moshal scholars.

Moshal believes its graduates start at higher level jobs than, for instance, a NSFAS Commerce graduate who is likely to enter at a lower entry-level job.

'Research highlights the difficulties that "outsiders", or those with lower social capital, face when trying to access the labour market. The Dell Young Leaders programme works to level the playing field for young people from economically and historically disadvantaged communities who often come to university with no established professional networks in their fields of learning. The programme provides opportunities for Dell Young Leaders to interact with potential employers through both formal presentations and interviews and informal networking events. (This exposure is significant as corporates increasingly use such "unofficial" events to assess prospective job candidates for things like "cultural fit.")'

(Singizi Consulting, 2016)

Lockdown adjustments:

Job search⁴²¹

- Half (five) of the ten organisations surveyed regarding lessons from lockdown offer support in job search.
- Two are now offering this entirely on-line – while three will do so through a combination of virtual and face-to-face.
- Four think that offering job search support on-line is ‘a more effective use of time’ and one that it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
- Three BSPs thus propose to support job search more frequently, while two will not be changing the frequency of their offering.

Graduate placement⁴²²

- Four of the ten organisations are involved with graduate placements.
- Of these four, two will do so through a combination of virtual and face-to-face while one will work entirely on-line and the other will continue to do so face-to-face.
- One organisation thinks the ‘results have been better working on-line’; three think it is ‘a more effective use of time’ and one that it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
- Two BSPs propose to engage with graduate placement more frequently while the other two will retain their current levels of interaction.

As an organisation that pays considerable attention to ensuring their graduates become properly employed, Moshal identified three employment-related services that they say they will offer on-line – as this is more time and cost effective:

- Corporate breakfasts (employment support)
- Mock interviews (final year students)
- Corporate meetings for student placements

Going forward, they will offer the mock interviews and corporate meetings more frequently.

⁴²¹ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

⁴²² Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Alumni's feedback

Just under half (48%) of the alumni who responded to the survey undertaken in 2020 for this research said that their BSPs had assisted them 'a lot' regarding thinking about employment – with another quarter each saying only 'a bit' (27%) or 'very little' (24%).⁴²³ While not entirely clear, it seems that about a quarter (65 to 78 of the 250 respondents) may not be employed – and 68 did not answer this question which asked them to identify the most valuable input they had received from their BSP that helped them get their first job. The low response rate may also reflect the possible 25% unemployment rate among respondents – as well as the refrain that they wanted more support from the BSPs in accessing work.

Table 22:
Critical inputs for accessing first jobs

Interview and communication skills	38
CV writing	29
Contacts/ networking	21
Workshops	16
Support and encouragement	14
Attitude	12
Job search	10
Work experience	7
Advice (generally)	4
Career advice and guidance	3
Reference letters	2

Nonetheless, CV writing and interview preparation were the most valued (38 and 29 respondents) followed by contacts and networking (21 respondents).

Workshops (16 respondents) were more frequently cited than work experience (7).'⁴²⁴

About half said that the various inputs from their BSP had assisted them in getting their first job: 29% said they had assisted 'a lot' followed by 20% who said a 'bit'. A quarter (26%) chose 'not applicable (if they had not yet started work)'.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.

⁴²⁴ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.

⁴²⁵ Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.

Just over three quarters (79%) of the 195 who responded to this question felt that the support received from their BSP had helped to put them in a stronger position than their peers (in the world of work) – 48% ‘a lot’ and 31% ‘a bit’.⁴²⁶

Although they appreciated the work readiness efforts, the appeal for greater assistance with finding employment is a feature of these findings. Where some organisations do not include this in their offering, perhaps stronger partnerships with those who broker graduate employment could be considered.⁴²⁷

Insights into the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

As some students drop out given a mismatch with the fields/courses they pursued, course selection is an aspect that could profit from being developed and offered more broadly. This echoes the proposal above that pre-enrolment work – including career guidance and advice – would increase young people’s chances of succeeding in a field of study in which they may be interested – and able.

If resources were reduced, two organisations thought they might offer less work readiness and would refer their students to the university’s offering instead.⁴²⁸ With more resources, one organisation who has been producing graduates for an employment pipeline, would increase *‘the skills they need to be competitive – although it is not clear what the additional skills are that they are looking for!’*⁴²⁹

Offering work readiness skills should be a staple offering in students’ final years – equipping them with the basic skills needed to apply for a job. Whether or not there should be a parallel stream that encourages entrepreneurship is a longer discussion. Despite the increased expectations that as graduates they will engage in ‘hustling’ (described above) this needs to be an active choice and not a fallback when formal employment is not available. Entrepreneurship is not an easy option.

A feature of these findings is alumni’s appeal for greater assistance with finding employment. Where BSPs do not include this in their offering, perhaps they could consider stronger partnerships with those who broker graduate employment.

⁴²⁶ Sub-report: Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020, p 5.

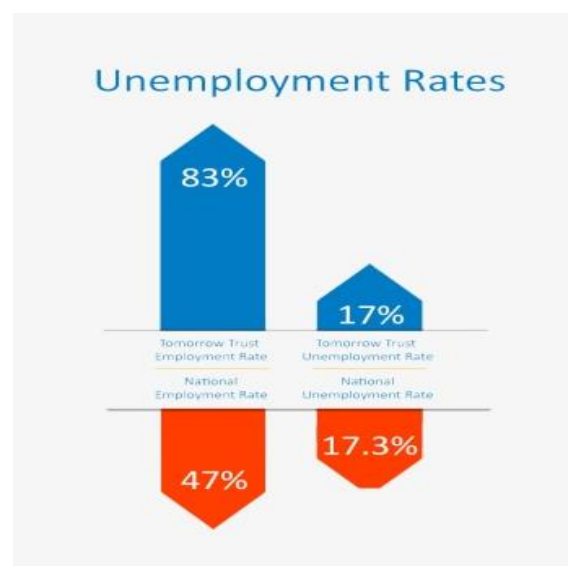
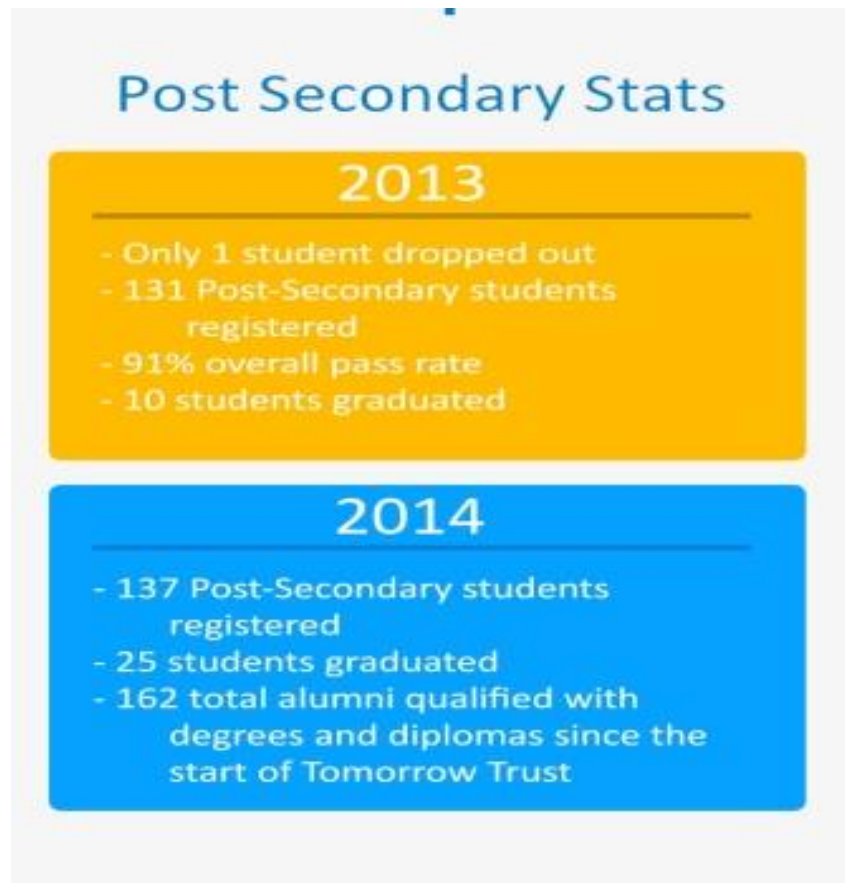
⁴²⁷ Sub-report: Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020, p 5.

⁴²⁸ REAP, Tomorrow Trust.

⁴²⁹ Umthombo.

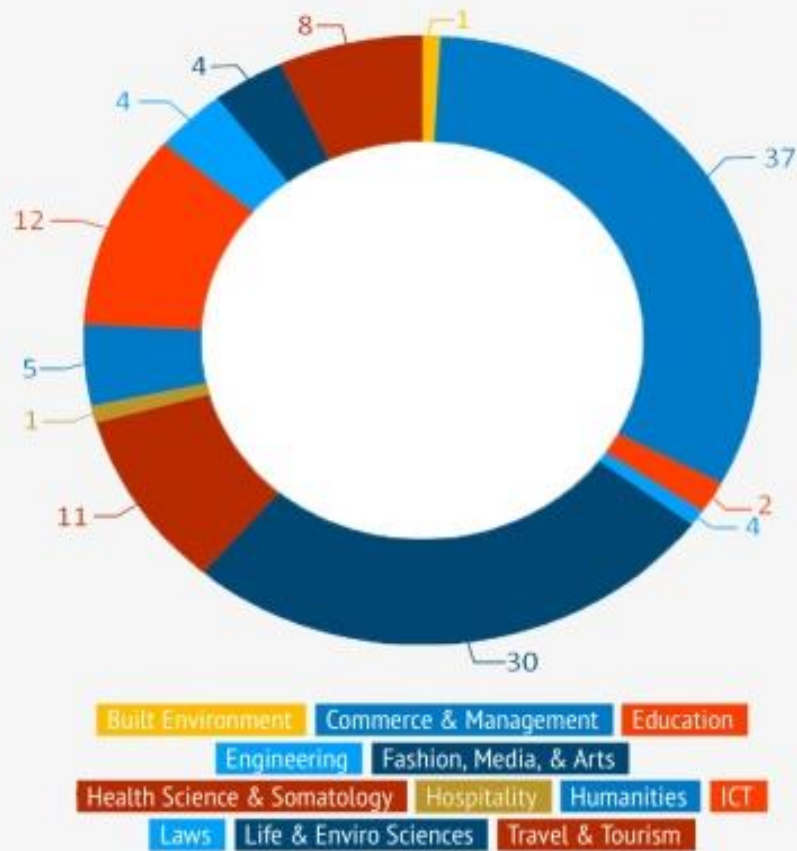
Example

Example of post-graduating tracking are seen in elements from the Tomorrow Trust's website which describe the: ⁴³⁰



⁴³⁰ Tomorrow Trust website - Success stories.

Alumni Career Path Stats



Tomorrow Trust alumni have gone on to become...



13. MODALITIES OF OFFERING SUPPORT

As said many times, the ways and extent to which BSPs offer their menu of services differs considerably across organisations.

For example in terms of psycho-social approaches

- many BSPs focus on optimising the capacities that students bring with them – like ‘REAP nurtures and affirms the resilience and strengths they have to get there.’⁴³¹
- Study Trust describes their approach as trying to ‘do a ‘quality switch’ towards autonomy and a learning mindset’, commenting that this is ‘an extremely difficult task and they do not always succeed; ... that even their best students have a long way to go.’⁴³²
- Asserting that full funding is a prerequisite to making a psycho-social difference, the Career Wise director argues that they want students to be able to ‘participate fully: to socialise and meet other people, to gain a broader perspective and be more versatile, to gain confidence, understanding and insights. This prepares them for the workplace which is diverse.’ They don’t want to focus only on their academic outcomes – and ‘get irritated if they stay in their rooms in res!’⁴³³

13.1 Contextual impacts on modalities

The seven directors were interviewed in the early days of the first COVID19-related lockdowns (April and May 2020) when the extent and long-lasting impacts were not yet being felt.

They were first asked about the modalities each organisation had been using to deliver its services, selecting options from a list. This was followed by an open-ended set of questions about

- which modalities had made the biggest difference;
- which current services they would intensify if they could; and
- which they would drop, if they lacked resources.

⁴³¹ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

⁴³² Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 20

⁴³³ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

They were then asked

- whether their existing on-line /distance model of support were feasible for lockdown conditions; and
- if they were making any changes to the wraparound support model during the lockdown / university closures; and if yes, whether any of these might be replicable going forward?

The two sets of responses reflect the timing of this research – the pre-COVID19 modus operandi followed by changes in practice fashioned during lockdown.

**Table 12: The ways in which services were offered
|by seven bursary support provider organisations
– and their perceptions of their effectiveness: 2020⁴³⁴**

	Orgs offering this (n=7)	Makes the biggest difference N=7	Add or intensify N=7	Reduce N=7
One-on-one: scheduled	7	7		1
Development workshops	7	3	1	1
Referrals	7	1		
Digital communications (WhatsApp, skype etc)	7		2	
One-on-one: as needed	5			
Residential camps	5			4
Peer support	5		2	
Group work	4		2	
Digital – on-line exercises / information	4		2	
Helpline	3			
Boot camps	2			1
Vacation programmes	1			
Other: Public accounting for performance	n/a	1		
Other: Celebration/ graduation events	n/a	1		1
Other: Different exposure	n/a	1		

⁴³⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

All seven organisations offered one-on-one (scheduled) sessions and development workshops; all used digital communications (WhatsApp, skype etc) and all referred students to other existing services.

Only three facilitated access to a helpline, two held boot camps, and one organisation offered vacation programmes.

Consistent with the priority given to individual support in the section above, all seven directors identified one-on-one sessions as making the biggest difference to students. This was followed by three who nominated development workshops as also doing so.

Existing on-line /distance model of support⁴³⁵

While historically individual support and workshops have been offered in-person/face-to-face, perhaps given the timing of the interviews, all seven reported using WhatsApp, skype etc, with two saying they would intensify this use going forward. But prior to 2020 some organisations had been using on-line methods – e.g.

- most organisations had used technology to communicate individually with students – some including over-the-phone support;
- StudyTrust had been developing a mentoring app – MyKnowledgeMentor, working with Mentoring4Success - to supplement face-to-face sessions (but this was still in its early stages);
- OMET had been offering webinars, but saw them only as supplementary; and
- REAP had tried to launch a sophisticated on-line student development programme, but this had failed to gain traction. This underscored not only issues of connectivity but the importance of providing suitable quantities of (extra) information and engagement, especially to new students for whom learning alone may not have been ideal.

The changes precipitated by the lockdowns have provided an opportunity to reflect on how things are being done. Following an appreciation of how some of these new modes of delivery may be effective going forward, some are likely to result in permanent adjustments to the ways services have been offered. The responses in the table below, then, should be read alongside the narratives in which the impacts of COVID19 on practice are included. (They are all elaborated on in a full report of the director's interviews⁴³⁶.)

⁴³⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴³⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

A ‘blended’ approach going forward

Echoing the maxim ‘high tech AND high touch’, the default view in the sector is that technology is valuable and can be better utilised ‘but cannot replace warm bodies in rooms for some things’.⁴³⁷

In their 2020 report ‘Youth development re-imagined’, Lucha Lunako proposed the gradual move to a blended approach, recognising the value it has for increasing reach:

‘...the deficit in basic skills require initial in-person interventions to bridge gaps, before an individual can move on to self-driven on-line learning. While a high-touch model may be most effective, these models prove challenging to scale without losing impact.’ (Lucha Lunako, 2020)

The question of extending the BSP sector’s reach to address more students is a perennial one. Not only would it provide a more extensive service to the country’s higher education students, but would improve the return on investment as more students are supported with similar inputs. This is addressed in section 14.8 below.

13.2 How services have been – and will be – offered

One-on-one support

*Scheduled sessions*⁴³⁸

The frequency with which one-on-one scheduled sessions have been offered varies considerably – from monthly to twice a year.

Examples of those who hold them monthly are as follows:

- Tomorrow Trust’s individual monthly sessions with a psychologist are compulsory throughout their degree as the organisation wants access to early warning signals.
- Umthombo requires first and second year students, and those who are struggling, to meet monthly with their mentor; the rest of the students are overseen by the Student Manager.

In contrast, other organisations require that students attend sessions either every three or six months:

- OMET offers individual sessions twice a year, after which staff categorise students according to the intensity of support required. This has been supplemented by a mentorship programme delivered by their alumni.

⁴³⁷ Interview with Murray Hofmeyr, 16&17 April 2020.

⁴³⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

- StudyTrust students have had two individual face-to-face sessions every year. These are the ‘core of the work’ and ‘must include a learning element’. Students complete a survey before the session, enabling self-reflection and providing information for the mentor. Students are also required to submit monthly reports.
- Career Wise has individual face-to-face sessions on campus every semester. Students are encouraged to take the initiative and contact the organisation for help in between these sessions, when they need it.

While no organisation would intensify their one-on-one support, one would reduce it if needs be, by reducing the weekly meetings with students at risk to fortnightly.⁴³⁹

*Lockdown adjustments: One-on-one contact sessions*⁴⁴⁰

The bedrock of the organisations’ offerings, one-on-one contact sessions with students have largely moved on-line. Most see this as continuing into the future, noting the time it saves – though most also want to retain some of the face-to-face contact.

- Nine of the ten BSPs responding to a survey on lessons from lockdown have been offering regular (scheduled) psycho-social support on a one-on-one basis.
- Eight of these, opt to do so through a combination of virtual and face-to-face, while one thinks they will continue to provide it exclusively face-to-face.
- Regarding virtual offerings:
 - eight think that on-line it is ‘a more effective use of time’ and three that it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
 - one organisation tentatively thinks the ‘results have been better working on-line’, but noted that this could not yet be evaluated.
- Capitalising on the access provided by now acceptable on-line communication, six organisations propose to offer scheduled one-on-one psycho-social support more frequently (‘more flexibility allows for more interaction’) – while three will not change the frequency of their offering.

Tomorrow Trust will not change how they do their ‘Board Review (self-assessment performance evaluation)’ process, however; this will continue to be face-to face and at the same frequently as they have always done.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 20

⁴⁴⁰ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Helpline⁴⁴¹

Three of the seven organisations have access to an external helpline facility – while Tomorrow Trust has their own in-house 24-hour cell phone for after hour emergencies. There were no comments about the relative value of a helpline, nor about increasing or reducing this service.

Lockdown adjustments: One-on-one (crisis intervention / support)⁴⁴²

- Eight of the ten BSPs responding to a survey on lessons from lockdown will offer crisis intervention / support through a combination of virtual and face-to-face, one of whom will move to face-to-face in ‘severe cases’.
- Two will offer on-line only, one of whom already has ‘a 24 hour phone that we always use for crisis intervention’.
- Three organisations think that offering crisis intervention support on-line might ‘offer better results’; eight that it is ‘a more effective use of time’ and two that it ‘is a more effective use of funds’.
- While seven organisations will not change the frequency of their offering, the other three propose to offer crisis intervention more frequently, as needed.

Group work⁴⁴³

Four of the seven organisations do group work with students. Examples are:

- Moshal runs small groups in Moshal houses (where only Moshal students live).
- Umthombo encourages students to meet together monthly, to provide support, to be ‘family’. One student is appointed as co-ordinator and mentors attend. Sometimes a bit of money is provided to convene it; some work well and some do not.

While no-one thought group work makes the biggest difference, none would reduce their current offering.

Two organisations are interested in promoting group work. Career Wise is ‘*trying to get students to learn collaboratively – especially in the absence of contact classes etc. Peer learning can be really effective but ‘must be natural’. Students who live together can divide up the curriculum and each master a section and teach one another.*’

⁴⁴¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁴² Sub-report: Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.

⁴⁴³ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Group work is a 'personal preference' of the REAP deputy/programme director who intends to grow this way of working. As a professional provider of psycho-social support, she has found working in small groups far more effective than individual case work. Students recognise strengths in others and learn from one another; they then leverage off each other, increasing their confidence and sense of self.

Group sessions would replace some of the more labour-intensive one-on-one session as:

- not every student needs individual contacts. She proposes two individual sessions and the rest with the group – plus additional individual sessions responsively as needed.
- Some students say they find the one-on-one sessions with student development advisors intimidating. Where they come from, they belong to stokvels and are used to community meetings – and would prefer to meet with other students.
- Senior students at a work readiness camp said they wished they had mixed with one another and used each other more; that they had made the idea of 'family' and 'support' real.

While running group sessions requires a particular set of skills, half of the REAP staff are social workers and should be able to do this. ⁴⁴⁴

*Lockdown adjustments: Group*⁴⁴⁵

- Eight of the ten organisations surveyed regarding lessons from lockdown will offer psycho-social support in groups through a combination of virtual and face-to-face – while one will only offer it virtually. Two have opted to continue to run these exclusively face-to-face, one of whom prioritised this for first year students.
- Three organisations will include on-line for group work as they think the results have been better working - while eight think it is 'a more effective use of time' and four that it 'is a more effective use of funds'.
- Six propose to offer group psycho-social support more frequently (*'smaller chunks more often'*) – while three will not change the frequency of the way they currently offer it.

Moshal will offer student community building and alumni master classes on-line, as it is a better use of time and money. They will offer them more frequently.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 2020.

⁴⁴⁵ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Peer support⁴⁴⁶

This has already been addressed under 9.2 above. Five of the seven organisations offer a peer support programme. Some, like REAP and StudyTrust, do so formally and others, like Career Wise and Umthombo, do so informally.

No-one asserted that peer support makes the biggest difference – but two organisations would intensify their approach if they had more resources:

- Moshal would ask their students – including alumni and senior students – to sometimes be the expert providers e.g. of topics like financial literacy.
- OMET would pay a stipend to final year students to have them help integrate first years.

No-one suggested how peer learning may be done through a blended approach.

Development workshops and residential /boot camps⁴⁴⁷

Again the extent to which development workshops have been held varies considerably – as do the formats they take – even among these seven organisations. Some find them essential to building capacity while others think they are ‘generic and expensive’. Only three of the seven asserted that development workshops are part of what make the biggest difference.

Five of the seven organisations included **residential camps** as a way of offering development workshops. Examples are:

- boot camp for first years – on academic foundations (Moshal, StudyTrust);
- orientation for first years (Moshal, REAP) and work readiness camp for final years and postgraduate students (StudyTrust, REAP);
- national annual event (Moshal/ Umthombo).

No-one asserted that residential camps make the biggest difference – but four organisations said they would stop offering them if funds were tight as they are very expensive.

⁴⁴⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁴⁷ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Of the two organisations who run boot camps, neither thought that they make the biggest difference. One thought their camp could be run less expensively by offering it locally *'although it is still really important part of their offering'* (Moshal).

- **REAP's** development workshops comprise dedicated residential weekends for each student grouping – namely first years, senior students, final years – focussing on their particular needs like orientation, employability etc. These are interspersed with one-day workshops on topical issues or study support, as needed.
'Residential weekends are pretty important, especially Orientation – but they are most expensive. The other residential weekends /camps are more optional. They were instituted as students found multiple Saturday workshops onerous; they could revert back to workshops and be more selective about content, removing the 'fluff'. They could present workshop content in small groups, while building a network of support.'
In addition they thought they could use programmes offered at universities for work readiness.⁴⁴⁸
- **Moshal:** Residential camps are part of community building; inducting the students into being part of something bigger. As the camps are very expensive, however, they could hold them on campus and cater themselves. In 2020 induction camps were held on campus; this was much cheaper and they managed to retain the essence. While they thought students would find it *'less-than, they all really appreciated it and had a good couple of takeaways'*.
- **Career Wise** does not run many workshops as they are generic and expensive - but they have offered a five-day residential lifeskills programme and, increasingly, mindfulness groups. These one-day sessions are offered early in the year (just after orientation, before they are overwhelmed by activities) for all first years and senior students having difficulties. This is followed by a half-day session just before exams. While Career Wise agrees that workshops are an efficient way of doing 'bulk messaging', they are concerned that they interfere with campus life; they prefer students to identify with their universities and maximise that experience. They do not want the bursary provider to be their main point of reference or their main identity; comparing themselves with 'middle class parents', they understand their role to be support in the background.
- **OMET** runs annual regional workshops which 'have been focussed on creating a space where students discuss their challenges (and co-create solutions); as well as fostering a sense of community, especially amongst students studying at the same institution.'⁴⁴⁹ They are discussing using on-line formats for the future.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Emma Francis, 24 April 20, amended 7 April 2021.

⁴⁴⁹ OMET 2019 Annual report, p11.

Celebration/ graduation events and camps⁴⁵⁰

Two organisations – Moshal and OMET – wanted to keep their celebratory / graduation events and camps.

- Moshal holds a national annual event attended by all students – to enhance the sense of community and celebrates achievements – and at which they also get to ‘see the man behind the big M, himself!’
*‘Martin Moshal believes the annual event is really important – [for students] to physically see they are part of something bigger; that there is something to aspire to. Also this closeness naturally flips them into being alumni as they want to be part of Moshal going forward.’*⁴⁵¹
- If funds were tight, OMET would cut their event, however: *‘Definitely cut the fancy annual graduation event in July as it is very expensive – although it is also a celebration of the partnerships with the unions.’*⁴⁵²

Lockdown adjustments Developmental workshops⁴⁵³

Group events like developmental workshops - which were unquestioningly offered in-person, and often off campus - are being facilitated through webinars where possible. Residential workshops have been replaced by more fragmented offerings of various intensities. For example while StudyTrust is offering work readiness to final year students through a webinar facilitated by five alumni, Tomorrow Trust will be offering them a three-month on-line course on employability through the African Management Institute. Umthombo added on-line teaching for medical students by a German company.

In keeping with a general feeling that webinars /on-line group sessions will be included in a ‘blended’ offering going forward, Moshal is using this situation to digitise their training courses which they have ‘been talking about doing forever’.

⁴⁵⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

⁴⁵² Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

⁴⁵³ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

Referrals⁴⁵⁴

All seven organisations refer students to other services – particularly to those at the universities where their students are studying, and especially to academic support. Not only do they want to avoid duplication, but those organisations that work remotely particularly value these staff who are in situ.

Six of the seven organisations say their staff are largely aware of what each university offers – and most work concertedly at maintaining close working relationships with these staff, both academic and in student support.

Moshal '*offers their own courses as it is easier to keep track of who has done what*' – but suggest they also go to campus courses for reinforcement; while Career Wise actively checks if the service to which they referred a student was helpful. If not, they refer them externally. Tomorrow Trust '*does everything in-house [as they employ] three psychologists*' and only use the university's tutoring and academic support.

While these services are relied upon by those who use them, no-one asserted that referrals make the biggest difference. One organisations said that, if needs be, they would increase their leverage off the university services a lot more – like health, career offices, time management workshops etc..⁴⁵⁵

Digital communications - WhatsApp, skype etc and on-line exercises / information⁴⁵⁶

Prior to COVID19, all seven organisations had been using digital communications - like WhatsApp, Skype etc – to communicate with students, largely to send messages and to have conversations with individuals. Since March 2020, however, the now ubiquitous use of Zoom/Teams etc and participation in collective events on-line will have shifted the frequency and perceived use of on-line technology.

Four of the seven organisations said they had used digital communications to offer on-line exercises / information. For example, Moshal offers on-line training in English.

⁴⁵⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁵⁵ Moshal.

⁴⁵⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

*Lockdown adjustments: Reducing the effects of lockdown*⁴⁵⁷

The isolation and disconnection that lockdown has brought to everyone – and particularly to students for whom on-campus life is an important part of growing up – has been assertively addressed by the BSPs through a range of on-line communications.

On-line group events are being used to offer information and support relating to the circumstances created by lockdown. This includes, for example, group sessions *‘of five first years for them to especially talk [with the psychologist] about issues they are battling with’*.⁴⁵⁸

Some organisations regularly message students offering bits of information in manageable chunks and with a view to motivating them/ reducing their sense of isolation. One organisation (Career Wise) is careful not to bombard students with messages as they think daily communications are too much; others think it is supportive and keeps communication channels open. For instance, one organisation had just launched a social media page *‘which will be interactive and include tips regarding the challenges they are experiencing in the form of Academic Mondays, Wellness Wednesdays and Career Fridays’*.⁴⁵⁹

13.3 Insights in the value of BSPs and what difference this makes

The BSP organisations adjusted quickly and diligently to the situation provided by the COVID19 lockdowns - and with an agility that is partly due to their lack of institutional structures and to their relatively small staff components, many of whom are used to working with whatever come up.

Individual in-person sessions have remained largely untouchable – except that there is a general acceptance that they do not have to be in-person but can largely be done on-line.

⁴⁵⁷ Sub-report: *Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.*

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Leonie Sampson, 22&29 April 2020.

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

The long history of working with individuals – and the capacity to do this both individually and collectively – has stood the sector in good stead, as organisations have been able to stay close to students through individual on-line sessions, detecting crises as early as possible, while also convening collective events – both psycho-social and academic – designed to mitigate some of the isolation.

Development workshops have also been shifted on- line – and the idea of residential workshops has been relinquished by some – though most do not want their entire offering to be provide on-line, favouring a combination of on-line and in-person once this is possible again.

There is little doubt that some of the ways of working will be included going forward; that, like universities, the BSP sector will adopt a blended approach. Not only do some of these ways of working produce good results, but they save money and extend reach. That being said ‘high tech and high touch’ prevails as an ideal and no-one seems to want to work entirely remotely; if anything some would revert back to in-person work, while most will be adopting a combination of mediums – a blended approach – as useful and appropriate.

14. THE DIFFERENCES BSPs CAN MAKE

The purpose of this research is to be able to say, in an authoritative way, what difference the work of the BSP sector makes to student success. Those involved in student success around the country are increasingly interested in which initiatives actually make a/ the difference – and funders are increasingly keen on hard evidence regarding return on investment, given other calls on their funding.

The usual way in which BSPs provide evidence is to cite academic throughput and year-on-year progression rates; they also use case studies to illustrate the changes that a BSP has made to the lives of some of those supported. These can be dramatic, given that most of the beneficiaries are first generation students and the differences made (to that person and their household/family) can be substantial.

Section 5 above has outlined some of the factors that confound counting, through which BSPs must pick their way when accounting and being accountable .

The evidence collected in this research project is given in the body of the report above – and, more substantively, in the more detailed sub-reports, some of which is not repeated in the main body of this report.

What follows is a summary of the findings, the difference the BSPs may be making, and recommendations.

14.1 Findings: Selection

Student profile

Almost all BSPs support students from financially under-resourced households and, often, poor schooling. Where BSPs link their selection to students funded by NSFAS, the increase in the **household incomes** used by NSFAS in the financial means test has widened the pool from which to select. In addition, some BSPs are also interested in supporting students in the 'missing middle' (household income up to ±R600,000). Others will retain their focus on those who are from really impoverished backgrounds. This reflects the much-mentioned diversity of the sector.

Many BSPs do not select those with the best **matric marks**, preferring those who have mid-level results, as they find these students are often more realistic about what they can achieve and what it takes to do so. In this way they avoid the 'Hero to Zero' effect when good matric students battle to adjust to academic requirements at university. Selecting mid-level matriculants also means that most BSPs do not compete with organisations providing scholarships who invariably select those with the best matric marks – although BSPs may lose some of their better achieving students to these programmes along the way.

Most organisations also select students on the basis of the **personal characteristics** that they prize – using various approaches (both formal and informal) to assess qualities like resilience, tenacity, motivation, etc.

Some recruit only those **in their first years of study**, while others recruit students at **other stages** of their (undergraduate) studies. These choices carry different degrees of risk of failure and dropout.

Some BSPs select only from **designated geographical areas**.

BSPs report a fairly even distribution of **genders** among their students.

The difference this makes

By supporting mid-level students – as opposed to matriculants with top marks – the BSP sector is making available supports they might otherwise not have accessed. It is these apparently mediocre students whose outcomes are given in this report – which, although not benchmarked against a completely comparable dataset, suggests they are doing better than the average.

Recommendations

1. The sector continues to support students from poorer households – while venturing into support for the missing middle as suits each organisation's interests .
2. The sector continues to recruit those with mid-level matric results.
3. The sector monitors academic outcomes with respect to gender, in the event that extra interventions are needed with males students.

HEIs and fields of study

Most organisations support students at public universities, with a few doing so at private universities. A minority support students at TVET colleges.

Given the unevenness of quality and provision at public HEIs, some BSPs choose to only work at those with enough services and quality for a student to possibly succeed – while others work across the board, but choose faculties/fields which are reputed to be good enough. Some BSPs work at only a selection of HEIs, given their limited organisational capacity. In choosing certain HEIs or particular fields of study – particularly STEM and health sciences – some organisations are realising their interests in

- services available for referral; and/or
- history of success / throughput; and/or
- graduate employability; and/or
- feasibility with respect to their own staffing.

BSP staff tend to know what services are offered at the universities at which they support students – and some work concertedly to know academic staff and the staff offering support services to facilitate the support needed for their students.

A lack of information regarding PSET generally as well as possible careers and courses matched to a realistic sense of what they might be suited to do, leads some students to make poor course selection and become unnecessary dropouts. This is particularly difficult for students who did well in matric and who aim 'high' in their selection of course and HEI, only to fail miserably – the Hero to Zero phenomenon. As a result there is increasing interest in pre-enrolment work – i.e. working with school learners – to help them make more informed decisions. We did not enquire into this work, however, nor did it come up spontaneously. Our sense is that this is not an area in which the BSPs engage much – other than during the selection process.

The difference this makes

At well-resourced universities, the BSPs assist with navigating the institutional systems and with referrals – and perhaps work with a lighter touch given the services available. That being said, early diagnosis, follow-up after referrals and tracking academic progress are exactly the individual attention that BSPs can offer all students with most HEIs cannot, no matter how well-resourced they are. This is reported to make a/the difference when times are tough.

At less well-resourced universities, some BSPs may provide more services in the absence of their being offered (sufficiently) by the HEI in an attempt to promote student wellbeing and success.

As the BSP sector largely does not work in TVET colleges it cannot be making a difference there.

Some BSP's specialised foci on fields of study (like STEM subjects) may well enhance results – but without comparing them with a control group (which has not had extra support) it is difficult to know this.

Recommendations

1. The provision of individual support to students at public universities should continue – being constantly alert to (good enough) services offered by the HEIs in order to facilitate referrals.
2. As the return on investment at private universities tends not to be good (it is expensive for no additional rates of success) this option should not be pursued.
3. BSP staff to ensure that they keep up-to-date with what is being offered at the universities so that duplication is avoided and relationships with university staff is fostered as suitable.
4. Where the NBSPF sees a glaring issue that impedes student success, particularly with respect to first generation students (e.g. poor basic nutrition) it could initiate advocacy (e.g. for a national HEI feeding scheme), ideally partnering with other national organisations.
5. While the TVET sector is not easy to work in – given its organisational challenges and funding models – a more layered set of PSET options beyond universities would better suit many young people's interests and abilities; it will also provide a more diversely skilled set of graduates for the country. If the BSP sector is to contribute to the public – and individual – good, then the recommendation is that the NBSPF sets up an interest group to develop and monitor ways of working in the more functional parts of the TVET sector.

6. Serious consideration to be given to pre-enrolment work – either contracting with organisations who already work in this area, or by developing a competence within the BSPs themselves (though this will be informed by their geographical footprint and recruitment strategy). While this cannot guarantee that learners will make the right choice, it would reduce the hit-and-miss decision-making process in which some students are forced to engage.

Progress and exclusion

Most organisations have criteria for continuing their support to students, largely to do with their annual academic results. While some BSPs are relatively lenient, many link their criteria to those of NSFAS, given that they utilise their funding as part of the support package. This ‘survival of the fittest’ is another form of selection – and affects the throughput statistics⁴⁶⁰ of those who draw these lines.

A clear finding in the retrospective analysis of statistics is that the throughput rate leaps from just over 60% to around 90% when an extra year is allowed for – e.g. four years for a three-year degree.

The difference this makes

Many BSP organisations’ alignment with NSFAS’ criteria for exclusion is unavoidable given their funding models. The statistics in Table 14 9a (a few pages below) suggest that the dropout rate may be lower for BSP-supported students than general NSFAS supported students, however, suggesting that the combination of selection and support is making some difference.

Where BSPs are not bound to NSFAS criteria, however, more lenient options would make a difference to those students who may require an extra year to complete their qualification.

Recommendations

1. Wherever possible, BSP organisations should budget for one extra year for all undergraduate students.
2. It remains a question as to whether some BSP organisations could be contracted by the state to support NSFAS-funded students more broadly. Pilots on how to do this should be undertaken to see what the basic criteria would be to be able to make a widespread difference.

⁴⁶⁰ Care should be taken not to assume that students leave university when a BSP withdraws their support however. They may access support elsewhere and go on to graduate.

14.2 Findings: overall assessment of what makes the difference

Seven BSP directors interviewed for this research, plus 250 alumni surveyed, both rated individual psycho-social support as making the biggest difference to student success. Given that organisations can be seduced by their own practices, the alumni's responses were an important corroboration of this central finding.

That being said, psycho-social support is offered in a range of ways and dosages without any immediately evident correlation of which works best. The retrospective analysis of statistics showed that the two organisations with better throughputs rates had a lighter dosage than the two which did not – but there were other variables that mitigated against this being a simple finding. What was clear is that a lighter dosage of psycho-social support can make a difference.

The lowest ranking of career / work readiness services is an indication of the lack of attention it is paid and therefore of its lack of impact. It would be instructive to know who it would be rated were it given more prominence in the overall menu of options.

Seven BSP directors

The directors were asked – without a list to prompt them – which supports were central to making a real difference to their students and which they might increase/intensify or reduce, depending on resources available. All seven volunteered that psycho-social support made the biggest difference – followed by lifeskills and full financial support.

Table 13: Perceptions of services offered – by number of organisations

	Makes the biggest difference N=7	Add or intensify N=7	Reduce N=7
Psycho-social services	7	2	0
Lifeskills	2	3	
Full financial support	2		
Academic support	1	1	
Career / work readiness		1	2

Alumni

As seen in in Figure 27 below, more than three quarters of the alumni who were surveyed rated the following services ‘very valuable’ or ‘quite valuable’.

The services associated with **finding work** – networking, job search, graduate placement and in-service training – were less frequently identified as ‘very valuable’ or ‘quite valuable’. This should be read against the later finding which prioritised these services as needing considerable more attention.

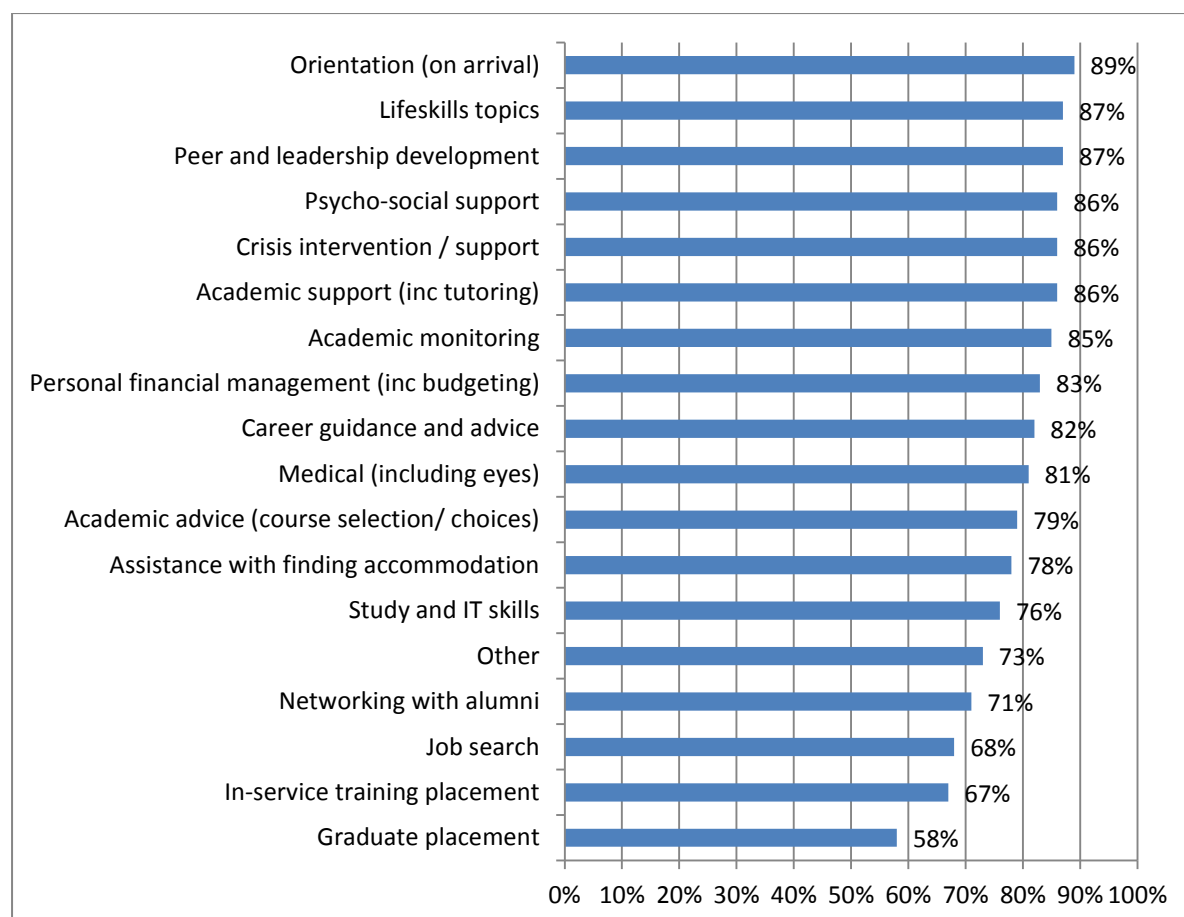


Figure 31: Proportion of alumni surveyed who accessed a service – who found it ‘very valuable’ or ‘quite valuable’⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹

Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 29.

14.3 Findings: Wraparound support

‘Wraparound’ support comprises financial, academic, psycho-social, developmental and sometime medical assistance.

While the menu of support elements is broadly the same across BSPs, there is considerable variation in how, and how much, is offered, to whom and when. Dosages and styles differ sometimes quite markedly across organisations – as does the compulsory /voluntary nature of the engagements.

For instance some BSPs provide standard compulsory offerings to all students (varied by stage of study) – while some are only responsive to each student’s needs, selecting from their menu what is actually needed. Some provide a combination of these, comprising a core offering supplemented by responses to individual students.

Two elements are regarded as essential, however:

- Full financial support (see below); and
- Individual psycho-social support.

Modalities

Three ways in which services are offered:

- by BSP staff
- by students commissioned as mentors of some kind; and/or
- by HEI units / outside organisations to which students are referred.

Most BSPs designate staff members to particular students while some choose not to. Certainly where mentors are concerned, students are allocated to either a peer or senior mentor. Their offerings can take a variety of forms but peer mentors tend to be more like a bother/sister and helps them navigate and find services they need while senior mentors seem to take on a more academic role. Mentors meet with students individually and/or in groups.

When staff refer students to services in the HEI or another organisation they invariably follow up to see if the service needed was delivered and was effective. Where this is not the case, some pay for private services – though not all organisations can afford to.

In terms of the ways in which supports and services are offered, one-on-one consultations were the most popularly valued by the alumni respondents (91%), followed by development work done in groups (88%).⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Sub-report: *Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020*, p 5.

The difference this makes

A concern has been that this comprehensive approach is a luxury and too much – that a pared down version might work just as well.

The research finds, however, that the difference is made to each individual by a combination of the essential supports – full financial support and individual psycho-social support – PLUS whatever other services meet their particular needs. In other words the essentials are necessary but not sufficient and success can be undermined by a lack of support in one of the more optional aspects. Some BSP directors said they would rather reduce student numbers than only keep one element of their model.

Examples of the differences made by comprehensive support given by two directors are:

- ‘confidence, soft skills (communication, empathy), initiative. They are more self-aware An individual managing staff [in a clinic] commented that some staff seemed ‘different’ (in a good way) – and they turned out to be Umthombo students.’⁴⁶³
- ‘REAP graduates are more rounded than a ‘NSFAS student’ – and are (hopefully) a more ethically responsible citizen.’⁴⁶⁴

The main finding, then, is that the BSP sector’s offering of a combination of essential supports, with one-on-one support at the centre, plus customised support for each student, is what makes the difference.

Recommendations

1. Where a BSP cannot offer the full range of supports, partnering with other services who can supplement their offering through contracting or referral is essential for a comprehensive basket of services to be offered to address the varied needs of these students.

14.4 Findings: Financial support

Some BSPs feel strongly that anything short of (reasonable) full funding – so that students are not distracted by concerns about material support – is not worthwhile. They generally provide this full support, while some who would like to, are unable to afford to do so.

In contrast, some consider their support as only a contribution, which the student needs to supplement elsewhere to meet their material needs.

⁴⁶³ Interview with Gavin MacGregor 25 March 2021.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with Russell Davies, 23 April 2020.

The difference this makes

In the retrospective analysis of statistics, however, the academic outcomes of those who had been fully funded did not simply correlate with better throughputs.

Nonetheless, if students from vulnerable backgrounds are to be able to compete equally, this research supports full funding – both from a psycho-social and social justice point of view. That being said, supporting fewer students with more, rather than more students with less, will have implications for return on investment (ROI). This will not be popular and will need to be addressed, given a possible decrease in the funding available and funders' increasing interest in the ROI, as well as calls to increase the reach of this sector's influence.

Recommendations

1. This research supports funding students fully – both from a psycho-social and social justice point of view.
2. The implications for the ROI of supporting fewer students with more, rather than more students with less, could be addressed directly with funders. Ideally this would have been supported by evidence of the difference this support makes to academic throughput – but this research has not shown this definitively. The psycho-social and social justice points of view may need to be mobilised in their absence.
3. These recommendations need to be read alongside those outlined in 14.8 'Findings: Increasing the reach' which suggests also piloting support to NSFAS-funded students without the provision of top-up funding.

14.5 Findings: Academic outcomes

Most BSPs refer students to university-based services to access actual academic support, including writing skills. All monitor their students' progress, however, and some assist with managing their course selection within their qualification. Some offer tutorials, either individually or in groups, paying for a tutor or having senior students volunteer. Some provide study skills.

Academic outcomes – like throughput, progression, dropout etc – are the standard measurement of success, both for funders and national student success efforts. Excellent lifeskills and academic failure are not a close second!

BSPs have used indicators of academic success to report on their effectiveness for many years. The fact that they have been using these concepts differently and have been counting these various indicators in different ways, however, has undermined the possibility of their making comparisons across organisations, however. They have nevertheless been comparing their results with others' on the basis of what each organisation had reported.

In the context of this research, a working group of BSP organisational volunteers developed definitions and methods for common calculations of key concepts – and four of these did retrospective calculations to test these methods, and their own data. While the quantitative outcomes were revealing – with one organisation having to re-understand its outcomes in the light of this exercise – the variables in their modus operandi were sufficiently diverse to confound easy comparisons.

If organisations sign up to the common ways of naming and counting, comparisons can begin to be made within the NBSPF at least. This is less possible with respect to national statistics, however, as terms are not used consistently by the major institutions (DHET, NFAS, CHE) – and who/what is being counted is not always clear, making comparisons with national data invidious.

Rather oddly, with respect to identifying which of their efforts made the biggest difference to student success, only one of the seven directors interviewed mentioned academic-related support at all – and they suggested that training in study skills was important to making the difference, and they would add more academic monitoring if they could.⁴⁶⁵ None of the directors commented on academic monitoring as being a crucial aspect of making a difference. This was surprising given that early detection with respect to academic difficulty is exactly one of the values of providing individual support.

As seen in Figure 27 above, 86% and 85% of alumni survey respondents found academic support and academic monitoring either very or quite valuable, however.

The difference this makes

Given that the BSPs are effectively supporting students whose household incomes are similar to those being supported by NSFAS, a central question is whether the sector makes a difference to these students compared to those only funded by NSFAS. Given that BSPs

- select students – while NSFAS supports all financially eligible candidates;
- select the HEIs and fields of study in which they will support them;
- provide students with various forms of support which others do not get (besides those accessing focussed funding and support elsewhere);

⁴⁶⁵

Interview with Jodi Bailey, 30 April & 4 May 2020.

– the BSPs’ outcomes cannot be fairly compared to those of NSFAS students more generally.

These variables, among others, confounded the ability to make a true comparison with NSFAS data within the sub-study of retrospective stats of four BSP organisations. In addition, it was difficult to get a comparable data set:

- we could not easily access data for NSFAS students for the **same start years** as those being used for the retrospective analysis we undertook; and
- the DHET study from which we accessed the NSFAS data included **distance students** who are known to have lower throughput rates – while the BSP sector has very few students studying through distance.

Table 14 below nonetheless summarises the findings of a comparison of these not perfectly matched data sets – which show that the BSP sector does better with its cohorts of students⁴⁶⁶ than those generally funded by NSFAS. It is notable, however, that the NSFAS outcomes in the STEM fields are better than others and closer to the BSP outcomes.

Despite the directors’ reticence, there is no doubt that the close monitoring of each student’s progress – and their provision of referral to assistance as needed – is a central part of the BSP sector’s offering. While some universities also do this, they cannot hope to provide individual support and follow-up in the way these smaller organisations can. This is done to various degrees of sophistication and some organisations may well do it better than others.

In addition, psycho-social support – especially as it relates directly to academic performance – provides the necessary support when students are despondent and in danger of dropping out.

⁴⁶⁶ Bear in mind that the BSP sector statistics are averages of the four organisations outcomes and that the outcomes of two organisations were considerably lower than the other two which were consistently high.

Table 14: Comparisons of throughputs rates reported by DHET with those in this study – by field of study⁴⁶⁷

DHET throughput rates			This study's average throughput rates		
overall finding	after five years of studying	after six years of studying		after five years of studying (2015 cohort)	after six years of studying (2014 cohort)
'Business studies students have the lowest throughput rates'	22,1%	27,9%	This study does not have 'Business Studies' as a category. The closest is Management which has high throughput rates	100% – although the sample was under 20 students.	80%
'followed by the humanities'.	24,8%	28,9%	Humanities had among the highest throughput rates.	89%	85%
'Education in general (covering all qualifications) has the next highest throughput rate, although lower than the Bachelor of Education on its own.'	54,1%	57,8%	Throughput rates for education looks comparably similar	76%	76%
'Science, engineering and technology fields have the highest throughputs of all fields of study.'	Science: 56,3% Technology: ? Engineering: 43,8% ⁴⁶⁸	Science: 62,8% Technology: ? Engineering: 54,1%	Our study shows variable outcomes for science and Technology Engineering throughput rates are generally poor	Science: 59% Technology: 83% Engineering: 31%	Science: 73% Technology: 50% Engineering: 50%
'The MBChB qualification, a 6 year degree prog. for medical doctors, has very high throughput rates when compared to all other qualifications.'	not available	66,8%	Throughput rates for health sciences (generally) look comparably similar	85%	88%

⁴⁶⁷ Sub-report: *Academic outcomes of students supported by four bursary support provider organisations. October 2021.* Table 11, p 36.

⁴⁶⁸ These rates increase with additional years. So, for instance, after ten years Engineering has throughput rates of 65,4% (2008), 63,9% (2007) etc

Recommendations

1. Care must be taken when comparing outcomes, as the diversity within the BSP sector – and with national data – undermines easy comparisons.
2. Consider advocating for national statistics (e.g. NSFAS) to be made more accessible such that datasets can be requested. Short of this, comparisons are difficult.
3. Enable BSPs to learn from each other regarding their systems for monitoring /tracking students' academic progress.
4. Actively advocate for harmonising the methods and terms used for quantifying academic outcomes within the BSP sector. This would begin to make it possible to compare outcomes between organisations – which would be useful both to be able to advocate for the sector's work, and to improve practices.
5. Popularise the value of these comparisons within the sector – and advocate for organisations to shift their data systems in line with the standard methods and terms .
6. Have NBSPF members sign up for doing cohort studies – in line with the standard methods and terms in the sector – so that throughput data can begin to be collected.
7. Engage with various civil society /university-based student success fora about standardising methods and terms of quantifying student success, in the interests of better understanding student success and what may contribute to it.
8. Possibly engage with DHET and NSFAS about standardising methods and terms of quantifying student success to promote common terms and methods within the country.

14.6 Findings: Psycho-social support

Psycho-social interventions and support are a significant part of the 'unique contribution' being made by the sector – with one-on-one support being central to this.

In the first instance, psycho-social support is instrumentalised in the interests of promoting academic success – i.e. by supporting students through life issues so that they are less distracted from their academic work.

But increasingly some organisations see the development of psycho-socially well and competent students as an end in itself – as contributing to producing employable graduates and good citizens.

Individual ('one-on-one') attention

All organisations provide one-on-one support to their students. Each student meets regularly with a staff member who knows their circumstances and is a consistent presence to whom they can refer questions / concerns. Some regard this as an *in loco parentis* model; others as professional mentoring. Some offer it monthly; others less frequently.

All seven organisations – and, I would safely venture, more generally beyond these seven – regard psycho-social support as the key to the difference they make.

At the heart of the value of this individual psycho-social support are

1. orientation
2. belonging (consistent relationship with BSP staff and a student cohort)
3. early detection and diagnosis
4. provision and referral
5. navigation
6. follow-up and accountability

This research argues that, in addition to full funding, these are the central elements that make up the BSP model more generally; that, together, these are the factors that make the difference.

The alumni respondents surveyed for this research affirmed the commonsense impressions that the personalised support offered by the BSPs is fundamental to the sector's ability to making a difference.⁴⁶⁹

One-on-one sessions have survived the lockdowns as on-line communication has become ubiquitous. While it obscures some of the information an in-person session can offer, it has provided a good alternative and most organisations will include on-line communication in their models – alongside in-person sessions – as it is more efficient and often, sufficiently effective.

⁴⁶⁹ Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020, p 5.

When asked what they would definitely keep if they had to cut elements of their support model, most identified one-on-one interactions as untouchable; noting that this was the one thing that large institutions do not/ cannot offer – with one adding that *‘personal development – individual sessions and workshops – is not a component that gets offered anywhere else, while things like careers, counselling, wellness etc are available at the university /elsewhere.’*⁴⁷⁰ Three organisations also noted the importance of holding students to account through psycho-social interactions.⁴⁷¹ One organisation thought that an improvement in the general provision of support services would be ‘if every student could have a relationship with someone who knows them, who has their best interests to heart, and has high expectations of them’.⁴⁷² Another would increase their psycho-social services if they could.⁴⁷³

The question of whether / how the reach of this labour-intensive model might be extended is still being addressed.

Group work

One way of increasing the reach of psycho-social support is to run group sessions. Some organisations who are doing so claim that this provides a safe space for some students who find the one-on-one sessions awkward. Group sessions also reduces isolation, currently a key issue, and promotes students as a resource to one another.

Psycho-social development / lifeskills

Complementing the individualised psycho-social support are the generic lifeskills development sessions which offer competences in a range of skills useful in university life and, in many cases, employment. Some BSPs make attendance compulsory and their group format again enrolls students as resources to one another. While there are key topics covered by many BSPs, the menus and formats are once again not the same across organisations.

Orientation / FYE

A concerted programme of skills to manage university life and studying are offered to first year students by most universities through their FYE / orientation programmes. This is supplemented by most BSPs who run an additional programme which introduces students to the supports they offer and provides insights into skills of navigation, time management, and social issues like diversity etc.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

⁴⁷¹ REAP, Umthombo, Tomorrow Trust.

⁴⁷² Interview with Stacey Rontiris, 15 & 21 April 2020.

⁴⁷³ REAP.

Community engagement

Some (many?) organisations require that their students pay back – or pay forward - by doing community outreach work. This is usually recognised publicly in some way, even if only on a transcript that records their contributions.

Measuring psycho-social outcomes

The contribution of psycho-social efforts to student success, then, needs to be quantified. Currently qualitative evidence, in the forms of case studies and students' views, is given. These are supplemented by various statistics regarding academic success, the ultimate goal of all organisations. There are pressures for some quantitative measurements for psycho-social factors themselves, however.

This complex aspect of measurement has been underdeveloped in NGOs in South Africa. While psychometrists produce profiles of various personal characteristics, even they are wary of measuring 'difference'.⁴⁷⁴

Again through a working group of NBSPPF volunteers, this research has identified eight behavioural outcomes, with each having two to four indicators. Matrices to measure each indicator have also been developed. (As most BSP staff are not psychometrists, no psychological assessments have been included.) Organisations choose from these for each academic stage and then for each student. Staff and students then do a baseline, followed by progress assessments. By requiring that do these assessments with one another, staff's interventions are more focussed and accountable and students take responsibility for their own goals and working towards their achievement, with the organisation's support.

This process of measurement began to be piloted by one organisation in 2021 and another is doing so in 2022. Feedback will be used to ascertain if this model is worthwhile and, if so, to refine the system.

The difference this makes

All seven organisations say that psycho-social interactions are indispensable to what makes the difference to student success. The one-on-one format enables early detection of issues, while group sessions enrol students as resources to one another and are said to reduce isolation, especially during lockdown.

⁴⁷⁴ This includes a concern for measuring only what organisations might actually influence – which speaks to the vexed issue of causality and attribution. How does an organisation know if it is their intervention that made a / the difference?

The sector would benefit from clearer evidence of the difference this makes, however – what difference is made, how, and to what extent. Work is underway in this regard and recommendations for ways forward are made.

The lifeskills sessions supplement this individual attention. 87% of alumni surveyed rated lifeskills as very or quite valuable – the second highest after orientation. In contrast, only two⁴⁷⁵ of the seven BSP directors identified **life skills** as contributing to making the biggest difference. If they had the resources to do so, one of these would add financial literacy for everyone – while another⁴⁷⁶ would *‘improve FYE / navigation skills etc by having all junior students mentored by a senior student’*.

The ROI of the BSPs’ orientation / FYE programmes are being questioned. While they establish the foundation for the relationship with the BSP and supplement the university’s programme, their residential format used by many BSPs is expensive. As lockdown has provided the opportunity to develop alternative ways offering this programme, it is likely that this is an aspect of the offering whose format will change – as will, perhaps some of the content which was not essential.

Recommendations

1. Consider formulating a generic model that presents the factors that are central to the sectors’ making the difference – for use in advocacy for the differences made by the sector.
The model proposed above could be used as a starting point (comprising orientation; belonging; early detection and diagnosis; provision and referral; navigation; follow-up and accountability).
2. Use lockdown experiences of providing psycho-social support on-line as an opportunity to review and refine the modality toward more efficient delivery – and with a view to possibly expanding reach.
3. Promote the increasing use of group sessions for psycho-social support as this reduces isolation, enrols students as peer resources and, again, possibly enables increasing reach.
4. Continue to offer lifeskills sessions.
5. Review and refine FYE / orientation programmes with a view to retaining their value, while reducing the cost.
6. Pilot the psycho-social measurements and make a finding as to its feasibility and usefulness.

⁴⁷⁵ Career Wise, Moshal

⁴⁷⁶ OMET

14.7 Findings: Measuring employment outcomes

While many BSPs provide final year students with some work readiness skills, these are often not extensive and do not include actual support in job search. Only a few organisations work concertedly with senior students and alumni to actually secure employment – or even internships; this is embedded in these organisations' main purposes and are an important outcome for them.

Alumni put the desire for more of services relating to job search at the top of their list. They rated the existing services 'very valuable' or 'quite valuable' less frequently: networking with alumni (71%), job search (68%), in-service training (67%) and graduate placement (58%).

The skills needed for the 4IR (by international corporates in particular) are going to put particular pressures on first generation students, whose schooling has not provided the foundation for the agility, critique and initiative that these skills imply.

Some organisations gesture at providing an introduction to entrepreneurship, but the main emphasis remains on formal employment. Given the local and global economic context, this may need to change.

Income-generating opportunities of some kind – and competencies to cope in the world of work – are important outcomes if higher education qualifications are to realise their promise of providing both a public and individual goods. Again a working group of NBSPF volunteers developed definitions and methods for counting employment outcomes. This has not been piloted however, but simply offered to those who may be interested.

The difference this makes

This research argues that, like pre-enrolment work, assisting graduates to find work/employment / income generating opportunities of some kind could be increased. While some universities offer this, many do not. This would better serve the social justice framing which informs the founding and work of many of these organisations.

That being said, this is outside the current realm of practice of most BSPs and would be a significant piece of new work. Again this might be better undertaken by working in partnership with organisations already working in this field.

Recommendations

1. Consciously mainstream work-related competencies, at least into the lifeskills programmes, including (but not only) those competencies prioritised by the 4IR literature. (These are included in the eight competencies in the psycho-social measuring mechanisms.)
2. Increase the work readiness component – and include skills in on-line job searches linked to each student's interests.
3. Consider offering – or linking students to – entrepreneurship programmes. Be sure this is their actual interest as being an entrepreneur does not suit everyone.
4. Consider popularising the employment outcomes among BSPs who want to track employment.

14.8 Findings: Increasing the reach

The question is whether the reach of these organisations should – and could – be increased, either under their own auspices or by contracting to HEIs, to NSFAS or DHET. Are they fit for purpose, or are they necessarily a supplementary, boutique offering – or something in between?

The shifts in some donor funding, alongside the advent of funding from renewable energy organisations – plus larger contracts available through B-BBEE and state funds like Skills Development – suggests that the time may be ripe for some scale-up for those BSPs who have an appetite for it, though many are modest, focussed organisations which are not geared for large-scale engagement.

Some questions to be pursued are:

- whether the critical element – one-on-one psycho-social support – can be retained when going to scale;
- what the implications are of working with students who are not fully funded; and
- how selection may be done, if at all.

The difference this makes

It is clearly desirable to be able to provide support that makes a difference to more students – though the form would have to retain those elements that are deemed to making the difference!

Recommendations

1. Pilot support to NSFAS-funded students without any extra / top-up funding and compare the outcome with a control group of those not supported. Attempt to limit the variables (e.g. within a few particular courses at a few selected institutions) so that the finding is relatively stark.
2. Research the prospects of funding from B-BBEE , SED (Socio-Economic Development), ED (Enterprise Development) and SD (Skills Development).
3. Consider working in alliance with one another to obtain larger contracts.

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Sub-reports of this research process (in date order)

- Lessons from COVID19 regarding how wraparound support might be offered. Views of bursary support organisations. July 2020.
- Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring employment outcomes – towards developing common usage / definitions. August 2020.
- Research into wraparound/ holistic support: Survey of alumni. September 2020.
- Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.
- Terms used in the bursary support sector when measuring academic outcomes – towards developing common usage / definitions. November 2020.
- Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary provider support sector. November 2020.
- What is to be measured – and how: Identifying outcomes, indicators and evidence for measuring psycho-social outcomes. 24 March 2021.
- Views of seven universities on the role of bursary support providers in promoting student success. August 2021
- Academic outcomes of students supported by four bursary support provider organisations. October 2021.

APPENDIX A: THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL BURSARY SUPPORT PROVIDERS FORUM

As at January 2021 the 23 members of the National Bursary Support Providers Forum (NBSPF) are as follows.

Those in

- bold are very regular participants.
- bold italics are fairly regular participants.

Organisation	Head Office	NBSPF Contact Person
Afrika Tikkun	Cape Town	Olivia Krok
Allan Gray Orbis Foundation	Cape Town	Chris Maiketso
Career Wise	Johannesburg	Monique Adams
<i>Charlize Theron Foundation</i>	Johannesburg	Laura Parker
Community Chest Western Cape	Cape Town	Belinda Mugwagwa
<i>Cyril Ramaphosa Education Trust</i>	Johannesburg	Chantelle Oosthuizen
Excel at Uni	Johannesburg	Ludwick Marishane
<i>HCI Foundation</i>	Cape Town	Jamala Safari
ISFAP (Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme)	Johannesburg	June Pym
<i>Jakes Gerwel Foundation</i>	Johannesburg	Julian Hewitt
JB Marks Education Trust	Johannesburg	Refilwe Mutloane
Make a Difference Leadership Foundation	Johannesburg	Helen Day
Michael & Susan Dell Young Leaders	Cape Town	Helen Vaughan
Mitchell's Plain Bursary & Role Model Trust	Cape Town	Tamara Esau
Moshal Scholarship Program	Durban	Jodi Bailey
REAP (Rural Education Access Programme)	Cape Town	Russell Davies
SAGEA (SA Graduate Employers Association)	Cape Town	Cathy Sims
Shoprite Bursary Programme		Lungile Koti
<i>Student Village</i>	Johannesburg	Ronen Aires
<i>Students for a Better Future</i>	Cape Town	Halli Manolakos / Deon Newkirk
StudyTrust	Johannesburg	Murray Hofmeyr
The Old Mutual Education Trust	Cape Town	Leonie Sampson
Tomorrow Trust	Johannesburg	James Donald
Umthombo Youth Development Foundation	Durban	Gavin MacGregor
Webber Wentzel Empowerment Trust	Johannesburg	Nondwe Kali

APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF INFORMANTS

Key informant interviews

Directors and senior staff of seven bursary support provider organisations

Name	Organisation
Monique Adams (Director)	Career Wise
Jodi Bailey (Country Director)	Moshal Scholarship Program
Russell Davies (Director) and Emma Francis (Deputy Director)	REAP (Rural Education Access Programme)
Murray Hofmeyr (Director)	Study Trust
Leonie Sampson (Head)	The Old Mutual Education Trust (OMET)
James Donald (Director) and Stacey Rontiris (Head of Programmes)	Tomorrow Trust
Gavin MacGregor (Director)	Umthombo Youth Development Foundation

Produced a 'Sub-Report on Seven Bursary Support Provider Organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff (March 2021)'

Student support directors and practitioners from seven HEIs

Phumlani Mnyango	Durban University of Technology (DUT)
Dave Jenkins Ronelle Plaatjes	Nelson Mandela University (NMU)
Assoc Prof Ermien von Pletzen Dr Riashna Sithaldeen	University of Cape Town (UCT)
Prof Francois Strydom	University of Free State (UFS) and USAf (Universities of SA)
Suzanne Stokes	University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)
Prof Pamela Dube	University of the Western Cape (UWC)
Neo Cindi Mpho Thahale	University of the Witwatersrand

Produced a sub-report on 'Views of seven universities on the role of bursary support providers in promoting student success' (August 2021)

Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion to address three questions was held with six organisational directors on 5 November 20 – comprising

- Career Wise (Monique Adams)
- Moshal Scholarship Program (Jodi Bailey)
- REAP (Russell Davies)
- StudyTrust (Murray Hofmeyr)
- Tomorrow Trust (James Donald)
- Umthombo Youth Development Foundation (Gavin MacGregor)

Experts consulted

Cathy Simms	SAGEA (SA Graduate Employers' Association)
Professor Emeritus Ian Scott	Formerly of the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), University of Cape Town
Sofia Neves(Director) Anja Mulder (M&E officer)	Life Choices – 24 March 2021
Prof Suki Goodman (organisational psychologist)	Head: School of Management Studies UCT - 10 Feb 2021

Working groups

Group	Members
Measuring student success	Angela Biden (for Career Wise) Aluwani Mbuva (Moshal) Russell Davies (REAP) Aliyah Mullajie (Students for a Better Future) Stacey Rontiris (Tomorrow Trust) Gavin MacGregor (Umthombo)
Measuring employment uptake	Angela Biden (for Career Wise) Aluwani Mbuva (Moshal) Russell Davies (REAP) Gavin MacGregor (Umthombo)
Measuring psycho-social outcomes	Ludwick Marishane (Excel at Uni) Helen Day (Make a Difference Leadership Foundation) Jodi Bailey (Moshal) Emma Francis (REAP) Stacey Rontiris (Tomorrow Trust)

Surveys

Alumni

An on-line survey was conducted in July 2020 among alumni of nine of the NBSPP member organisations who volunteered to participate, namely:

Career Wise, HCI Foundation, Make a Difference (MAD) Foundation, Moshal Scholarship Program, REAP, Students for a Better Future, StudyTrust, Tomorrow Trust and Umthombo Youth Development Foundation.

It was designed to assist the sector 'better understand which of our offering to students actually make a difference'.

Bursary support organisations

A survey of bursary support provider organisations was conducted in July 2020 - three months into the first COVID19 lockdowns – to access lessons regarding how wraparound support might be offered. It asked how the experiences of the last few months might affect how organisations offer their services going forward, once they are able to meet students face-to-face again. The responses are regarded as provisional, given that circumstances and universities decisions are unknowable. In addition, some organisations were wanting to consult their students about what works and what does not. Nine organisations participated:

Career Wise, Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation, HCI Foundation, Moshal , The Old Mutual Education Trust (OMET), REAP, Students for a Better Future (SBF) Foundation, Tomorrow Trust, StudyTrust, Umthombo

APPENDIX C:

PROFILE OF KEY INFORMANTS:

BURSARY SUPPORT PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS

The seven organisations interviewed are all well-established and have been operating from between ten and 46 years.⁴⁷⁷

Six of the organisations are not-for-profit, while one (Career Wise) is for profit, working with ‘an extensive client base consisting of corporate clients, some government entities and private clients’. Of the six, one organisation is a CSI initiative based in the company’s Corporate Affairs division as part of being a ‘responsible business initiative’. The rest are trusts and NPOs.⁴⁷⁸

Student profile

While most of the seven organisations work with young people from financially disadvantaged households, a few also include people from the ‘missing middle’ - i.e. from households which earn above the R350 0000 per annum NSFAS limit.⁴⁷⁹

The number of students supported by each of these organisation ranges from 103 to about 2,000 students.

Practices and interests

Their practices are quite highly varied – from who is recruited to how, as well as how and how often, each kind of service is offered. Most organisations mount general (training) events combined with individual attention, some of which is responsive to the students’ individual needs. All organisations are intent on promoting student success which includes completing a qualification in as short a time as possible – but for some success has additional aspects and qualities like workplace competencies.

Where they work

While all seven organisation support students doing undergraduate studies at universities,

- four also support a few **postgraduate** students;
- one also works in **TVET colleges** (StudyTrust)– and one is about to start doing so (REAP); and

⁴⁷⁷ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁷⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁷⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

- three also work in **schools**, with one doing the majority of their work there (Tomorrow Trust - 91,5%).
- Four organisations work at any (state)university (Career Wise, OMET, StudyTrust, Umthombo).
One noted that *'some universities don't seem to have the same status but are doing amazing work'* adding, however, *'that the poor responsiveness of some university's is very hard..... Sometimes students are at really poor universities that are badly managed.'* (OMET) Similarly, one organisation would *'prefer not to fund students at some where quality of the degree is very poor – e.g. Limpopo'* (Umthombo).
- One organisation works only at ten universities, all of which were HWUs and none are universities of technology – their rationale being *'ROI: what is going to get the student the best paid job to break the cycle of poverty'*. (Moshal)
- Another works only at universities in Gauteng and the Western Cape (plus Rhodes) - for operational reasons. (Tomorrow Trust)
- One has reduced the number at which they work from 16 to now only recruiting for six – partly for operational reasons but also as the articulation gap is less accentuated at the six. (REAP)

Desired outcomes

Supporting students to graduate is the common outcome – while facilitating access, ensuring their personal development and their getting 'well-paid jobs' to 'improve their financial situation' is the aim of some. Three of the seven expressly include producing 'proactive' or 'ethically responsible citizens'

Vision and values

The public and individual 'good' of higher education is highlighted in these organisations' visions and values , whose refrain comprises making difference to others, be they family or the broader community.

Focus

Four of the seven organisations focus on supporting particular courses / fields / streams – largely informed by possible employment and donor specifications. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and Health Sciences predominate. Two of these four customise their support offering – the others do not.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

Asked if the changing employment options resulting from COVID19/lockdown might provide an opportunity for an additional/ different focus, two of the specialising organisations said they are monitoring this. One organisation commented that the employment agreement with the Department of Health had already started to flounder before COVID19 – while the other is ‘constantly talking with partners about what jobs are needed’ and noted that ‘visual arts for gaming is a new area; also behavioural economics is needed for 4IR.’⁴⁸¹

Staffing

The staff:student ratio for frontline staff who work directly with students ranges from 1:34 to 1:300.⁴⁸²

Funding

Move some of this details to section 8.1?

They are funded in a variety of ways.

Two do not need to fundraise:

- The CSI initiative is self-funded from company dividends.
- One organisation – Moshal – is solely funded by philanthropist Martin Moshal.

The other four organisations are funded by private donors, corporate donors, foundations and trusts. The implications of the funding arrangements is that two organisations (Career Wise and OMET) are not from ‘the development sector’ and both say that, as a result, they approach their work differently.⁴⁸³

Four organisations are accessing funding through the opportunities provided by the B-BBEE – particularly through SED (Socio-Economic Development), ED (Enterprise Development) and SD (Skills Development). Most find the exacting reporting requirements manageable; and there is a general sense that there is – and will be - a lot of money in this system.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸² Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸³ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸⁴ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

The directors were asked whether they thought the economic situation produced by COVID19 will change the appetite for funding wraparound support – and if so in what ways. The general sense was that funding will become tighter and requests for evidence of the difference that support might make is becoming more frequent; that undergraduate education is now seen to be funded by NSFAS and there is not sufficient appreciation for the difference that student support can make to the (state's) return on investment through improved throughput and student success. Thus this research. ⁴⁸⁵

The directors were asked if they would be continuing with their current levels of service offerings and with their current HEIs, or whether they envisaged any changes. ⁴⁸⁶

The for-profit organisation and the two not-for-profits who do not fundraise all said they will continue with no changes – though the for-profit organisation thought that their clients 'may reduce numbers next year'. She also thought that 'NSFAS will have to allow for repeat years'⁴⁸⁷ which they do not ordinarily do. Two of the four remaining organisations also thought they would continue as usual – although one thought they would have to 'tighten their belts' going forward. ⁴⁸⁸

The other two have reduced/stopped recruiting new students in order to be able to fund the students to whom they were already committed. ⁴⁸⁹

The sector's location in higher education issues

Bursary support providers are necessarily external to university systems and structures. The supports they provide, be they financial or personal is, therefore, invariably supplementary.

Located in this way and based in business and civil society, these focussed organisations are unlikely to be significant role players in affecting *system change* within the higher education sector. As their development initiatives (over and above their financial offerings) are necessarily supplementary to those offered at the various institutions, these are concurrent with existing mainstream cultures and curricula, as flawed as these may be. Their initiatives are about helping young people to succeed *within the current educational structures and systems*.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁵ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸⁶ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Monique Adams, 15 April 2020.

⁴⁸⁸ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁸⁹ Sub-report on seven bursary support provider organisations from interviews with directors / senior staff. October 2020.

⁴⁹⁰ Proposal to DGMT: Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal. 22 February 2020.

That's being said 'while the sector does little (and probably cannot do much) to change the system, it can employ its long-established expertise to add its voice to policy lobbies which it believes will best serve student success.'⁴⁹¹

'As bursary support providers have access to the students within their ambit, they are well placed to reflect on the barriers to success that disadvantage can produce – as well as what support is needed and what makes a / the difference. They are not well placed to represent disadvantaged students, however, nor to convene general consultative fora.'⁴⁹²

This research 'foregrounds the unique access and long, respectable expertise of this sector and the issues on which it is best placed to comment.'⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

⁴⁹² Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

⁴⁹³ Proposal to DGMT: *Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this. A research proposal.* 22 February 2020.

APPENDIX D: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS WHOSE VIEWS ARE GIVEN IN THE VOICES UNITE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT REPORT ⁴⁹⁴

- '3,233 Voices Unite members were surveyed for this report – and around 2/3 are female.'
- 'Most of Voices Unite members (86%) are Black African, and just over half (52%) are aged 18-21 years old.'
- '93% were born in South Africa, and 1/5 speak Zulu as their home language. English is the second most popular home language.'
- 'Just over half of members (54%) live in urban areas, while a quarter are rural.'
- 'Slightly more than half of the members currently reside in Gauteng (51%).
- 1 in 4 members grew up in a different province than where they currently live – but 25% did not grow up in the province in which they currently reside: 5% grew up in Limpopo, 4% grew up in Eastern Cape, 4% grew up in KZN.'
- Household monthly income

I don't know	22%
R1 - R3,200	34%
R3,200 - R6,400	11%
R6,400 - R12,800	9%
R12,800 - R25,600	9%
+R25,600	6%
Prefer not to answer	9%

- 'Most households are headed by the parents (71%). 1 in 10 members are the heads of their homes, and an additional 1/10 are headed by Grandparents.'
- 'Two-thirds (67%) of Voices members are unemployed students, with more than a quarter of these students (27%) being from University of Johannesburg (UJ).'

And

- 'The majority of Voices student members are studying towards a degree (70%), with 87% studying full-time and 82% at undergrad level.'
- 'Voices members are mostly split across nine fields of study, with Accounting (20%), Law (17%) and Education (15%) being most popular.'
- 'Just over ¾ of Voices members who have applied for funding have been successful (76%), with the large majority of these successful applications being through Government funding (84%).' ⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Voices Unite Youth Development Report, p31-37.

⁴⁹⁵ Voices Unite Youth Development Report p 145 - 152.

APPENDIX E:

DIFFICULTIES OF MEASURING PSYCHO-SOCIAL OUTCOMES

A unit in Harvard University's Graduate School of Education focussing on Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) was unequivocal about the difficulties of measuring social and emotional learning (SEL) or psycho-social outcomes:

'Social and emotional learning (SEL) has often been used as an umbrella term to represent a wide array of non-academic skills that individuals need in order to set goals, manage behavior, build relationships, and process and remember information. These skills and competencies develop across our lives and are essential to success in school, work, home, and community. '

*'Generally speaking, this set of skills can be organized into three interrelated areas: **cognitive, social, and emotional**. Importantly, these skills and competencies develop and are in dynamic interaction with **attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets** as well as **character and values**, all of which are fundamentally tied to characteristics of settings.'*

*Throughout its history, ...SEL ... has been defined or characterized in a variety of ways. In some respects, the term SEL serves as an **umbrella for many subfields** with which many educators, researchers, and policy-makers are familiar (e.g., bullying prevention, civic and character education and development, conflict resolution, social skills training, life skills, 'soft' or 'non-cognitive' skills, 21st century skills).*

*However, discussion of this broad non-academic domain **lacks clarity about what we mean and is beset by dilemmas about how best to measure and promote skills in this area.***

*Underlying this challenge, and in some ways compounding it, is the fact that the field more generally is structured around a **large number of organizational systems or frameworks that often use different or even conflicting terminology to talk about a similar set of skills.***⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ EASEL (Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning) Laboratory, Harvard Grad School of Education
Downloaded from https://easel.gse.harvard.edu/taxonomy-project_1 Feb 2021.