Bridging programmes: gain, pain or all in vain

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Abstract
South African higher education institutions find it increasingly difficult to deal with school leavers who are ill prepared for higher education. Institutions are obliged to meet national goals in terms of access and increased pass rates. However, the hard realities of educational backloop are difficult to deal with. In this article an access programme which has now been offered for 10 years is assessed. Although opponents of such programmes are of the opinion that it is not the responsibility of higher education to prepare students, this programme showed that, if done in an innovative way, it has a justifiable place in higher education.

INTRODUCTION
Given the realities of South Africa’s past it may even take decades before the educational backlogs of a great proportion of school-leavers will be perceptible. Hopefully the attempts to transform the entire South African education system will soon start to show indispensible tangibles needed to provide a well-trained work force, representing the South African society. Still, in the short to the medium term innovative strategies and methods will have to deal with the educational backlogs of the millions of school-leavers who are not adequately prepared for higher education, particularly if we would like to achieve the national goals set by the National Department of Education (DoE). Some of these goals will be easier to achieve within the Humanities, whilst our greatest challenge in the years to come will be to obtain greater access to the Natural Sciences, medicine-related professions, Accounting and Engineering the so-called hard options, particularly for Black students.

During the last decade a variety of efforts were made to address the needs of school-leavers who were not ready to enrol for higher education. Some of these students, for example, did not pass their matric examination with exemption. A route often chosen to address the needs of this group is bridging courses, also referred to as foundation or access courses. Up to now, however, the typical bridging programme did not earn subsidy and, in many instances, institutions relied on donor funding to operationalise these programmes. Campaigners of bridging programmes also had to face the critique expressed by their opposers, eg that it is not worth-while the effort and money; that these students are simply not
higher education material; that they will in any case drop out somewhere along the line; that false expectations are created; etc – hence the title of this article. Therefore, for those of us who are advocates of bridging programmes, the obligation is to engage in vigorous research to prove that these programmes are indeed worthwhile and have a place in higher education. Currently there seems a lack in South African research into the achievements brought about by such programmes, particularly for longitudinal or tracer studies.

In this article the authors report on a longitudinal tracer study that was conducted in the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) offered at the University of the Free State (UFS). The programme has now been running for a decade. Data which was gathered since the establishment of the programme is provided on how the students have progressed, dropped out and how degrees have been obtained. In the last place, the authors draw on lessons learned from this longitudinal study for future considerations. First of all, however, it is important to highlight some theoretical conceptualisations on access.

NOTIONS OF ACCESS

The notion of access is a rather thorny phenomenon to define. Particularly after 1994 – in an attempt to be politically correct – it has to a certain extent become a buzzword. For some the word “access” immediately evokes political and emotional responses and it seems difficult to look objectively at access-related issues. The multi-facetedness thereof often complicates the access discourse notion (Steyn 2001). The popularity notion to access, for example, has a number of sources of which the most important has been the serviceability of the ideas of increased and wider access as a means of institutional survival (the issue of numbers); as a source of qualified personnel (the person-power issue); as a way of extending educational opportunity (the equity issue); and as a means of changing teaching and learning in higher education (the catalyst issue). Access awareness has indeed assumed populist proportions across and beyond the educational arena. The problematic side of access, which includes emotional and political dimensions, is more difficult to explain. The public platform offered to practitioners and policy-makers has exposed serious shortcomings in the nature of access discourse and development. Perry (1989:8) explains it in the following way: “The theoretical potential of the idea of access – access to the structures of knowledge embodied in the curriculum – is rendered or reduced to the narrower notion of accessibility: a conception conveyed in the language of openness, flexibility and transferability”. In this more familiar form, institutional barriers to change rather than the social dynamics of change and cultural resistance become the objects of policy and strategy, while educational innovation is made possible without disturbing traditional categories and contents.

Access, along with needs and provision, constitutes a professional ideology which has operated to depoliticise curriculum questions and to pre-empt critical
analysis. This ideological content of access is constructed by the professional need to impute learning needs to greater numbers of people and is thus a need of the system itself. The demand for and access to higher education are some of the fundamental issues in the shaping of higher education policy. The degree of access determines the overall size and character of the system: How much higher education is there and how much is needed? What type and structure of higher education institutions are appropriate in an era of mass participation? Obviously it is impossible to separate access from funding matters. As a result of access complexities, national traditions show various approaches to the issue of access, whilst governments differ in the extent to which they exert power to influence participation in higher education. Despite these differences, access policies – as is the case in many other national higher education policy statements – are based on the principle of general access.

Since 1994, with a new education dispensation in place, various policy initiatives were put on the table to give momentum to access issues (vide NEPI (1992); the NCHE Report (1996); the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (RSA DoE 1996); the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 (RSA DoE 1997); the Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997 (RSA 1997); and the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA MoE 2001)). Many of the debates in the South African higher education, especially in the 1980s, focused on issues surrounding the widening of access for Black students, including Asian, Coloured and Indian students. This should be viewed against the background of the fact that in 1986 the total student enrolment at technikons, for example, was only 7% for students, while 83% were White. In the university sector 23% Black and 64% White students were enrolled. According to the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) Report, *A Framework for Transformation* (1996:32), the enrolments for Africans at universities and technikons increased during the last couple of years at an average annual rate of 14%, compared to an average annual growth of 4% for Whites. The total student enrolments at universities and technikons increased by an annual average of 8% during this period. Much of the growth in the enrolment of African students at universities was due to increasing numbers being registered at historically Black universities, which – as a group – almost doubled their student numbers. Enrolment figures for the two distance universities in South Africa, namely Vista and the University of South Africa, also increased dramatically. In contrast, the growth at historically White universities was extremely limited, with an annual increase of 15% compared to 10% for the historically Black universities. These racial inequalities in access were not only limited to the total number participating in the higher education system, but existed across disciplines. The NCHE Report (1996:34) stresses the fact that South Africa’s output in the natural sciences, engineering and technology is too low, as more graduates are needed in these disciplines, which are referred to as the “intellectual engine of economic development”.

When looking at the inequalities in the enrolment figures at institutions of
higher education during the apartheid era, one must bear in mind that the disadvantaged schooling system in South Africa was (and still is) a grave problem, as the historically Black institutions had to deal with great proportions of disadvantaged students, high student lecturer ratios, and insufficient capacity to cope with the students’ educational needs. Thus it seems as if effective access is not so much at the entry to the higher education system, but in the throughput (the revolving door syndrome). Currently it appears as if South Africa has not yet broken the vicious circle of an inadequate teaching force producing poorly prepared students, which again leads to inadequate teacher production. The challenge is hence to focus on the mismatch between the preparation of students leaving secondary school and the first-year university education. However, cognisance should be taken that a significant difference exists between the demand for access abroad and in South Africa. Abroad the majority of citizens are adequately prepared and more or less equally prepared for higher education, whilst in our context the opposite is true; we have more unprepared than prepared students for higher education.

According to Strydom (1997), there are some drawbacks in addressing this problem with bridging and support programmes. First, as add-on programmes they may permit the rest of the institution, its courses and teaching methods to remain essentially unchanged, since it is somebody else’s job to bridge the gap or provide remediation for the students. Such an endeavour is peripheralised. Second, the attitude is perpetuated that it is only the students who have to be modified, not the institution or its courses. Third, the curricula and the teaching approaches in such programmes are constrained in that they must ultimately fit the students to the existing courses, good or bad, rather than educate the students in the best way possible. Finally, bridging courses and support activities often earn the student no credit toward the degree and do not attract state subsidy. Strydom (1997:4) suggests an alternative of closing rather than bridging the gap: “University course offerings should be expanded to include alternatives appropriate for all the students it accepts [sic]. Such an alternative offers two alternative first-year [sic] courses for each subject: an accelerated course and an extended integrated course. The latter course would be twice the duration and be integrated with academic skills, communication, tutoring, etc. Such a course could close the gap by starting where the students are and teaching them appropriately.” Thus course curriculum and teaching methods are specifically designed for the situation at hand, using current knowledge about the learning/teaching process. The accelerated and extended courses ultimately end up at the same level. They both carry credit and both attract state subsidy. Strydom makes a plea to close the gap by expanding the university courses to include an extended option.

The theoretical foundations expressed in the views of Strydom to a great extent influenced the initiation of the CPP offered at the UFS.
THE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAMME (CPP) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE (UFS)

The CPP originated in the Bloemfontein region of the Free State in January 1993 as the Need for Education and Elevation (NEED) Programme. The necessity for the programme arose due to the above-mentioned imbalances in the school system, which resulted in many deserving students not being able to meet the entrance requirements of universities, technikons and vocational colleges. Ten institutions in the Free State region came together in a consortium to implement the programme. The primary aim of the CPP is to offer students the opportunity to enter generative and vocationally-directed studies at various higher and further education institutions in the region. An equally important aim of the programme is that it addresses, through courses in Skills and Competencies in Lifelong Learning, Academic Language, and Numeracy the students’ wider needs with regard to quality of personal life, study, self-assertiveness, problem-solving and other generic competencies and reading and writing skills. The CPP does therefore not only focus on the academic preparation of learners, but follows a holistic approach towards learner development.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

Students are allowed to enrol for the course if they meet the following criteria: A school-leaving certificate; an M-score of 12 points or more on Grade 12 subject symbols; Grade 12 Mathematics (SG) if they wish to register for Economics or Mathematics. The students study two university-credited subjects as well as two N4 subjects (which are offered at the further education and training institutions in the various regions), namely Computer Practice and Communication. They also follow a compulsory Academic Language Course as well as a Course in Skills and Competencies in Lifelong Learning, which develops a variety of important critical life skills. This Life Skills Course is presented by the Psychology Department of the University. If all four courses are completed successfully, they can continue their studies at either the UFS, the Technikon Free State (TFS) or any vocational college in the province. After some deliberations CPP students have lately also been accepted at other South African universities such as Rhodes University, the University of Port Elizabeth (under certain conditions), the University of the Western Cape, the University of Stellenbosch, the Vaal Triangle Campus of the University of North West, and the University of Pretoria.

In the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences the subjects of Economics, Accounting, Industrial Psychology and Business Management are applicable, whilst English, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology are offered in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences. In the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Chemistry and Mathematics are offered. Further education and training (FET) colleges offer courses such as an Introduction to Information Processing, N4 Computer Practice, an introduction course to communication and
Communication N4. Figure 1 provides information regarding the courses students enrolled in for 2003.

![Pie chart showing course enrolment: Human and Social Sciences 55%, Natural and Agricultural Sciences 15%, Economic and Management Sciences 31%]

**Figure 1**: Course enrolment in the CPP: 2003

From this figure it is clear that the majority of the students still enrol for courses in the Humanities, while only a small percentage (15%) enrol for studies in the Natural Sciences. This is 2% less than the 17% of students who enrolled for studies in the Natural Sciences in 2002. Obviously this is one of the areas that the CPP will have to address in trying to recruit more students who could enrol for courses in the Natural Sciences.

The non-credit-bearing Foundation Course in Lifelong Learning provides for critical cross-field competencies and outcomes as prescribed by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). This course is compulsory for all the students and, although students are assessed in various ways, they receive an attendance certificate at the end of the year. The obtaining of this certificate forms part of the access policy of the UFS for bridging programme students. Students should, in addition, attend at least 75% of the contact sessions of the Foundation Course. The pass mark for college courses is 40% and for university courses 50%. Over the years the CPP has evolved from a lecture-based to a resource-based learning curriculum, which proved to offer an array of educational advantages for the programme. The (deliberate) decision to utilise resource-based learning as a way of instruction and delivery was well informed and based on sound educational values.
RESOURCE-BASED LEARNING (RBL) AS A TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Resource-based Learning (RBL) is utilised for all the courses of the CPP offered at the university. In RBL less emphasis is placed on the presentation of lectures and more on well-developed self-study material (self-instruction packages) with accompanying tutorial support from the co-ordinator and the facilitators. Additional sources like multimedia packages (video, audio), computer-based instruction, tutorials, etc serve as further support and help the students during the learning process.

The term “resource-based learning”, conversely, has several meanings (Gibbs, Pollard & Farrell 1994). As indicated by Beswick (1977), the concept means to some people learning that is closely sequenced, teacher-directed and programmed. Others view it as an open-ended teaching methodology based on enquiry and discovery. The Saskatchewan Education Department (1991) defines RBL as the means by which facilitators assist learners to develop attitudes and abilities for lifelong learning – an aspect the CPP strongly supports. In the context of the CPP RBL has been accepted as a teaching mode which uses printed materials; written, collated or sign-posted by tutors and a substitute for some aspects of teaching and the library. The underlying assumption of this approach is that students will learn through direct confrontation (individually or as a group) with a learning resource or a set of resources and activities connected to them, rather than through the conventional exposition by the teacher (lecturer) (Beswick 1997). Such an approach can easily be used in distance, open and flexible learning. The paradigm shift from a more conventional teaching to RBL demonstrates various hybrid systems, each one having its own emphasis, which fluctuates between class contact and learning resources as a dual mode of delivery (Brown & Smith 1996). These writers also note that teaching and the library are mainly being replaced by teaching technology.

Writers such as Gibbs et al (1994), as well as Brown and Smith (1996) declare that the flexibility of RBL allows students to work at their own pace, in addition to being competent to select relevant material. These writers further argue that the above-mentioned is also an answer to the diversity problem. With regard to testing and tutorial advice, the RBL versions such as self-assessment, computer-based testing, peer tutoring and the employment of graduate assistants are much more economical. Another most valuable attribute of RBL is that, if applied correctly, it provides extensive support for learning activities. Although individual supervision is expensive, a detailed guidance and advice print could serve as a substitute and promote independent learning. In accord with this, Gibbs et al (1994) draw our attention to the fact that a guided independent study is one of the most successful strategies to cut teaching costs, save on lecture time, as well as improve the quality and consistency of learning outcomes.

The success of any access programme depends highly on the support students
in the programme receives. The CPP is no exception. For this purpose a counsellor was appointed to the CPP in each subregion to assist students with academic, career and personal problems, as well as with their future career planning. The counsellor also advises students regarding the courses available at the university, technikon and other higher and further education institutions and informs the students on subject requirements and the closing dates for application to certain courses. Consequently, certain ground rules for the counselling service were set by the programme managers, eg that students may not visit a counsellor during class time and that all appointments are made at the Programme Office. In addition, to honour the principles of RBL and to adhere to good teaching practices, the student/facilitator ratio is limited to no more than 35/40:1.

**Gender distribution**

In terms of gender distribution, female enrolments outnumber male enrolments. Another interesting fact is that, in studying throughput to the University and the number of degrees achieved, females outperform their male counterparts by far. Figure 2 provides information on the gender representation of the CPP.

**Gender distribution: University-credited courses 1993–2003**

![Gender distribution chart](image)

**Figure 2:** Gender distribution in the CPP

**ENROLMENTS AND SUBREGIONS INVOLVED**

Although the programme started in Bloemfontein, the need for such a
programme quickly led to the Programme expanding to Bethlehem in 1998; to Kimberley in 1999; to Welkom and Sasolburg in 2000; to Oudtshoorn in 2001; to Aliwal North in 2002; and to Qwaqwa in 2003. Since 1993 6 288 students have made use of the CPP and currently 1 650 students are enrolled. Students attend classes at the Motheo FET College (Bloemfontein and Hillside View Campuses) in Bloemfontein, the Maluti FET College in Bethlehem, the Northern Cape Technical College in Kimberley, the Goldfields FET College in Welkom, Flavious Mareka College in Sasolburg, the South Cape College in Oudtshoorn, and Ikahala Public FET College in Aliwal North. Recently the CPP was also implemented as an Extended Programme at the Qwaqwa Campus of the UFS where 372 students registered. If successful, they can continue their studies at either the UFS, the TFS, FET colleges or one of the vocational colleges. Table 1 gives an indication of how students from the CPP have registered at the participating institutions since 1992:

The decrease in enrolment from 1998 may be attributed to the reduction of the Programme to three courses after expanding to seven courses between 1994 and 1997; the exclusion of the N4 Business and Engineering Courses from the programme as from 1997; as well as a national decline in enrolment at higher education institutions. The latter factor is ascribed to a lack of finances and the proliferation of private colleges.

Since 1994 the Provincial Health Department has allocated 10% of the annual first-year intake to students who successfully completed the bridging course to honour their commitment to accommodate deserving students from deprived circumstances.

The two Nursing Colleges did not accommodate any first-year nursing students due to financial constraints, which resulted in the termination of the nursing bridging course. There has been a decrease in the number of successful CPP students who enrolled at the TFS since 1999 due to the implementation of the TFS’s own access programme called the “Context Advancement Programme (CAP)”. 

During 2003 the CPP experienced a rapid growth in student numbers from 546 in 2002 to 717 in 2003. The newly-formed partnership between the UFS (the CPP) and the “National Institute for Higher Education” in the Northern Cape resulted in an increase in student numbers in Kimberley from 30 in 2002 to 150 in 2003. The availability of State financial aid to students contributed to the increase in student numbers.
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<td><strong>TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAMME:</strong></td>
<td>416</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>1 153</td>
<td>1 673</td>
<td>1 736</td>
<td>1 578</td>
<td>1 364</td>
<td>1 355</td>
<td>1 285</td>
<td>1 351</td>
<td>1 497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUCCESS RATES

To have an objective view of the success rate of students in the CPP it should be viewed against the admission requirement policy for successful CPP students who wish to continue their studies at the UFS. Such students have to pass one of the two compulsory university first-year courses (except in Natural and Agricultural Sciences where they have to pass both Mathematics and Chemistry), both N4 courses in Computer Practice and Communication, and obtain 75% attendance in the Course in Skills and Competencies in Lifelong Learning and the Academic Language courses. Figure 3 portrays the success rate of the students who enrolled for university-credited courses since 1993.

![Success rate of university-credited course students: 1993 2002](image)

After applying the selection criteria at the end of each academic year, the annual pass rate for the Programme varies between 55% and 59%, with the exception of 66% in 1993 (which was a smaller group of intake) and 48% in 1998. This figure is exceptionally good if one bears in mind that approximately 90% of the students in this Programme do not have matriculation exemption and their M-Score only varies between 12 and 27 points. A reason for this success is, among others, the emphasis on the “value-added courses” and the methodology of resource-based learning. Another interesting observation from the data is that approximately 60% of the students who passed the bridging year continued their studies either at the technikon or at the university.
Enrolments after the CPP year

Since 1992, 46.8% (1274) of the students who commenced their studies in the Career Preparation Programme have subsequently enrolled at the UFS. Approximately 15% (515 students) enrolled at the TFS.

![Pie chart showing enrolment distribution]

**Figure 4: Student distribution after the Career Preparation Programme year**

This figure clearly indicates that most students prefer to continue their studies at the university. The Programme has a full-time counsellor who assists students with the selection of subjects for the following year. The counsellor also monitors the academic performance, the outcomes of psychometric and aptitude tests, and conducts in-depth interviews with each student.

After successful completion of the bridging year, many students also continue their studies at nursing colleges, FET colleges, colleges of education, etc. It is impossible to obtain student performance information from these institutions because they do not accommodate longitudinal studies in students’ performance. Only the UFS and the TFS at least try to do a basic form of longitudinal studies on students entering the institutions.

The “failure” rate of students entering the bridging programme since 1992 has varied between 47% and 52%. Approximately 1% of these students repeat the bridging year. Though the failure rate for 1999 was only 44% after the curriculum had even been better adapted to support students without compromising academic standards in any way, many students do not continue their studies after the bridging
year due to a lack of funding. Unfortunately, no exact figures are available in this regard.

Success rate for Career Preparation Programme university courses

Owing to the implementation of this longitudinal study at the UFS, it is possible to provide the students’ success rate in each of the three faculties involved on an annual basis.

Table 2: Success rates for university courses for 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Students passed</th>
<th>Failed or studies suspended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic and Management Sciences</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human and Social Sciences</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>249 (54.69%)</td>
<td>241 (45.30%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 provides evidence that more students in Natural Sciences fail the appropriate courses (Mathematics and Chemistry) than those who are successful. This can be ascribed to the huge gap between school and university level courses in Natural Sciences and because students have to pass both bridging courses in this option.

Degrees obtained

The percentages of the UFS intake from the bridging programme who have obtained degrees so far are 50% in 1992; 20.5% in 1993; 27.3% in 1994; and 6.6% in 1995. Therefore, of the 1992–1995 UFS intake, 26% of the students coming from the bridging programme have obtained degrees so far. Since 1996 a total of 610 degrees have been awarded to students who commenced their studies in the CPP. Of these, 43 were honours degrees and one a Master’s degree, while one medical doctor qualified at the end of 2001. Without the CPP, these 610 would not have obtained their degrees.

Data obtained attests to the fact that the majority of degrees were awarded in Social Sciences (283), followed by Humanities (131), Economic and Management Sciences (91), and Natural Sciences (45). This evidence also demonstrates the underlying philosophy that the inclusion of only 11 core strategic subjects in the study package of the CPP still enables students to enter into any available study option of their choice after thorough career counselling during the bridging year.

In studying statistics from the Technikon it became apparent that most successful students enter studies at the TFS in Economic and Management Sciences, followed by studies in Applied Sciences. The value of accommodating the CPP in the FET sector, which enables successful students to also enter for studies at the Technikon, is demonstrated by the above graduation numbers.

Continued studies in the further education sector

Only approximately five percent of the student intake continue their studies in the FET sector, which is unfortunate. This situation will only be addressed adequately if the status of further education and applicable national and local programme planning is attended to in the new dispensation that is now being established for FET institutions.

INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOMES

This Programme has not only influenced the future and lives of students in the province. The UFS was also transformed at an increased rapid rate due to the influence of this Programme and the growth of Black student numbers. Previously classes were only presented in Afrikaans and this Programme made the need for classes in English essential. This has led to the hastening of official acceptance of English as a second medium of instruction. The University and the staff were also prepared for the challenges of a multicultural student population by the inclusion of this Programme and invaluable information regarding learning and development of disadvantaged students has been obtained. The deficiencies of standardised tests and this Programme exposed current selection methods. The UFS was the first university to be granted permission to do away with matriculation exemption as an absolute hurdle for admission to higher education, as this Programme provides better selection mechanisms and procedures for admission. The associated FET institutions were also greatly influenced by the inclusion of these students, a factor which sped up their transformation and promoted their status in the community.

This Programme has illustrated the problems and advantages of partnerships among institutions. This was one of the reasons why the Free State Higher and Further Education and Training Trust (FSHFETT) was established. The Programme is being developed in terms of the aims of the Trust in co-operation with other institutions in the FET (technical colleges) and higher education sectors (universities, technikons, and the then colleges of education).

The necessity for a developmental programme during undergraduate studies at the University itself was exposed. This has led to the planning of foundation courses as part of undergraduate studies at the University. The existing foundation course in the CPP is being adapted to serve the NQF level 4 in further education.
The necessity to revise curricula in the courses in this Programme has not only contributed to the revision of the curriculum content of these courses, but has also influenced all of the other disciplines at the University. Traditional lecturing has proved to be inadequate and has been supplemented by open and resource-based learning.

ACHIEVEMENTS

It is important to mention that positive feedback has been received from numerous experts in the field of access and bridging programmes. The South African Association for Academic Development was commissioned to prepare a national profile of academic development and bridging programmes: issues, trends, and policy considerations. In this report the following is stated: “The OFS Career Preparation Programme is an exception in that it does cater for large numbers of students and uses local institutions maximally in a post-secondary regional framework. Where regional coherence is possible from a geographical perspective and the availability of a range of institutions (ie technical colleges, technikons, and universities) as is the case in Natal and the Western Cape, the OFS model can be duplicated effectively.” The Programme also featured prominently in the Sunday Times Special Supplement on Higher Education (1998:8) as one of South Africa’s most innovative projects at education institutions. The Programme was selected as one of eight initiatives chosen “on the basis of their innovative and demonstrable contribution towards higher-education policy goals”. It was also mentioned that they had selected the programme because “the regional co-operation between educational institutions in the province is one of the most advanced of all such initiatives in the country”.

According to Griessel (1999:45), who did an in-depth investigation into access programmes in South Africa – including the CPP – the achievement of a systemic approach to equity and redress by the CPP has to be acknowledged: “It fits the national frameworks created by the NQF/SAQA and Education White Paper and legislation, and the CPP is firmly conceptualised and implemented within these national policy guidelines.”

Nevertheless, some important challenges remain to be addressed according to national changes and demands in access policy for the higher and FET sectors. More specifically the CPP has to:

- accommodate the new prospective admission policy for higher education, based on a future FET certificate, effectively;
- provide for the educational needs of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) candidates; and
- continue and improve its role as pilot programme to establish academic transformation in academic departments at the university itself, based on the successful implementation of the resource-based learning methodology in university courses.
CONCLUSION

As a result of the co-operation among institutions in programmes, there is no doubt that this it is at least one of the most cost-effective selection, development, and bridging programmes of its kind in South Africa. In revisiting the question posed by the title of this article, it can be concluded that – although the CPP has had growing pains – the gains exceed them by far. This programme is certainly not in vain in a time of widening access to historically disadvantaged school-leavers.

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