

Government intervention in higher education in South Africa : policy options

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Abstract:

The primary objectives of this study are to consider the theoretical foundations of Public Administration and specifically public policy; the international context within which higher education in South Africa operates; the South African higher education context, policy processes and reasons for government intervention in higher education; how these reasons relate to the process of transforming higher education; the problems that have or could result from such intervention; the implications of mergers and incorporations for higher educational institutions; the state of higher education funding and its implications for institutional autonomy and academic freedom ; the implications of government intervention in higher education in other areas such as the determination of what universities may teach and student admissions; the claim that the autonomy of higher educational institutions is under threat as a result of the extent of government intervention; and how to enhance cooperative governance between universities and the government. The secondary objective is to identify the best policy options that the government and higher educational institutions could adopt to rectify identified problems, ensure a higher education system that meets the developmental needs of the country and protects institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Government intervention in higher education in South Africa aims, among others, at reforming the system of higher education to reflect the new democratic order, setting the higher education system on a path of growth and development and meeting developmental needs. However, the higher education policies that the government established since 1994 have not adequately addressed the challenges of higher education, and the policies in fact contradict themselves in a number of aspects. The policy objectives of the government's intervention in higher education will not be (fully) realised if the negative implications of the intervention measures, such as insufficient funding, the bankrupting of universities, alignment of institutional cultures, infringements on institutional autonomy and academic freedom are not adequately addressed in partnership with the management of higher educational institutions and their governance structures. Furthermore, the outcome of the restructuring of the higher education system depends on the abilities of universities to adequately resolve the challenges they confront and provide sound and strategic management. Copyright

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