

SECTION 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA



Before 1994, government provision of education in South Africa fell under 19 different education authorities, differentiated in terms of both geography and population group. The resourcing of the different departments, and the quantity and quality of services delivered, differed substantially across the 19 authorities. Overall, under-investment in human resource development during this period resulted in low levels of skills that have persisted until today.

In the later years of the apartheid era there were significant increases in government spending on education. The increases were particularly marked for African people, thus somewhat narrowing the disparities in provision. Nevertheless, even by 1994, the differences in spending on education provision under the different authorities were still reflected in wide variations in conditions and quality in different parts of the country.

In education, as in other sectors, the post-1994 period has seen far-reaching policy changes. In particular, education is no longer racially segregated. Other aspects of the new education policy are reflected in documents and legislation such as the White Paper on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa; the Hunter Review Committee Report of 1995; the South African Qualifications Authority Act of 1996; the National Education Policy Act of 1996; the South African Schools Act of 1996; the White Paper on Further Education and Training of 1998 and the Further Education and Training Act of 1998.

The White Paper on Education and Training of 1995 recognises the right of every person to 'basic education and to equal access to education institutions'. It acknowledges that the government has an obligation to promote this right, so that 'all citizens irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to the society'. The Bill of Rights also states that everyone has the right to both basic and further education and that the government 'must take reasonable measures to make education progressively available and accessible'. One of the planks of the new education policy is at least ten years of free and compulsory education for all children in the country.