



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Academics who took part in this study were leaving academic institutions for a range of reasons. How they account for moving has for the purposes of this report been categorised into two sets of practices: the one set is essentially racist and the second set signifies poor leadership and management. However, at points there is much overlap between the two sets of practices.

| Institutional Racism

This was a reason for academics leaving both historically English-medium and Afrikaans-medium universities. The participants labelled the lack of institutional change and certain attitudes, actions and ideologies, racist. The behaviour of certain white colleagues was viewed as anti-transformation and essentially being “in opposition” to building a non-racist environment. Although black persons had been appointed to senior posts there was the assumption that “hard decisions” were still vested with white persons. A theme also emerged (though not dominant) that certain key black appointments were merely a colour change and their ideology in no way threatened core anti-transformation agendas.

| Racism Couched as Liberalism

Liberalism was seen as disguising “covert” racism. Here participants felt that the historically liberal institutions should address issues that black employees were facing and not “hide” behind the liberal history of the institutions, which included opposing apartheid. Certain participants argued that individuals at these institutions had

challenged apartheid and not the institutions themselves. This is probably true if one looks at the history of a person like Frances Ames, who challenged opinion of the medical doctors in the Biko case, but who got very little support from colleagues (see *Sunday Times*, 24 November 2002). The institution made it clear that she was challenging authority in her personal capacity. Many of the participants at lecturer levels felt they were seen as “token” appointees. Persons at professorial and senior management level did not share this point of view.

| Racism in Evaluation and Expectations

Participants at historically white universities had to meet unrealistic goals and levels of performance. They had to be good teachers, counsellors to black students as well as fit in with the institutional context. Simply put, they had to be “super human beings”. If they did not meet these goals their mistakes were blown out of proportion, often with serious consequences.

| Racism/Black Essentialism

Here black experience was homogenised. This usually played itself out by, for example, black persons being given courses that in any way addressed issues relating to blackness. This was irrespective of the person’s specialisation. They were expected to “understand” all black students’ “issues” and were assigned the role of counsellor to black students. Interestingly black persons, irrespective of whether they were classified as African, coloured or Indian, had this experience.

| Poor Management or Leadership

Many of those interviewed talked about problems at the level of institutional leadership as a reason for leaving. These issues were raised by participants who were attached to both historically black and white institutions. The way in which it was raised, however, took radically different forms. The first is linked to institutional racism and with a political discourse focused on transformation. The second is linked to conflicting views about the core functions, professionalism and responsiveness of institutions in the contemporary context.

Participants from the historically black universities seemed to suggest that black universities were unaware that they needed to transform. Much like English universities, they relied on their “struggle credentials”.

Women at the HBUs in particular felt that they were the victims of sexism. The women at the historically white universities felt that racism was intrinsically linked to sexism, but racism seemed to be the overriding variable. Certain of these women at HBUs had opted for Afrikaans-speaking universities as opposed to the liberal English universities. Certain of the participants had in fact moved from a HBU to a liberal university and then to a historically Afrikaans university. Lack of professionalism also led to participants exiting HBUs.

| Responding to the New Environment

Participants were leaving historically Afrikaans-medium universities, as they were more comfortable with the traditional notion of an academic. They were not comfortable with the academic as fundraiser and entrepreneur. Interestingly certain black academics were leaving historically black universities as they felt that these universities had not risen to the challenge of operating within a changing global economy. It emerged that the academics at one technikon who were left behind did not in fact have many options, given their limited qualifications. However, certain academics had left historically black universities and taken key positions at historically white technikons.

| The Political and Private Sphere

Certain participants moved as they were motivated by the national changes taking place within South Africa. In this regard, certain people had joined historically white universities because they saw them as national assets and also believed they could assist with transformation agendas at these institutions.

Regarding the private sphere, there was much movement between institutions as a result of family commitments in the case of both men and women. Other personal reasons for movement between institutions as well as totally out of academia included the need to

test their marketability, increased salaries and being head-hunted for positions.

| Issues not Addressed by Respondents

To say that the higher education landscape is in constant transformation in South Africa is probably an understatement. At the time of these interviews the spectre of certain institutions being merged or closed down, and the radical transformation of higher education, had gained much media attention. The individual institutions had also begun discussions and other initiatives around the issues. However, these imminent changes did not feature in the views of respondents as reasons for moving between institutions. Another factor of major consequence in the tertiary sector that did not seem to impact on the decisions of the participants is the impact of new technology in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

A possible interpretation is that the participants felt that they could deal with these changes, and they therefore did not constitute a major reason for moving. The changing landscape of higher education did surface in discussions but it was “something they had to deal with”. On the other hand they may assume that their skills are needed and would thus not be negatively affected by these changes.