

**An Evaluation of the Impact of  
SSACI's Support to the**

**Rural Education Access Project,  
2003-6**

by

**Strategy Works**

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## Preface

It is unusual to receive such elegantly straightforward terms of reference for an evaluation. And even more unheard of to sign them a three full months before the deadline. So often, evaluations of projects are prepared in undue haste, resulting in compromises to the richness of potential analysis. The information generated by an evaluation needs to percolate in the minds of the evaluator and members of the project being evaluated. SSACI's foresight, both in terms of preparing for this evaluation, and in terms of seeking out an opportunity to make an impact on rural access to higher education at a critical time, is highly commended.

Similarly, REAP greatly eased the entry point into this evaluation by explicitly asking me to play the role of a "critical friend" when they heard that I had been contracted by SSACI. Having been a student advisor at CEAP in 1996/7 (the Catholic Educational Aid Programme, one of two bursary organisations amalgamated to form REAP in 2001), I have my own history with this organisation. This has deepened through my ad-hoc involvement in the student tracking project since 2004 and my facilitation of REAP's 2005 strategic thinking workshop. There is real benefit in evaluating a programme in the context of an ongoing, constructive relationship. In my first meeting about this evaluation with Glenda Glover, REAP's director, she invited me to "... be harsh with us; there's a lot for us to learn". Evaluators are not often welcomed with such openness. There has been a curiosity from all the REAP staff, throughout this process, about what they are getting right *and* wrong at this relatively early stage of their organisational development: REAP celebrated its fifth birthday this year.

The willingness of stakeholders to make time for evaluation interviews is often a good indicator of their interest and investment in a project. We interviewed 65 people, all of whom gave their considered feedback with great goodwill; many responded with alacrity to the opportunity to contribute ideas. It was a privilege to interact with them and harvest some very illuminating quotes, peppered throughout through this report.

My sincere thanks to Ditend Tesh for his quiet and unassuming thoughtfulness which often made clear what I wasn't seeing, and Pozisa Buso whose great skill with people and her systematic, attentive approach to her work will take her a long way in her new chosen profession as a nurse. I have learned a lot from their contributions to this evaluation and the final product has much greater depth as a result.

**Rebecca Freeth, StrategyWorks**  
**October 2006**

## Executive Summary

SSACI provided funding to REAP from 2003 to 2006 to support 58 students through their technikon studies. This support included a modest financial package intended to promote access (such as registration fees, transport from the student's rural home to campus, as well as some money for meals, books and medical expenses) as well as direct support from a REAP student advisor. The latter component comprised access to a NSFAS<sup>1</sup> loan, regular telephonic contact (initially on a monthly basis for first-year students), three face-to-face meetings per year, academic monitoring and support, workshops and referrals to other support services where necessary. This was commensurate with the multi-faceted support available to all REAP students.

SSACI brought influence to bear on the area of job preparation skills, information and support. At the onset of this funding period, REAP was preoccupied with issues of access for first-year students from rural areas, and was beginning to absorb the implications of continuing support beyond a student's first year - once it had become clear that a single year of support would not generate sufficient momentum to propel the student through their full qualification, as initially intended. SSACI's interest in graduates getting jobs challenged REAP to pay more attention to the exit end of the programme. This evaluation demonstrates that significant progress has been made in this respect, but not as quickly or as thoroughly as SSACI had expected.

This points to two core issues: a) what is foregrounded for different parties to a shared project at particular points in time; and b) the often-unstated influence of underlying paradigms. In this instance: Equity of access to higher education for rural matriculants versus the instrumental role of tertiary education as a vehicle towards a job in the formal sector. REAP's rights-based focus, informed by its Catholic origins, has started to move towards a more integrated approach in parallel with the movement of its first cohorts into the job market. This remains a tension in terms of competing priorities within the service and in terms of funders' priorities, especially those of corporate South African funders. REAP celebrates well-rounded students who have adapted to urban life and a myriad obstacles to academic achievement, while the gaze of many funders, SSACI included, is on their success in securing a permanent job. This was a key issue at REAP's strategic thinking workshop in 2005 and it has been interesting to watch REAP engage more vigorously with these challenges since, prompted by the results of the tracking studies and interactions with current and potential funders. There is a significant shift taking place as a result.

REAP provides a finely-tuned and comprehensive service to students, responsive to the needs of rural youth and able to provide individualized attention, particularly in times of crisis which can precipitate drop-out from tertiary studies. Students, funders, higher education institutions and NSFAS rate this service highly. However, it cannot be assumed that this is sufficient for each student to graduate and get a job. There are too many other factors at stake, as well as a context of very low throughput rates in the higher education sector. Some of the factors, over which REAP has little influence, include problems with securing in-service training, the impact of ill-health and pregnancy on students, and serious graduate employment blockages in South Africa. REAP's ethos and its services to students do, however, provide a crucial piece of the skills set of REAP graduates, often absent in other students, in terms of self-reliance and self-awareness lifeskills, deemed crucial to the capacity of an individual to carve a career path over the longer term.

46% of the SSACI cohort have graduated after four years of studying, compared with 32% of the national technikon cohort<sup>2</sup> over the same timeframe. Further analysis shows that students supported by REAP are much less likely to drop-out (26% versus 58%) and much more likely to

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1 National Student Financial Aid Scheme: A government-funded, low interest-bearing loan to students in higher education who meet the academic and means-tested financial criteria for support.

2 This figure excludes distance students registered at Technikon SA. The inclusion of these students lowers the graduation rate to 19%

sustain their studies (over a prolonged period) than their national counterparts. Eleven former students are currently employed, with most finding work in areas directly related to their area of study. The graduate employment rate is disappointing, reflecting national trends and dynamics. This poses some key questions to REAP in terms of its role and its contribution to partnerships.

How is this data to be interpreted? As with all complex development programmes, there are many readings. It is undoubtedly true that the envisaged project outputs were not realized. It is also true that students with potential but no financial means were enabled to access universities of technology and that despite major academic backlogs, outstripped the national cohort, which represents youth from the best schools as well as rural youth.

REAP has gained important lessons from this cohort, and has done so consciously. Future cohorts will benefit from these insights. The programme is a more relevant, more adaptive model in 2006 than in 2003 and with the quality of the leadership in place at REAP, will continue to evolve thoughtfully and strategically.

Both SSACI and REAP invested considerable time in negotiating this project agreement. The contract is a clear one, with more specific inputs and outputs than many similar agreements. Both parties would have benefited from an ongoing engagement about development paradigms as there is real merit in both models and great possibility in bringing the strongest components of each to bear on the project, but also possibility for misunderstanding.

Critical questions for the organisation at this stage of its development relate to coverage and capacity, sustainability, specialist services, information management, better measures of academic potential and more strategic means of helping students to realise it.

It gives great confidence that the majority of these questions have been posed by REAP staff in recent years, and live actively in the minds of the Board and the people closest to implementation of the project. When evaluations raise a previously un-considered set of questions, they risk failure of engagement by the organisation. But when an evaluation builds on existing momentum to resolve some of the paradoxes - inherent in all development work – of a programme, there is potential for real value to come of the exercise. As British quantum physicist, David Bohm, suggested, the complex issues in our world are not problems to be solved, but paradoxes to engage with, over time.

## Summary of findings

This report comprises findings in two formats. The first is a **summary of evidence in terms of the contract** between SACCI and REAP. This takes as its base the “expected activities and outcomes” listed in the original agreement between the two parties for the period 2003 to 2006. The second is a much fuller report of the evaluation findings that both throw light on the contract between SACCI and REAP, and also provide greater depth on qualitative and contextual aspects of the latter's work. All the points raised in this summary of findings are discussed in far greater detail in the remainder of this report.

The agreement between REAP and SSACI states the following primary objective:

*To provide three-year access and support for 58 Technikon students from rural communities in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and North West provinces, and ensure that at least 40 of them find jobs related to their fields of study within six months of graduating.*

In order to meet this objective;

*Students will be selected by REAP on the basis of their previous academic record, the likely match between their courses of study and employment opportunities in their localities, and an in-depth interview with REAP fieldworkers*

*Students will be enrolled for [approved] three-year courses at [approved] technikons – the agreement listed 30 approved courses and the institutions at which they could be studied*

*REAP will conduct a support programme for students, comprising:*

- monthly counselling and progress monitoring sessions via toll free telephone line*
- two face to face consultations per year*
- one academic skills workshop per year*
- two lifeskills workshops per year*
- two work placement / employment preparation workshops.*

*Other organised activities will include participation in peer support groups, assistance with medical problems, institutional liaison for maximum integration and support. Students will be tracked during and after their studies.*

This evaluation is founded on four key questions which will be addressed in summary format below and followed with a brief interpretation of the findings in terms of the higher education context, REAP's organizational capacity, and the original contract.

## **Did the implementers (REAP) do what they said they were going to do?**

Summary of findings:

- ◆ **Recruitment and selection:** REAP did recruit 58 students for funding – 30 female and 28 male, and all of them attended technikon. There was a precise match with the 31 courses listed in the agreement and the institutions at which they could be studied, with one exception<sup>3</sup>. However, only 50 of the 58 came from provinces stipulated in the contract. REAP consulted with SSACI in some cases, but not all.
- ◆ **Access:** In addition to the support services detailed below, REAP disbursed financial support to students over the three years (an average of R5735 per student in 2004, and R5294 per student in 2005) under the “access package”. This included registration fees, contributions towards accommodation and meal costs, technical equipment, travel and occasional medical support. This was done in line with the contract.
- ◆ **Support services** were provided along the general lines stipulated by the contract – with some caveats:
  - Registers of attendance at workshops were not kept consistently, making verification difficult,
  - After fewer initial workshops, REAP increased the number and range of workshops such that it exceeded the requirements of the funding contract by 2005 and 2006
  - Telephonic and face to face interviews were conducted according to the contract stipulations. From 2004, REAP reported on the frequency and content of both face to face and telephonic sessions in its 6 monthly reports to SSACI.
  - REAP instituted informal peer support systems for student, linking senior students with first-years.
  - Medical assistance was provided on request
- ◆ **Institutional liaison** was conducted with the technikons attended by this student group, even through the many mergers of these institutions.

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3 The contract linked radiography studies exclusively with the Durban Institute of Technology (DUT, now DIT). Two SSACI students studied radiography, one at DUT and one at Witwatersrand Technikon (now part of the University of Johannesburg, or UJ). UJ was a nominated institution for other courses, not radiography.

- ◆ **Basic cohort tracking** information was provided to SSACI on an annual basis in addition to individual student progress reports and case studies.

## Did they do it well?

Summary of findings:

- ◆ **Selection and recruitment:** Students were selected according to academic merit as well as personality traits as identified in the network of recruiters. It is impossible to assess whether other means of recruitment would have been more effective in terms of academic or employment outcomes, but funders who support other, similar programmes rate REAP's recruitment system highly.
- ◆ **Access :** financial disbursements were made timeously and efficiently. The combination of these disbursements with loan access in first year (and thereafter, if necessary) is highly effective. Some students report financial constraints despite this assistance, which is small relative to overall costs of education. The scope of this assistance was within overall budget in terms of the contract.
- ◆ **Support Services:** Students and academic institutions reported high quality and timeous interventions in workshop and one-to-one activities. The quality of the support services were clearly effective in supporting some students through periods in which they were at risk of dropping out of their studies. The quality of the support – particularly the academic elements – was compromised by the range of subjects and institutions of the recipient students, as well as the timing of their work practicals.
- ◆ **Liaison:** The quality of the liaison was reported as high across many of the institutions, and was effective in dealing with difficult bureaucracies during registration periods. Difficulties with liaison were linked to complex merger processes at the institutions over the period under review.
- ◆ **Tracking:** The information produced by tracking was not of a consistently high standard, particularly in terms of tracking the progress of students who had left the support programme. Reporting against the contract could have been improved with longitudinal tracking. This has been instituted in the latter part of the contract.

## Have those inputs led to the desired outputs?

Summary of findings:

- ◆ **Completion of study:** There were no explicit targets for the number of students that would graduate during the contract period. However, given the targets for post-graduation employment, the contract implied that most students would graduate successfully and within the stipulated three year period. This was not the case. Of the 58 selected, 15 dropped out (26%), 19 graduated (33%), 9 are about to graduate (16%) and the remaining 15 (26%) are still studying. A total of 46% of the cohort graduated after 4 years of study.
- ◆ **Employment:** Of the 19 graduates, 11 have secured employment while another two have had temporary work. This outcome falls far short of the 40 people that the contract between SSACI and REAP stipulated should be employed, constituting an overall employment rate of 19% of the cohort. However, those that have graduated have quite successful in securing employment. This is 58% of the graduating cohort, or 68% when those with temporary employment are also taken into account. The overall employment outcomes of this cohort can only viably be assessed in a year or two once the current and future graduands enter the job market.
- ◆ **Area of employment:** The 11 graduands who are employed are, with one exception, employed in their area of study.

Interpretation of findings:

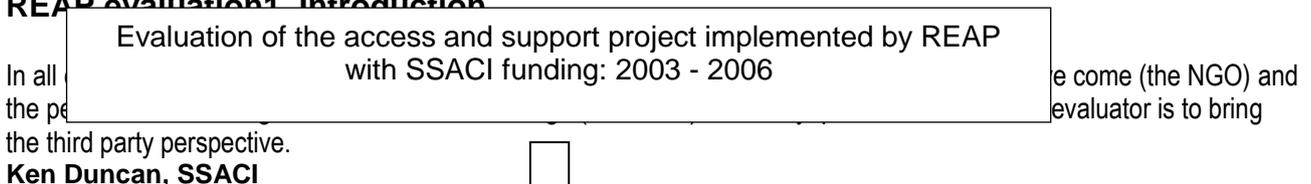
- ◆ **National higher education sector:** There can be no doubt that the South African higher education sector is in crisis. The SSACI / REAP cohort performed much better than the national average for university of technology students. Whereas nationally, 58% of students drop out, 26% of the cohort did. While only 32% of students graduate from universities of technology within 4 years across the country, a much higher 46% of the cohort have graduated or are on track to graduate within this year. This supports the conclusion that the REAP / SSACI intervention has been successful in supporting students to access technical study, and graduate successfully. Less than half the national proportion of students dropped out in the SSACI cohort. The proportion of students still studying is difficult to interpret. While 10% of students are still at universities of technology after 4 years across South Africa, the figure is 28% for the SSACI cohort. If a large proportion of these students are able to graduate in the next year, this can be considered a success.

**What can SSACI and REAP learn from this experience?**

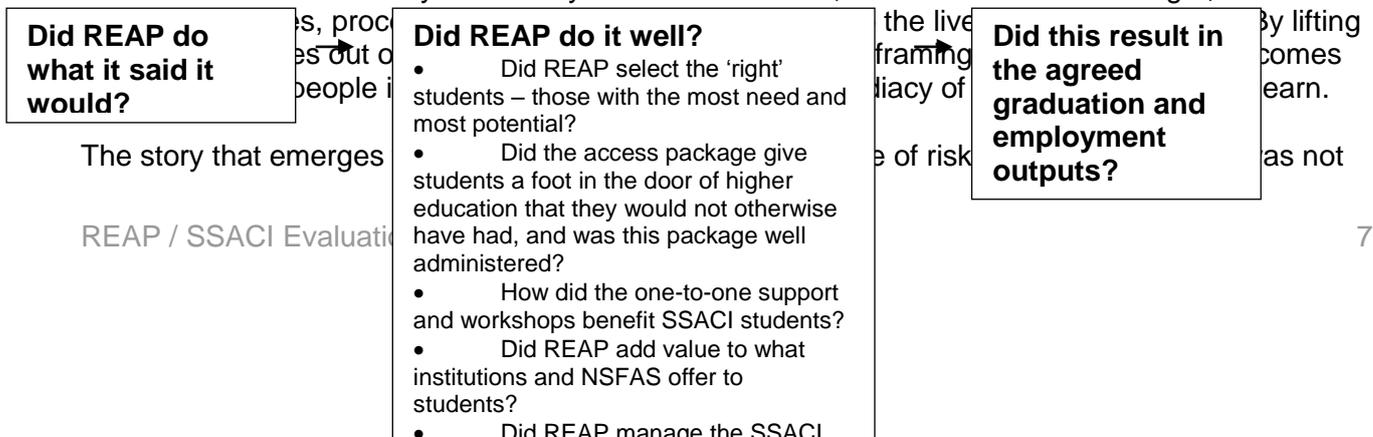
Summary of findings:

- ◆ **Appropriate output measures:** The targets for the outputs of this contract were unrealistic given the national higher education throughput rates. Much of this data was not available at the time of contracting.
- ◆ **Selection and recruitment:** Matric grades are not a good predictor of tertiary education success, and it will be useful to engage with current studies and alternative assessment methods on this issue.
- ◆ **Subject and institution choice:** Academic support to students was compromised by the wide range of subjects and institutions taken by this cohort. Improved course choice and a smaller number of institutions might make the intervention more successful.
- ◆ **The access and support package:** The package has been proved to be most successful in two areas; providing access to tertiary education where there is no other means to enter an institution of higher education, and in providing a safety net for students who would otherwise drop out due to a crisis, whether financial, social or academic.
- ◆ **Tracking and reporting:** That a standardised and consistent tracking process is both necessary, and resource intensive.
- ◆ **Programme planning:** As a result of the evaluation findings, REAP has started to engage in a series of planning exercises which are exploring the following issues:
  - ◆ Interventions to address higher education readiness and course and career choices for rural students,
  - ◆ Reducing the number of higher education institutions which have developed graduate recruitment programmes,

Advocacy for rural students in higher education with NSFAS and the DOE **flow chart of the REAP evaluation1. Introduction**



An evaluation describes a particular end... or, and then seeks to assign a value to it. But an evaluation also tells a story. The story creates coherence, with the benefit of hindsight, out of the



The story that emerges  
REAP / SSACI Evaluati

framed as risky, but there were many unknowns. None of the key individual players, except Lynette Harding, had much experience of higher education (HE) at the time of developing this joint project. REAP was a new organisation, albeit standing on the shoulders of two experienced bursary providers, with a new director, and new financial manager. SSACI committed itself to three-year funding support to a cohort of students selected from REAP's first and second full intake groups; REAP had not yet established a track record of seeing cohorts through the full HE process. SSACI's primary interest was in graduate employment, of which REAP had no experience. The partners set stringent outputs when there was very little available data, either on national throughput rates at technikons or on employment rates upon graduation. If the partners had known then what subsequent national research has revealed about these rates, would they have set the bar so high?

### **1.1. Purpose of evaluation**

This evaluation is intended to fulfill an accountability function at the end of the project period. It is also expected to inform decisions by REAP about replicating this model, and by SSACI to continue supporting it. Most importantly, it will have achieved its purpose if it contributes to an improvement of the programme and a deepening of its impact on issues of rural access to higher education. Candid comments have been included on the basis that this is an internal document with the aim of generating learning and further discussion about both the work and the partnership.

### **1.2. Methodology**

REAP works at the cross-section of the schooling, higher education and employment sectors, all of which are under-performing and in flux. It was decided that a literature review should be fairly extensive, to do justice to the backdrop to the findings of this evaluation. A desk review of REAP reports and publications was also conducted (see reference list for details).

The data-gathering phase comprised 65 evaluation interviews, about half of which were face-to-face. REAP staff and board members were key to this enquiry and participated in two focus group discussions as well as on a one-to-one interviews. Staff at HE institutions attended by 80% of the SSACI cohort were interviewed, as was Allan Taylor, CEO of NSFAS. Significant time (21 hours of telephone work) was invested in tracking down students for interviews. The amount of problems encountered in this regard gave insight into the difficulties experienced by REAP student advisors in maintaining contact with students. Although many students have cell phone numbers, communication problems include lack of electricity in rural homes to charge telephone numbers, lack of money to buy vouchers and lack of signal in some remote areas.

The evaluation team conducted qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. Where available, quantitative findings were compared with similar data to aid interpretation. Substantial use has been made of direct quotes from interview transcripts so that the voices of the evaluation participants can be heard.

## **2. Context**

### **2.1. External context: Poverty, inequality and unemployment**

There is a rights-based argument for equity of access to higher education by rural youth, and an economic argument. Many South African commentators (such as Habib, Legum and Bond) are critical of GEAR, South Africa's macro-economic policy framework, which attempts to respond to incompatible demands for redress and demands of a changing global economy. This both opens and closes the doors to learning for poor South Africans. Educational policy has struggled with a parallel set of competing priorities. Vally (2006) notes that "Observers of higher education planning

in South Africa over the past decade, despite numerous White Papers, commissions and committees, should be forgiven their bewilderment. Higher education policy has failed, often on its own terms, as bureaucrats renege on the lofty ideals of numerous papers and scramble to reconfigure the landscape – now suggesting a cap on students, then revising this, then suggesting a “differentiated” university system.<sup>4</sup> He goes on to comment that “... access to institutions is defined largely through market-driven notions, fiscal parsimony, corporate values and corporate planning frameworks.” Vale suggests that “... the higher education section has been at the mercy of a finance ministry largely unsympathetic, until this moment, to its role in the economy.<sup>5</sup>”

Van den Berg writes that education is the most appropriate route to reducing income inequality in South Africa. He identifies education as “the one factor amenable to policy intervention... to reduce earnings inequality through more equal educational attainment and quality” (2003:2). However, the relationship between attaining a tertiary qualification and entering the formal economy with a permanent, secure job is far from linear, as thousands of young unemployed South African graduates can attest. South Africa is challenged to, at a minimum:

- a) produce school-leavers who have had sufficient exposure to a variety of intellectual and technical skills to know what they're good at and have the material resources and self belief to pursue their potential;
- b) match these skills to the needs of the economy, and provide education and training opportunities beyond school to develop these skills;
- c) grow *and* develop the formal economy so that it can accommodate a growing labour force;
- d) pursue macro-economic policy which can tackle unemployment in the long term.

### 2.1.1 Schooling

Van den Berg (2004) notes that significant shifts in the allocation of resources and deployment of teachers have not had the expected impact on academic performance at schools. “The overall performance of South African (school) students is near the worst in the world in the important areas of numeracy and mathematics, and is not much better in others”. (in Brown, IJR: 2004). South African learners attained the third lowest results in grade 6 reading comprehension and mathematics when compared with ten other Southern African countries, despite higher per capita expenditure than any of the other countries<sup>6</sup>. Matric results continue to reflect historical disadvantage, with African students at former DET (Department of Education and Training) schools faring worst. In 2003, 11.4% of this subgroup gained matric endorsement compared to 51.7% of their white counterparts. The average number of years of schooling completed by 20-24 year olds in South Africa increased only marginally from an average of 9.66 years during the period 1993-1995, to 9.99 years a decade later.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation concluded that “Despite some progress, the degree of change towards producing a better-educated workforce with more mathematically skilled members is disappointing, given the level of resource investment” (Brown et al, 2005:28). A document on access to higher education (HE) produced by the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) in 2001 noted that “Despite small signs of resurgence the school system is affected by a culture of poor quality, differing standards and unequal resource bases. Income gaps continue to add to the level of disadvantage which burdens most students exiting the school system. Poor articulation with the higher education system is another structural fault line.” (2001:2)

### 2.1.2 Throughput in Higher Education

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4 Quoted in Mail & Guardian, Beyond Matric supplement: September 15 2006. Article entitled: **Wanted:Lofty academic ideals**

5 *Ibid.* Article entitled: **On quality and quantity**

6 DoE report, 2003: **Report to the Minister: Review of the financing, resourcing and costs of public schooling**

In her Budget Vote speech in May 2005, Minister of Education Naledi Pandor explained,

“What has emerged from our research and our detailed consultations with higher education institutions is that universities and universities of technology are producing fewer graduates than they should, and that one of the main causes of this under-production is the high level of student drop-out. A cohort study undertaken of the 120 000 students entering higher education in 2000 suggests this. Apparently that cohort may not achieve an overall graduation rate of even 40%.<sup>7</sup>”

Four years after entering higher education, 22% of this tracked cohort had graduated while 50% had dropped out of their studies<sup>8</sup>. The remaining 28% had continued to study but would need at least a fifth year in order to complete<sup>9</sup>. Students at technikons fared worse than their university-enrolled counterparts, with a total of 58% having dropped out by the end of 2002 and a graduation rate of only 19% (or 32% if distance students are excluded) after four years. This is in the face of significantly increased financial investment in tertiary education; annual loan awards from NSFAS have risen from R154 million in 1995 to R1.2 billion in 2005. The Department of Education (DoE) report concludes that “... the pattern of growth in the higher education system is neither affordable nor sustainable.” (undated:15).

Academic progress at the top-performing university in the country<sup>10</sup> and one which is therefore able to be selective about intake, is sobering. 39% of undergraduates entering UCT in 2001 graduated within the minimum three-year period<sup>11</sup>. A further 15% graduated after an additional year of studies, raising the throughput rate to 54%<sup>12</sup>.

As noted in REAP's study of their own 2002 cohort, the DoE is grappling with the combined impact of high enrolment at institutions of higher education, and slower progress than envisaged through these institutions. This creates a strain on affordability of higher education, with mounting evidence that students are not gaining qualifications in the numbers hoped (Freeth & Ngidi, 2005).

A study conducted for NSFAS by Budlender et al (2002) identified the following main factors contributing to withdrawal from studies among students who were performing adequately (i.e. for whom academic exclusion was not a factor):

- Financial constraints: they particularly mention registration fees, accommodation, meal, book (including materials and equipment) and travel costs
- Choice of course: students tend to drop out when they find that they have little interest in, or aptitude for, their course
- Lack of in-service training opportunities
- Pregnancy
- HIV / Aids
- Crisis at home

A recent article in the Mail & Guardian newspaper<sup>13</sup>, which provided a breakdown of throughput per institution, explored reasons for what it described as “shocking” dropout rates:

- Inadequate academic preparation at school: “Inflated school results mean even school-leavers with good

7 Accessed through DoE website: [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)

8 Recorded as having left their original institutions prior to completion. Students who later registered at another institution are not recorded in the study as continuing students.

9 Research cited in the Department of Education report: “Student Enrollment Planning in Public Higher Education” (undated)

10 According to the 2000 cohort graduation statistics

11 This includes only students registered for degrees of a three-year duration

12 Data produced by UCT's Institutional Planning Unit and kindly made available by Jane Hendry

13 September 22 2006. Article entitled, **Shock varsity dropout stats**

results are increasingly under-prepared for higher education.” (Magda Fourie, vice rector of University of the Free State)

- Lack of “appropriate aptitude” for an HE qualification
- Problems with securing funding
- Problems with accommodation
- Problems with meals: “Students who cannot afford food will clearly not cope with the academic environment.” (Mandla Seopela, president of South African Students Congress)
- HIV/Aids
- English as the medium of tuition “English is not even a second language but a foreign language [for many black students]. (Gessler Nkondo, spokesperson of the Association for Black Empowerment in Higher Education).

The Budlender study analysed dropout rates among NSFAS-funded students attending historically advantaged and – disadvantaged technikons. It can be surmised that withdrawal is higher from the former because the youth who are eligible for NSFAS loans are at a significant disadvantage to many of the historically advantaged students who access these institutions, and normally do not have other forms of support built into their studies.

Historical status of technikon	Dropout	Total (n)
Historically advantaged	61%	20219
Historically disadvantaged	54%	16416
Total	46%	87233

Table 1: Drop out rate by institution’s historical status (Budlender et al, 2002: 18)

The study found that “the dropouts were more likely than graduates to be from rural areas. About half (50%) said that their family lived in a rural area in their last year of study compared to 37% of graduates.” (2002:37)

### 2.1.3 Graduate Employment

While it is clear that South Africans with a university qualification are more likely to find employment, and to find it more quickly than those without a degree, women and African university graduates still face significant obstacles.

**Moleke, 2003:vi**

The March 2005 Labour Force Survey (LFS) found that 34% of Africans with a post-matric qualification of at least six months full time study duration (including full HE degrees and diplomas) were unemployed (Budlender, 2005). While this is a disturbing finding, it’s a marked improvement on the picture painted by the February 2002 LFS which found 48% unemployment in this group (*ibid*).

It has been speculated (Moleke, 2003; Budlender, 2005) that the following factors are at play:

- A mismatch between skills and the requirements of the labour market;
- Graduates from historically disadvantaged institutions are not as sought after by employers as graduates from historically privileged institutions; and
- Some employers are reluctant to employ black graduates.

The issue of mismatched supply and demand in the labour market warrants further exploration. Research by Kraak in 2003 suggests that “current skills shortages appear to be relatively small in aggregate terms.” (in Akoojee et al, 2005:100). One needs to consider sector, skills level and both formal and informal work in juggling the figures and popular perceptions. Shortages in the public sector include teaching and nursing, while management skills in the public service are at a premium. Information and communications technology (ICT) shortages in the private sector are of greatest concern to researchers Moleke et al, 2003 (*ibid*).

Inadequate skills acquisition at the intermediate and higher end of the scale is often cited as a problem, especially as it impedes the manufacturing sector for local and international markets. The situation is more complex than this, as Akoojee comments, "... scarce skills act as a constraint on growth, but are also kept relatively small by the lack of new demand coming from an economy in which employment is not growing fast enough". (2005:101).

The economic implications are significant and include the following risks, among others:

- ◆ freshly qualified graduates, primed to make their mark as economic actors, may become discouraged and withdraw from active job-seeking over time due to unsustainable opportunity costs;
- ◆ jobs may remain unfilled in the private and public sectors, with resulting decline in outputs or strategies to import necessary skills from other countries; and
- ◆ insufficient returns to NSFAS, which realises loan repayments from employed beneficiaries<sup>14</sup> and writes off debts owed by students who never enter the formal economy. For example, in the financial year 2005 / 2006, NSFAS disbursed R1.2 billion and recovered R329 million<sup>15</sup>. Even accounting for the time lag between allocation and recovery of loan monies, this has to be a worry.

It is in this context that the government has launched the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA). Its first task is to address the problem of confusing and patchy information about skills gaps, and hence to identify skills requirements to implement ASGISA<sup>16</sup> priority projects. Nkiling Mashoi of the JIPSA directorate is on record that they had "identified graduate development and relevant skills as major challenges for the achievements of ASGISA's goal<sup>17</sup>"

A summit for unemployed graduates in June 2006 generated some interesting perspectives: Vivian Moila of the Transnet Foundation stated that "About half of a million graduates are struggling to find jobs in South Africa [while] 120 000 jobs go unfilled each year, due to a lack of having the right skills."<sup>18</sup> At the same summit, a JIPSA spokesperson drew attention to the need to focus skills development in the following priority areas: Tourism, information and communication technology, business process outsourcing and the biofuels industry.

A recent assessment of employability found that, "There is sufficient evidence that students who choose the science, engineering and technology (SET) fields are more likely to be immediately employed upon completion of study than are commerce or economic graduates... The situation is worse for students who choose humanities and arts in that there is an even longer waiting period before employment opportunities can be realised." (Crosser, 2003:9, in Koen, 2006:3).

While SET students have a relative advantage, lack of in-service training (IST) placements is a major stumbling block. About 40% of black engineers fail to graduate because they have not completed their in-service training, according to the South African Graduate Development Association's (SAGDA) Caleb Maqubela<sup>19</sup>. This issue was highlighted as a key drop-out factor, across different technikon courses, in the NSFAS study (Budlender et al): "Lack of in-service training opportunities presents a problem, particularly for technikon students for whom this training is usually a compulsory part of the qualification. Most institutions have a Co-operative Education or similar unit that assists students to find in-service opportunities. Often, however, these units are under-staffed and cannot assist all students. Students are forced to try to find places themselves. If they cannot, which happens regularly in the current poor economic conditions, they drop out by default." (2002: 84)

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14 Via the South African Revenue Service (SARS)

15 NSFAS fact sheet: May 2006

16 Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative

17 Business Day: July 3 2006. Article entitled: **Graduates "Unsuited for Real World"**

18 Dispatch online: July 3 2006

19 Reported in Business Day: 3 July 2006

### 2.1.4 A rural twist ...

Many of the issues and inter-related problems with schooling, access to higher education and entry into the formal job market are amplified at a rural level. Rural matriculants are not only under-prepared for the academic requirements of tertiary education but often lack the career guidance necessary to help them make sound decisions about their future. On exit from tertiary education, those students who complete their tertiary qualifications do not always possess either the hard skills in demand at the time or the 'soft skills' to compete confidently with other graduates.

REAP thus experiences the knock-on effect at both the intake and exit points of its programme. The initial design and intention of the programme was to enhance **access**; hence REAP invested all its attention and resources in students after they had left school focused primarily on enabling first-year students to get a foot in the door of higher education. Since 2003, in recognition that students benefit from financial and related support throughout their studies, and that NSFAS loans are not automatically available through the institutions after first-year, REAP since extended its support for the full duration (plus one year) of the qualification. During 2005 and 2006, as students have begun to graduate, and tracking results have started to emerge, REAP has questioned whether it should extend its core business in either or both directions.

## 2.2. REAP: Then and now

At the commencement of the REAP / SSACI project in 2003, REAP had two experienced student advisors, one new advisor, a new management team and a funding crisis. It supported 268 students that year. Since then, the student advisor team has grown to five, while the part-time financial manager's post has become full-time. The co-ordination role of one of the student advisors has continued to grow, and she has down scaled her caseload accordingly. 386 students receive support in 2006. The demographic profile of students has shifted in favor of more rural provinces (for example, from 17 Limpopo students in 2003 to 48 in 2006).

The funding base was significantly developed during 2003 and consolidated in subsequent years. In 2006, REAP has had to adjust to the fact that Lottery did not award an anticipated grant, and prepare for the planned withdrawal of Irish Aid funding. While increasing engagement with South African corporate donors has garnered significant support, the difference in emphasis between REAP's mission and the corporate social investment agenda has led REAP to explore many of the issues raised in this report, in the interests of sustainability.

## 3. Inputs (Did REAP do what was intended?)

The following "expected activities and outcomes" were listed in the agreement with SSACI:

*Students will be selected by REAP on the basis of their previous academic record, the likely match between their courses of study and employment opportunities in their localities, and an in-depth interview with REAP fieldworkers*

*Students will be enrolled for [approved] three-year courses at [approved] technikons – the agreement listed 30 approved courses and the institutions at which they could be studied*  
*REAP will conduct a support programme for students, comprising:*

- *monthly counselling and progress monitoring sessions via toll free telephone line*
- *two face to face consultations per year*
- *one academic skills workshop per year*
- *two lifeskills workshops per year*
- *two work placement / employment preparation workshops.*

*Other organised activities will include participation in peer support groups, assistance with medical problems, institutional liaison for maximum integration and support. Students will be tracked during and after their studies.*

This agreement was predicated upon a serious underestimate of how long it would take students to complete their qualifications, and what it would cost to support them to do so. The outputs were developed in a vacuum of accurate information – both about throughput and graduate employment among REAP and national cohorts. Contributing factors to this situation seem to include the fact that both the director and financial manager were newly arrived at REAP at the time of negotiating the agreement, that in-house monitoring of students' academic progress was basic and (unintentionally) masked the struggles experienced by many students<sup>20</sup>, and that the programme had not yet supported a cohort through to graduation (the first full intake was in 2002 after a pilot in 2001), with a concomitant lack of national data about throughput rates. The first major study of this kind was released last year and there is still a dearth of comparative, disaggregated data for REAP to compare its success rate against.

### **3.1. Student selection**

Selection of SSACI students<sup>21</sup> followed the usual REAP model of recruitment via regional representatives,<sup>22</sup> all of whom have reach into, and intimate knowledge of, rural areas. They conducted initial interviews before forwarding students' written applications to REAP for rating. The rating system scores academic performance at school, financial need, marketability of intended field of study, as well as evidence of community involvement and leadership abilities. The rating includes both a gut-feel score from the assessor, intended to reward applicants who show a certain determination to succeed, and a bonus point for female applicants. While the first interview elicits what the student wants to do after school and assesses how proactive they had been in realising these ambitions, a second interview with short-listed applicants by REAP staff and regional representatives tests coping skills in the face of the challenges that rural matriculants face when going to an urban higher education campus. How good is their English? How strong are their problem solving skills, etc?

The agreement between SSACI and REAP was very specific in terms of which provinces students came from, which institutions they studied at and what they studied. It stipulated that only technikon students, hailing from the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the North West provinces would be included. Please see Table 3 for the provincial profile of the final selected cohort; exceptions were cleared with SSACI. Ken Duncan recalls the discussion about courses and institutions: "It didn't matter which courses as long as there was reason to believe that their qualifications would be in demand. And that the institutions should have credibility for that course. [Glenda Glover] came up with ... the ones they recommended. We weeded out just a few." While SSACI had doubts about the credibility of at least two of the institutions, it was agreed that they would stay on the list.

The SSACI contract was implemented mid-way through 2003; 47 of the 58 students had been

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20 This monitoring produced pass rates of about 80% and above in 2002 / 03. However, a 'pass' merely indicated that the student had passed at least 50% of their courses and was allowed (by the institution) to continue. These statistics failed to take into account the number of courses students carried into the next year, which has a knock-on effect, extending duration of studies into a fourth and fifth year in some cases, and failed to track students who dropped out between the end of one academic year and the beginning of the next. REAP has since realised how misleading these results are and no longer uses them.

21 Although they are referred to here as SSACI students, at the time of selection they were not earmarked for SSACI funding.

22 Representing, in 2003, 22 of the 26 Catholic dioceses in South Africa. Not all of the regional representatives are Catholics, but many are priests and nuns formerly involved with the EAS (Educational Assistance Scheme) which merged with CEAP to form REAP.

selected at the beginning of that year while 11 had been on the programme since the beginning of 2002.

#### *Profile of selected students*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Count</b>
Female	30
Male	28

Table 2: Gender profile of selected students

Students were selected from a wider area than initially agreed with SSACI. 83% originated in the agreed provinces.

<b>Province of origin</b>	<b>Count</b>
KwaZulu-Natal	17
Western Cape	16
North West	10
Mpumalanga	7
Limpopo	5
Free State	1

Table 3: Provincial profile of selected students

The evaluation team interviewed 33 of the cohort of 58 for this evaluation, 25 (or three-quarters) of whom were the first members of their families ever to reach higher education.

### **3.2. Access package**

Access includes registration fees, accommodation and meal costs, book and technical equipment costs as well as travel and occasional medical bills, calculated according to the individual needs of the student.

SSACI supported the costs of REAP's services to students during 2003 and started contributing towards access costs as well from 2004, in terms of the agreement. All 58 students started on the REAP programme in 2002 or 2003 on alternative financing. 18 students received SSACI-funded services in 2003 only, either because their original funder decided to extend support for a longer period than initially envisaged, or because they left the programme – in some cases, due to offers of full bursaries. The number of students supported by SSACI decreased each year, as some students completed, some withdrew and others accessed more substantial financial aid. Since 2003, REAP has endeavored to allocate students to one funder only, and to seek funding that will follow a cohort for the full duration of their studies.

<b>Year of support</b>	<b>Cohort size</b>	<b>Average access package per student (rands)</b>
2003	58	0
2004	40	5 735
2005	3	5 294
2006	5	1 661 (by mid-year)

Table 4: Size of SSACI cohort per year, with average access allocations

Generally, REAP under spent on the SSACI access budget, using between 84% and 93% of the original allocation each year. A SSACI budget analysis, prepared by REAP for this evaluation, is

attached (see Appendix 3).

### 3.3. Support programme

If we are going to help students with their tertiary studies without helping them with their past, we are going to have broken people. REAP needs to find out where the student comes from and offer counselling at the institution. When you read some of their stories in their application forms, you realise some of them are having it tough.

**Fr Sammy Mabusela, Jericho diocese: North West province**

REAP to me has been a pillar of strength. If it was not for REAP I would not even have made it through S1 but due to your continuous financial and workshop support I managed to pass my S2 and last year I did my in service training... I can proudly say today that I am doing my S3 which is my final year.

**Zola, Civil Engineering student at CPUT**

Two prominent role-players in HE emphasised the extent of rural students' needs:

It's worse if you go to historically white institutions because there's a lack of empathy for poverty.

**Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

These are often the students who cannot bridge the gap [between school and higher education] without huge social support.

**Prof. Jonathan Jansen, REAP Board member**

Since 2004, student advisors have reported on each SSACI student individually on a semester basis, in response to a request to do so. These reports indicate which workshops students attended and record face-to-face and telephonic sessions with student advisors.

The **workshop programme** was only implemented in the Western Cape in the first semester of 2003, but extended to two workshops on lifeskills<sup>23</sup> and academic skills<sup>24</sup> in each of the six institutional hubs<sup>25</sup> in the second semester. REAP did not keep a register of SSACI student attendance that year, although it was compulsory for students to attend and stipulated as such in the contracts signed by students. In 2004 and 2005, the workshop programme grew and REAP provided more workshops than the minimum quota agreed with SSACI. Despite the compulsory nature, records show that attendance was patchy. Students didn't attend if the timing of workshops conflicted with lectures or tutorials, or if they were engaged in practicals or in-service training. Reasons for non-attendance of a small minority of others is not clear from the records. Please see section 4.3 of this report for an assessment of the benefits and challenges of providing workshops.

The **telephonic and face-to-face relationship** between the student and their advisor is the primary vehicle for support and service provision. Section 4 of this report will consider student feedback in this regard. The student files record all contact and the content of that contact, including follow-up actions. Students had monthly contact with the advisors in first and second year, with bi-monthly contact thereafter. Face to face contact increased from two to three visits per year from 2004. Reports to SSACI show that, on the whole, targets for student contact were met. Students were more motivated to use the toll-phone line regularly because release of access money was made conditional on doing so, but this had mixed results (see case study below):

At times, students may have felt that they just wanted the money and didn't need to engage with someone about their well-being. The particular student I have in mind is Rosalie, one of two [SSACI-supported] students from Prince Albert. The other maintained contact and worked well with REAP, but Rosalie didn't initiate. I had to phone and ask how she was managing because she hadn't asked for money. It was a struggle to get her to come to meet me at the office. And she was one of the students who needed a lot more support, given that she'd had a year out of school and didn't have strong academic results. But she wasn't prepared to tap into the support REAP had to offer. I used to ask [the other student] if he had seen Rosalie on campus and try to pass messages on in that way.

**Lynette Harding**

23 G  
24 S  
25 P

REA

The SSACI contract also mentions facilitating **peer support** among students. Asked about this, Lynette Harding reflected:

At a social level, it's there, between REAP students. But it's not been so easy to get academic peer support going. If you've got only one horticulture student on the programme, who can you link them with?

Other advisors explained that they invited senior students to initial contracting workshops with new REAP students to foster peer support in this way, with indications later in the year of these relationships having been sustained. One student, asked whether her student advisor had done anything exceptional by way of support, said:

Yes, [she] organised a study group for me and I'm still working with that group until now, so that was very kind of her. It is working so well for me.

The evaluation found that there was not enough detail about student support in many student files and that record-keeping at this level could be improved. Student records do not do justice to conscientious work by student advisors. Brief, and in some cases, barely legible, entries do not lend themselves to follow-up by colleagues if the student advisor is away or leaves the organisation, nor to accountability in the case of file audits or programme evaluations. A member of the evaluation team commented:

From what I read [in the student files], I assumed that the student advisors weren't doing enough follow-up. My perception is changing completely as a result of interviews with them; I now think they are doing enough.

Spending on support services includes the costs of recruitment and selection, the toll-free line, field visits and workshops. Spending on access was double that on support services to students in 2004, and about one third greater in 2005.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cohort size</b>	<b>Average access grant</b>	<b>Average support services cost</b>
2003	58	0	1 240 (July – Dec only)
2004	40	5 735	2 904
2005	31	5 294	3 419
2006	5	1 661 (Jan – June only)	1 976 (Jan – June only)

Table 5: Average spending per student: Comparison of expenditure on access grants and support services

### *Understanding student support*

Student advisors perceive their role and the relational aspects of their support as follows:

For some of them, it's the first time they've had a chance to be listened to. I'm generalising here, but for a young black

person it's unusual to find someone to share your heart with. It works for me to offer that listening heart rather than a listening figure like they're used to at home. Hence I've had some breakthroughs where students have shared some things. It takes time, I'm confident that over the years it works.

**Eugene Machimana**

I try not to solve their problems for them – I tell them who to speak to and to call me again if there's still a problem. This matter of independence has changed a lot since the beginning of the programme.

**Jacqui Layman**

### **What do Student Advisors do to boost academic performance?**

Follow up and building confidence gives people clear goals and steps to success. We give students attention so that they not only feel special but so that they own their success. Workshops alone wouldn't make them graduate.

**Tsepo Senoamali**

Richard [a SSACI student] failed one of his second year modules. There was a lot of anxiety about whether he'd have to go back and complete it before the institution would let him progress to third year. We talked about this a lot in order to be pro-active about dealing with the implications. When he met with his lecturers, they allowed him to register, but to come in to complete those credits while he was doing his IST. For him, despite that setback, he could still complete in minimum time.

**Lyne Harding**

... we encourage students who are carrying first year subjects in their third year to think ahead about how they're going to manage the various scenarios. It gives them a prompt to figure out what credits they need to get a NSFAS loan.

**Jacqui Layman**

I share from my personal experience to motivate them. We have a similar background, in terms of rural areas, and I had to go through similar struggles with my studies. I challenge them that I know the difficulties, and now I've got a full time job and am studying at the same time – if I can do this, then I'm expecting more from them too.

**Eugene Machimana**

**What do SAs do to boost graduate employment?**

Grooming through workshops (career preparation and CV writing) is important, but doesn't reach everyone, especially the quiet ones. On a one-to-one basis, you can get the message across that the student needs to be more marketable and generate ideas of how to do this in discussion with them. [I find that] vacation jobs are very beneficial.

**Tsepo Senoamali**

I organise career preparation workshops with the institutions for the students to attend. I usually observe those workshops. As a follow-up, I ask them to write their CV and present it to the person who facilitated that workshop. I encourage my students who can cope to look for part-time jobs while they're studying to gain experience. I have a number of students who are working part-time, mostly in the December holidays.

**Eugene Machimana**

**3.4. Partnership with NSFAS**

The SSACI / REAP agreement does not mention NSFAS as an input, but it is worth making a brief note of the complementary role that NSFAS loans play in enabling access. REAP consistently administers loans in the region of R2 million per year. These loans are primarily for first year students, although where more senior students have struggled to access loans at their institutions, REAP has stepped in on occasion (see section 4.4 for more information).

The partnership with NSFAS has deepened over this period, due to a developing understanding of the unique contribution that each makes to the other.

I think what they do well is they're very good at looking after the students. One sees good results, and better throughput.

**Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

In terms of NSFAS broadening and having to advertise it's programme to rural students, it realised it needed NGOs and community organisations. Previously, I think it expected that students would access loans through their institutions... it's got to the point where REAP is invited to meetings with other NGOs and REAP is playing a role in channeling rural students to financial aid. It's definitely a better partnership than in the early days.

**Lynnette Harding, Co-ordinator**

### **NSFAS Loans and study-related expenses**

The NSFAS scheme has grown from relatively modest beginnings in the early 1990s, with marked increases from government since 1996. In 2006, it is set to disburse over R1.3 billion to about 110 000 students. The maximum loan annual loan allocation per student has increased from R20 000 in 2003 to R30 000 this year.

**Source: Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

Each institution establishes its own loan qualification criteria and principles for dividing up the money (e.g. Bigger loans for fewer students versus smaller loans for more students). This results in wide variations in financial aid practices and priorities between institutions. Some evaluation respondents speculate that the availability of more NSFAS loan money in the system encourages institutions to increase their fees.

The issue of **meal expenses** bears further scrutiny; financial aid officers interviewed for this evaluation raised concerns that some students (not REAP's) are not getting enough to eat. Further investigation showed that campus meals cost over R10 000 per annum at these institutions; of the three financial aid offices administering NSFAS loans in the context of this study, one did not allocate any funding for meals, one allocated some funding as it was not considered a priority, and a third allocated approximately R4 000 per annum for students who qualified for 100% loans.

SSACI students were asked an open-ended question in evaluation interviews about any problems they encountered during their studies. Five of the 33 specifically mentioned problems with meal costs and insufficient meal allocations in the REAP access package.

Money for meals is too small. I mean R300 per month is nothing if you consider the prices of the shops on our campus

**Former SSACI student**

### **3.5. Liaison with HE institutions**

Student advisors liaise with three key components of each institution: financial aid officers, campus-based counsellors and careers advisors. The latter two services are not available on all campuses. REAP also draws workshop facilitators from these ranks. They maintain regular contact, especially with the financial aid bureaux, and are often able to bypass sticky systems (such as delayed access to student exam results) by virtue of these relationships.

There has been a drive over the last two years to establish stronger networks on campuses, in the interests of coherent service provision to students. It is considered preferable to refer students to a campus-based service, where it exists, than to provide that service long-distance from the REAP office. REAP is increasingly tapping into faculty-level academic support services, but this requires an attention to detail that is hard to sustain across so many campuses.

So I've just found out about the support by faculties. In my fieldtrip report, I recommended that all first year students need to make contact with the faculty in their first term and be informed about what is expected of them and what is available to them. I think with this amount of support, there's little excuse to fail.

**Eugene Machimana**

### 3.6. Reporting to SSACI

[SSACI reporting criteria have] required us to be more disciplined and specific, which again is a good development. There is a possibility with SSACI of getting too focused on recording activities per student which is a lot of administration, but recording certainly shows the gaps, weaknesses & strengths of the programme. The six monthly report presents rich material for programme exploration...

**Glenda Glover, director**

The REAP / SSACI contract states that:

*REAP will submit bi-annual progress reports to SSACI: formative reports in March and September 2004, March and September 2005, and March 2006; a final summative report will be submitted in December 2006. These reports will be in an agreed format and will indicate progress towards the desired outputs and objectives, and measure expenditure against budget. SSACI will monitor the project and will prepare an evaluative report soon after its conclusion.*

REAP submitted bi-annual narrative and financial reports, as well as an annual reports. The three narrative reports were standard for all funders, providing updates on organisational, programme and student information as well as some analysis. In addition, REAP tracked the basic academic progress of the SSACI cohort on an annual basis, and reported on any changes in their source of funding. From 2004, progress reports were compiled every semester on each SSACI student at SSACI's request. In April 2005, REAP conducted a short interim project assessment against each section of the original agreement, which highlighted any discrepancies.

Financial reports accounted for expenditure by line item, against SSACI income. Where Lottery money was used to supplement SSACI funds, this was indicated.

Between stipulated reporting dates, Ken Duncan corresponded with REAP managers about additional questions or issues, all of which received written responses. A review of the documentation shows that while REAP clearly stepped up its reporting over the period of the agreement, many covering letters started with an apology for delays in producing requested information. SSACI acknowledges that it, too, had capacity constraints and did not therefore monitor the project as closely as it had intended to.

SSACI's reporting requirements are more demanding than those of other REAP funders. More attention is paid to this, and related issues, in section 4.5 of this report. Written correspondence between the two organisations suggests a healthy degree of transparency on REAP's side, and a useful degree of vigilance on SSACI's side. The frustration expressed by Ken Duncan in the quote below was not apparent in the correspondence reviewed by the evaluator.

I have battled to get coherent reports out of them. It's a constant frustration. They send out one report to all funders, which tends not to be very informative. The case studies can be very illustrative as vignettes, but just giving us endless feel-good stories is not a report. Financial reporting has been problematic. I've had to take them to task a couple of times.

**Ken Duncan, SSACI CEO**

I think the reporting [to SSACI] has probably improved consistently since 2003 when it was very generalized. There is a reporting dilemma: I think all supporters like the general reporting with the anecdotes, student accounts etc. Then, somewhat detailed technical programmatic progress reporting, which is good but it's all very time consuming and difficult when we have large numbers of students which we need to be viable... We have to really upgrade our data system and the entry of data to make this manageable.

**Glenda Glover, director**

### **3.7. Tracking students**

REAP has conducted two major tracking studies during the 2003-2006 period under review. One is longitudinal, tracking students who have left the programme, while the other tracks the 2002 cohort. About half (27) of the SSACI students were tracked by one or other of these studies. There has not been a rigorous attempt to track the SSACI cohort *per se*. Interviews with student advisors revealed anecdotal information about former SSACI students, passed on to them via other students, gathered during field trips, or as a result of some students staying in touch with their advisors after graduation. Lynnette Harding has produced annual tables of information about SSACI students' current status. Without the necessary IT systems in place, this is a time-consuming activity for REAP, the results of which have regularly fallen short of SSACI's expectations.

Tracking studies in the HE sector are notoriously problematic and REAP's published 2002 cohort tracking study has received very warm responses from others struggling to produce tracking data. UCT, a leader in studies of this nature, with a well-resourced institutional planning unit and a strong careers support programme, has yet to institute graduate employment tracking. The closest tool is a First Destination survey, completed by students when they graduate, which indicates how many have jobs lined up already.

## **4. Quality (How well did REAP do the work?)**

...in a country like SA, it's not good enough to say 'we accomplished some good with our money.' We must say, 'we've done the best thing we could have with our money'.

**Ken Duncan, SSACI**

Some [of the organisations we fund] are good and some are bad. REAP is on the good list.

**Donor A**

Of the [organisations doing similar work] we support, REAP is the most innovative..."

**Donor B**

This section of the report is framed by a set of questions that go to the question of the quality of REAP's implementation of the SSACI project. The insights they prompt are intended to inform the later discussion on achievement of outputs in section 5. The questions are:

- Did REAP select the 'right' students – those with the most need and most potential?
- Did the access package give students a foot in the door of higher education that they would not otherwise have had, and was it well administered?
- How did the one-to-one support and workshops benefit SSACI students?
- Did REAP add value to what institutions and NSFAS offer to students?
- Did REAP manage the SSACI project efficiently?
- Is the overall programme relevant, coherent, and practical?

The science of assessing quality draws on insights, subjective experience, and informed speculation. A combination of such material and verifiable data caters for the 'soft' and 'hard' component of an evaluation. Section 5 provides the quantitative complement.

### **4.1. Did REAP select the 'right' students – those with the most need and most**

## **potential?**

There is an inherent balancing act to the selection process. Some students are extremely needy but have not exhibited sufficient academic promise at school to warrant the risk to REAP and its funders. Other students have succeeded, against many odds, at rural schools, but either have the independent means to register without REAP support, or are likely to come to the attention of the big bursary schemes. The question of whether REAP should target the “cream of the (rural) crop” or the layer of achievers below them surfaced during the course of this evaluation.

When I first arrived here, we never used the “cream of the crop” language. We believed that those students would easily find financial aid or bursaries. Our target has been the students between the “cream of the crop” and those who were struggling. It is only now that we are beginning to look at this because of what our funders say. Our argument is about the milk in between.

**Student Advisor (Pumie Zonela)**

... We have to redefine the “cream”. Quite a lot of the donor [vision] is about making potential leaders from the continent. But there's a whole other layer of people that the country needs; students who are vital to the development of this country but are not going to become Rhodes Scholars.

**Glenda Glover, director**

This is the kind of programme that would have identified me. I could have been easily overlooked.

**Prof Jonathan Jansen, Dean of Education at UP<sup>26</sup> and REAP Board member**

Selection criteria are complex. The urban / rural question is a prime example. Many matriculants live parallel rural and peri-urban lives and there are ongoing debates about whether they qualify.

We have people residing in a rural area, but going to school in an urban area because their parents are willing to sacrifice a lot to get them to a good school... There was a boy last year who was in [this] exact situation. He couldn't get support because his school was based in town. It's heartbreaking to see some of these things.”

**Fr Sammy Mabusela, regional representative: Jericho Diocese, North West**

Some rural representatives have strong ideas about which criteria should carry greatest weight in recruitment and selection. Many of the priests and nuns have watched the young people grow up in their dioceses and have a passionate belief in their potential, not always reflected in the written applications completed by students and rated by REAP.

First of all there's difficulty with drawing the line in terms of who is most in need. Secondly, when people hear the word 'bursary' they jump. You have to explain the criteria very carefully. The other thing is the unfortunate part – most of our students don't take this thing very seriously. You can see it in the way they fill out the forms... It comes from not having resources – they think their life ends wherever they are. They don't dream beyond their present situation. ...There's a lot of fear as well; some of them fear that they are inadequate and won't perform as well as they hoped.

**Fr Sammy Mabusela, regional representative: Jericho Diocese, North West**

The issue of reach, both into deep rural areas and beyond Catholic structures, is key. REAP inherited the EAS Catholic networks, which stretch well beyond the usual HE catchment areas. Since 2001, this regional network has been extended via schools; community based organisations and individual champions of rural education. In Dundee in KZN, for example, the regional representatives advertise REAP opportunities through the local radio station.

I think the regional representatives are recruiting the right students. The national percentage of matric exemptions is really low, but much higher among the students who came through from the regions. This indicates that they are targeting the right students.

**Student Advisor (Eugene Machimana)**

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26 University of Pretoria

### What is potential and how to measure it?

The problem is that you can't tell from matric results how they will fare at university. That's why we work with gut feel, look for fully-rounded human beings, these are the people who will succeed, through hard work and dedication, and not those who will necessarily make the top.

**Beva Runciman: Board member**

Looking back, if a student met the requirements of the institution, we were satisfied. Looking at the academic [results] more closely is a big shift for REAP. I'm struggling with it because there are students with lower matric grades who have achieved [at technikon]. What are the factors? Is it the particular course or is it their perseverance that sets them apart? By raising the academic standard, we might be missing a group of students who are really driven. I can show that one of the top matric achievers in the Western Cape failed first year. What makes the difference?

**Lynette Harding: programme co-ordinator**

I know for a fact that there are thousands of students coming out of high school who are enormously talented. But you're not going to see it at the end of grade 12; you're going to see it later. Not all of us bloom then.... One of the guys [from the University of Pretoria, not a REAP student] who now has a Mandela-Rhodes scholarship to study in the UK definitely didn't have the matric results at the time, he fell below the radar.

**Prof Jonathan Jansen, Board member**

Please refer to Table 9 for an analysis of matric results as predictors of later success.

ess.

While there is no direct cause-effect relationship between recruiting the 'right' students and academic success at a university of technology<sup>27</sup>, this is an area that REAP has had to tighten up. In efforts to improve the selection process, REAP staff and regional representatives have made annual adjustments to the system. These include:

- Supporting only those students offered a place to study one of their top two choices, if they were freshly out of school. And, for those who had been out of school for a year or more, only their first choice on the basis that they had had time to explore career options.

[We found that] students were accepting any offer of a place to study because they were desperate to study, even if this wasn't their first choice. We've learned that this could be a wasted year of funding because students often then want to change at a later stage.

**Lynette Harding, programme co-ordinator**

- Raising the bar each year in terms of matric scores. In 2003, REAP accepted students who had met the institution's selection criteria. When this proved insufficient, REAP required in 2004 that all students gain, at minimum, a matric exemption in order to be short-listed for support. From 2005, students obtaining a matric aggregate of less than S/M 950 points were not considered, and where students intended to study commercial, scientific or engineering courses, REAP required a minimum of a higher grade pass or 60% standard grade pass in maths, physical science and accounting. In 2006, the matric aggregate cut-off was raised to M 1200. Had this been the cut-off for SSACI students in 2003, only 20 of the 58 would have been considered. It is worth noting that only eight of the 20 have graduated already, with a further four due to complete this year.
- Encouraging regional representatives to be more discriminating in their recruitment practices.

<sup>27</sup> Some factors are beyond a student's direct control, such as their own health or that of family members, mal-administration by the institution (e.g. one department lost the in-service training logbook of a SSACI student, resulting in a year-long delay in his graduation) and lack of in-service placements (addressed in more detail later in this report)

Eugene Machimana explained a best practice approach that he is trying to make common practice:

Fr George in the Bethlehem diocese has a policy that before he gives new applicants the form, they have to show him proof that they've applied at the institution and, for students who have already written matric exams, their results. He contends that these students are more prepared.

#### **4.2. Did the access package give students a foot in the door of higher education that they would not normally have had, and was it well administered?**

REAP has done something that I thought was impossible – i.e. paying towards my studies...

**Pumla: SSACI student**

My view is that no institution should admit a student unless they know where that student is going to get the fees from, regardless of the source of those fees, for the next 3 years. It's a pointless exercise to admit a student who you know is poor and then turn around at mid-year and exclude them.

**Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

[One of REAP's Board members, with strong links to poor communities] has of late been saying that poor students are going to, in a sense, be excluded. That the period post 1994 of including the previously excluded has passed and that now it's back to academic performance in a context of limited financial aid. Who falls out of that group? How do our students survive in that context? How possible is it for a really poor student to survive only on a loan? ... So there's a sense that the poor are going to be left out. Programmes like REAP are therefore extremely important.

**Glenda Glover, director**

We always tell the students, "Pay for your first year if you don't get NSFAS and apply for NSFAS subsequently. And make sure you pass your subjects". The pressure is on them to pass so that they can get NSFAS. There are certain cases where the student can't afford to pay for the previous year's fees. So, they qualify for a loan for the following year, but they have an outstanding balance. This is a dilemma that most institutions face.

**Justice Diremelo: Financial Aid manager at TUT<sup>28</sup>, Soshanguve campus**

Students interviewed for this evaluation were asked to rate access to a loan, telephonic support, face to face support and workshops, in terms of how much value they had derived. As expected, most (26 out of 33) felt that access to a loan in their first year had been the most critical element.

Of REAP's non-tuition related costs of being at a tertiary institution, 20 of 33 students rated accommodation as most crucial, while ten valued book money the most. Few assigned particular significance to REAP's contributions to medical costs (doctors fees and money for spectacles) but the few who did clearly derived great benefit. 24 of 33 students rated travel among the top three study costs met by REAP.

The access package is challenging to administer. There is a narrow timeframe in which to confirm REAP support (contingent on the student securing a place), completing all the REAP data capturing, processing a registration payment and meeting the institution's paperwork requirements. Many rural students set out for the institution during registration week not knowing whether they have a place or financial support, and are under threat of losing a place once it is offered unless registration is paid on the spot. The student advisors' administrative workload has long been a source of tension (at CEAP and REAP) throughout the academic year, but the first few months are the most stressful. This is not eased by overly bureaucratic systems at some institutions; recent mergers have tended to exacerbate problems.

REAP's service is good. And the [programme] idea is good. There's only one problem that worries me – the communication between the student and REAP. It looks like the student does not know what is required of him in

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respect of REAP, then coming to the institution. In most cases, one has to look for the student, checking: Did you do this, did you sign this, did you send this off? Students don't take initiative, they queue up here and ask if [the student advisor] has paid, and it turns out they never sent him results. Usually, they do send us a letter, but payments are made late, which frustrates the student... We also encourage students to go back to their sponsor and pester them. That makes my life easier.

**Justice Diremelo: Financial Aid manager at TUT, Soshanguve campus**

I don't know where things go wrong, but it's communication. REAP applies directly to NSFAS and sends us a letter. But those letters... I suppose it's because we've got multiple campuses, they need to go to one central place (to the financial aid manager on our central campus), but [then] the student comes to me. So I ask Tsepo to fax a copy to me too. It would be easier if we both get a copy of the letter.... Students arrive here when they've finished writing exams and the results are not out, saying "Tsepo sent me..." but I know nothing about it. Last semester, the students had a problem registering.

**Tebogo Segoje, Financial Aid Officer at University of Johannesburg**

[The administration of the access package] is spot-on. Always on time. They give me ample time in which to do things for them. My relationship with them over the years has been excellent. We work well together.

**Beryl Ghansar, Financial Aid officer, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)**

### **4.3. How did the one-to-one support and workshops benefits SSACI students?**

#### *Workshops*

Five of the thirty-three students interviewed rated workshops above access to a NSFAS loan and fifteen considered them of second highest importance after the loan.

Asked which workshops had been most beneficial, sixteen said they had gained most from the work preparation workshops, fifteen put the study skills workshops at the top of their list, while the remaining four students rated lifeskills most highly.

Seven of the nine students with jobs thought the work preparation workshops were most valuable, only one of whom had a family member who had ever had a job. The significance of providing job seeking skills and information and instilling confidence in the process cannot be overstated in cases where students come from families of "discouraged work seekers" in the language of Statistics South Africa.

What I see is that [REAP students] need a lot of support. That's why I told Pumie that they need more than one workshop every six months. We do an Academic Potential Assessment to decide which skills they need. It's difficult to do with the REAP group, but I think they need critical thinking skills and analytical skills. The other issue is to build their confidence so that they can talk without a problem. You should have a consistent facilitator(s) so that the students get to know the person and they can come back for follow-up... we can run the lifeskills programme that we [usually] offer. I can also train facilitators; I'm accredited for this. We could also train mentors for university students. As long as REAP is prepared to pay – not exorbitant rates, we know it's an NGO.

**Sharo Sithole, workshop facilitator: TUT**

Sharo went on to say:

I think my overall recommendation is to bring all the Gauteng-based facilitators together and tell us what [REAP] wants to achieve [with the workshop programme].

#### *One to one support*

[My student advisor] gave me a lot of support. I had a break-in in my room. She helped me through... She really gave me emotional and moral support

**Thandi: SSACI student**

I failed one subject and needed support from REAP so after I had spoken to my advisor and explained my situation at home, REAP agreed to help me with those two subjects and now I am a graduate

**Bangani: SSACI student**

As anticipated, face to face and telephonic support came lower down the rating scale in student interviews. The relational aspect is much more amorphous than loans or workshops; the benefit is hard to measure. Of the sixteen students who gained most from access to a loan, nine found regular telephonic contact with a student advisor of secondary importance in the package of services. Two students put face-to-face contact at the top of their lists, above loans, but 14 of 33 interviewees gave it third or fourth place.

Three students interviewed for the evaluation used the open-ended question about gaps in the service to raise requests for more assistance with job seeking, two of whom had graduated but not yet found work.

**4.4. Did REAP add value to what institutions and NSFAS offer to students?**

If you take our cohort of students, they're the first [in the family] to go to a tertiary institution. There's nothing to fall back on, to ask "How did you cope with this?" It's a matter of confidence to approach a lecturer and ask for help. More are beginning to do that, to feel more entitled to help. Even those who do that find that they don't always get a positive response.

**Lynette Harding, Co-ordinator, student services**

Without REAP, I know for a fact that a lot of those students won't make it. On the other hand, with only REAP, a lot of those students will have a hard time. So productive relationships with institutions must be sustained.

**Professor Jonathan Jansen: Board member**

NGOs [like REAP] have a reach beyond ours. That shouldn't be the case, but it is. The other thing that they add is the counselling, mentoring etc, which is important. The kids are that much more assertive and can go and get jobs. If the view was only that they had greater reach, that would only be a short-term advantage.... [REAP is] very good at looking after the students... There are very few REAPs around who we can put an enormous amount of trust and reliance in and we [so] have to deal with them at a secondary level. REAP is a first tier NGO, and we've only got three of those [in the country].

**Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

NSFAS was originally drawn to the REAP partnership because we access rural students and that was what they needed. Whether that still holds as a pin, I'm not sure. In my recent conversations with Allan, he talks about 'good graduates' rather than rural access [as REAP's added value].

**Glenda Glover, director**

**The value REAP adds to the NSFAS loan system**

Lynette: The difficulty is the way [the institutions] allocate loans. Whereas we can give a full grant, different institutions use different criteria, and if a student is eligible for R32 000 and needs that amount, they may only get R15 000 because of the way the institution needs to allocate loans to meet targets. REAP doesn't operate under those limitations when allocating student loans.

Evaluator: What happens if REAP offers a full loan on the basis of assessed needs in a student's first year and then that student only gets half that amount from the institution in second year?

Lynette: I'll give an example from DUT. That institution's policy is that if you are accessing a loan for the first time, they'll only cover tuition costs, not accommodation. So, we've negotiated that if they've qualified for a full cost loan, we would process a second loan to meet the difference. So there have been quite a number where we've had to top-up.

R **Source: Focus group with REAP managers**

Could REAP's services be offered by other key role players, such as institutions themselves or NSFAS?

In an ideal world, the institutions could do this work [currently done by REAP]. But these academic development programmes are 20 years old and one's not sure that they're contributing towards the same type of success that REAP has. Academic development programmes are about students preparation, while REAP enables them to cope. Institutions are a long way away from helping students to cope. They can assist with more welfare related issues, less development- related issues... We [NSFAS] are a mass-based thing, we're not going to be able to customise a service. We've got to have a one-size-fits-all approach to an extent because of the numbers we're helping.

**Allan Taylor, NSFAS CEO**

#### **4.5. Did REAP manage the SSACI project efficiently?**

Implicit in much of the report thus far is an indication that REAP draws on its financial and human capacity resources thoughtfully and that there is an ethos of doing a lot with relatively little. Challenges are generally foreseen and managed constructively. The Education Ministry and NSFAS have honoured REAP for the contribution it makes to the sector, and other major role players seem to hold the organisation in high esteem. However, during the course of the evaluation, it became evident that there was tension is evident in the partnership, specifically related to SSACI's concerns about REAP's management of this project.

Management of the contract has been very weak. It's a cross-cutting weakness in the NGO sector. I went over the contract paragraph by paragraph with Glenda, but parts of it just didn't penetrate. We had a sharp exchange about a year ago, where I reminded her that every student would receive these services – had they done it? They couldn't tell me, so I assumed it hadn't been done. That doesn't go down well with me.

**Ken Duncan, SSACI CEO**

Part of the tension seems to relate to different cultures of project management in the non-profit and corporate sectors, as the following quote indicates:

The things we [at SSACI] prize highly are efficiency and effectiveness. Response time is a key indicator. That kind of culture is very Swiss and quite at odds with the SA culture. Much of what is called ubuntu is, in my opinion, soft management. Concern about human resource issues should not impede the organisation. If my staff are having difficulties, it's no excuse for me to fall behind. Over and over again, I get reinforcement of this from the Swiss side and resentment from the SA side

**Ken Duncan, SSACI CEO**

REAP and SSACI had engaged in discussions during the project period about the potential for key targets to be missed, but it appears that REAP was not aware of the extent of SSACI's disappointment with project management. REAP argues for a more flexible approach to development processes:

One does ones best in articulating in a proposal what the programme is about and how it's going to work. But the fact that we start with 58 students doesn't mean there'll be 58 students every year. This situation was exacerbated with SSACI because we didn't know that some of the donors would want to retain their students in later years. But I've continued to report on some of these students because they did receive SSACI funding. Already in 2003, we started to shift to keeping students with one funder. If a donor drops out, then we have to re-allocate... . We were green and the programme was evolving. [SSACI] did allow for an amended budget last year. But there's an expectation that we're watching these things daily.

**Glenda Glover, director**

One of the frustrations expressed by REAP managers was that SSACI limited operational

expenditure to 16% of the budget. In 2004, REAP (in consultation with SSACI) drew on Lottery funding to supplement SSACI's contribution to operating and management costs of the project. The following year, REAP did not supplement SSACI funds and overspent by almost R16 000 in these line items.

The evaluators sought feedback from two other REAP funders about management of their funds, with interesting and nuanced results:

Glenda comes and sees us once a year. We also get very good reports from them at least twice a year. She also invites us to meetings that the fieldworkers have with students. There's always this willingness of contact and keeping us up to date all the time. Any questions we have get answered.

**Funder A**

I'm not sure whether they have all the capacity they need to be on top of every donor, from time to time we've battled to get accurate reports on exactly where the students are at in terms of their performance. It's compounded by the fact that it takes time to get this information out of the [institutions], and by the fact that we support students at less elite institutions. REAP seems to be particularly well connected at the institutions and in their dealings with students. Other organisations we support are a bit more hit and miss.

**Funder B**

This evaluation found that REAP was not accustomed to the kind of project contract it entered into with SSACI in 2003. Of all REAP's funding agreements, both prior to the SSACI agreement and since, this one set the most specific objectives and expected outcomes, and required the highest level of monitoring and reporting. These requirements exceeded REAP's capacity, most notably in the earlier period covered by the agreement. Glenda Glover and her team are cognisant of the deficits and have reviewed and adjusted systems consistently throughout the period under review. The learnings accumulated over this time, and especially during the process of this evaluation, are viewed in a positive light by the organisation. There is recognition that REAP (and its predecessors) historically benefited from the generosity of philanthropic funders who had different, more qualitative expectations, and that REAP is now, by virtue of the relationship with SSACI, better geared to a more diverse set of funders.

This points to the value of ongoing dialogue between funders and NGOs across different development paradigms, so that tensions can be constructively worked with (if not to reach consensus, then in the hope of enhancing mutual understanding) throughout the duration of a partnership.

#### **4.6. Is the overall programme practical, relevant and coherent?**

**Relevance:** The work addresses real and assessed needs of the target group

**Coherence:** There are clear strategic links between different programmes and projects, which all fit within the core business

The evaluation found that internal leadership of REAP, and that provided by the Board, has a finger on the pulse of the organisation and, increasingly, on the pulse of the HE sector. It is this that keeps it coherent, relevant, and practical.

##### **4.6.1 Practicality**

When all the talking [about a new programme] started, the EAS money was finished and everyone wondered what we

should do after 26 fantastic years. At that moment, I opened my big bek and asked about the rural students. So, a gap was perceived by the Catholic Church that they hadn't completed their task in HE yet. It seemed sensible to combine with CEAP, which wasn't renewing itself and was heading for the same situation as EAS. ... we were trying to find out what still needed to be done in the sense of serving humanity.

**Beva Runciman, former Director of CEAP and current REAP Board member**

REAP took the best of both the CEAP and EAS bursary schemes and moulded them into a more sustainable model, targeting the sector of South African society with least means and most obstacles to accessing HE. The final product had some practicality trade-offs in the interests of drawing on existing resources. For example, the CEAP building in Athlone (formerly a Catholic convent) was the obvious choice for REAP's new home. But it is geographically very removed from where most of the REAP students live and study. Secondly, while the regional representatives inherited from the EAS scheme are, without exception, deeply committed to rural issues, many were not part of conceptualising the REAP programme and not all agree with the selection criteria it applies.

We have no problem in finding people; whether they're accepted or not is the problem. Last year we sent in 30 [REAP application forms] and only one was accepted last year. And he wasn't a member of the Catholic church...If I have to hand them out to a secondary school, I don't have a clue who's getting them, or whether they're telling the truth. But I know the people in the parish and I'm involved in trying to help them. I don't want to deprive them.

**Fr Anthony Pathe, Rustenburg Diocese**

#### **4.6.2 Relevance**

Objectively, recent reports in the media about dropout rates from higher education lend significant weight to the rationale behind the REAP programme. Subjectively, REAP experiences increasing recognition of their relevance as a player in the sector from the response it receives:

I get an appointment with government people, NSFAS leadership, HE leaders... They see us if we ask. It is always with great admiration that the programme is met.

**Glenda Glover, director**

In terms of the institutions, I've not had anyone coming back refusing to register a student on receipt of a letter from REAP. They know that we will pay.

**Lynette Harding, programme co-ordinator**

#### **4.6.3 Coherence**

The programme is essentially a coherent model, tested over many years by CEAP, and fine-tuned by REAP to meet the specific needs of rural students. Tracking studies over the last two years have helped to link questions about the fit of elements of the programme with initial evidence of the impact, the results of which have fed into annual review and planning workshops with board members and staff.

### **5. Outputs (Has this led to the expected outputs?)**

The agreement between REAP and SSACI states the following primary objective:

*To provide three-year access and support for 58 Technikon students from rural communities in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and North West provinces, and ensure that at least 40 of them find jobs related to their fields of study within six months of graduating.*

... the things that [SSACI] challenged us with - especially that they were looking at employment at a time when we were looking at access - have been very beneficial for us.

**Glenda Glover, director**

Since the beginning of the project, there has been a substantial gap between REAP and SSACI's sense of what constitutes success. As a result, they have tended to talk past each other, with student advisors taking a lot of pride in what their students have achieved and SSACI expressing concern about missed outputs targets. More recently, there have been shifts towards a closer understanding of success between REAP and SSACI.

A real change in my time has been [re-evaluating] the idea that if we get students in, they will then fly. The kind of student we support needs more than access, and the end result – a student who's employable – is important.

**Glenda Glover, director**

**What is success, for REAP?**

Discussions with student advisors demonstrate that they expect their students to gain maturity, make good decisions using support appropriately, and to show serious commitment to improving their academic results and lifeskills. If they don't meet these expectations, and fail while on conditional support, SAs make joint decisions to terminate support unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as the death of a parent. Exit from the programme for failing to take advantage of the services available is considered an integral part of learning to take responsibility as a young adult. For a funder, this may look like failure and a waste of the funds already invested in the individual. Development of the whole student is a priority; graduation rates have not, until recently, been a key marker of success.

For the purpose of this evaluation, student advisors were asked about the **most significant changes\*** they expected students to go through as a result of REAP's support. They look for acquisition of leadership skills and a wide range of lifeskills, such as the ability to make decisions and budget. In addition, student advisors emphasised that enhanced coping-orientation to life is an indicator of success. This includes being goal-oriented, having good self esteem and confidence, being self-reliant and pro-active, an ability to cope with change and an awareness of the importance of 'giving back'.

*\* based on the evaluation model: Most Significant Change Technique (Davies and Dart)*

**5.1 Graduation**

Implicit in the REAP / SSACI project contract is that at least 40 of the 58 students would graduate. This has not been the case, as Chart 1 demonstrates.

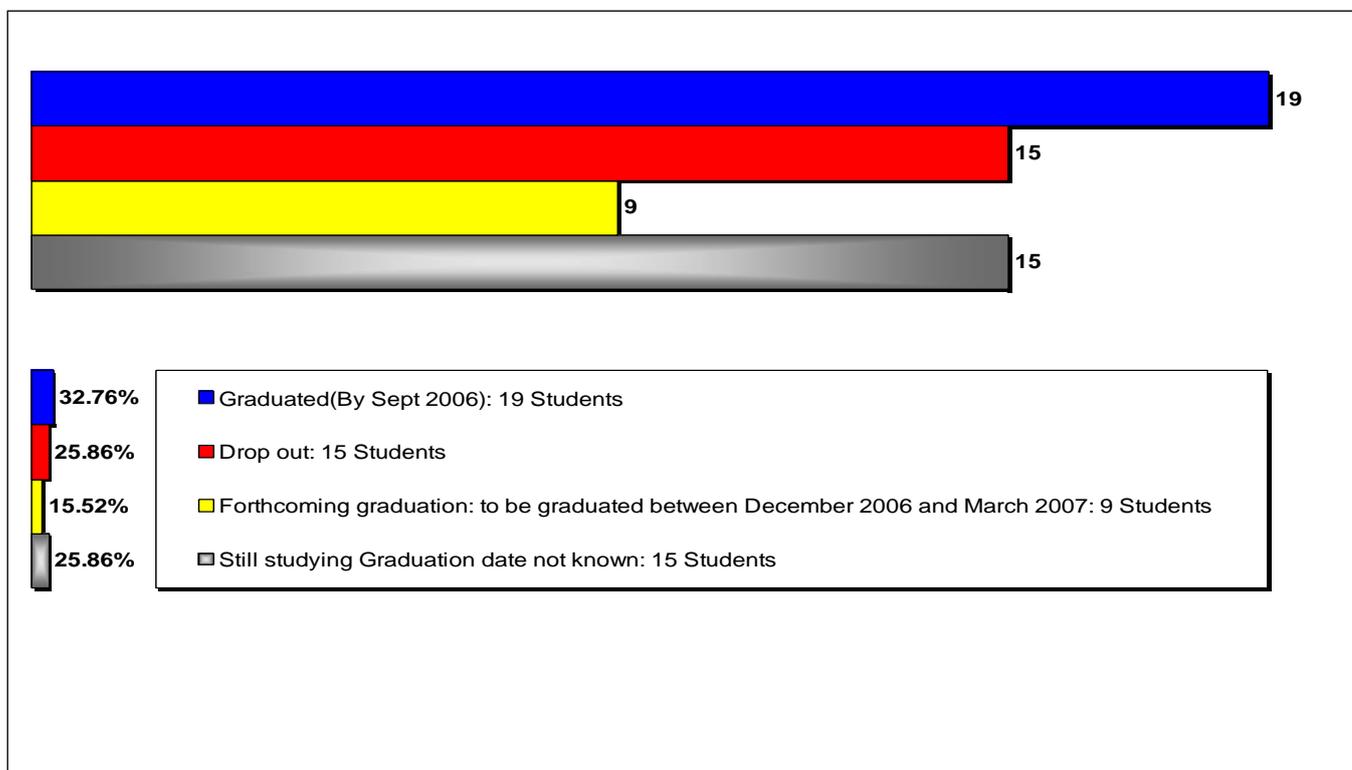


Chart 1: SSACI student outcomes by September 2006

The progress of the REAP-funded SSACI cohort can alternatively be depicted as follows, again using graduation by September 2006 as a cut-off date and detailing progress towards graduation over different time frames, thus accommodating for the different start dates of SSACI students:

Progress of SACC I Cohort	Grad in min time	Grad: Date not recorded	Grad: min +1	Grad: min+ 2 (by Sept 2006)	Total graduates By Sept 2006	Due to complete by Dec 2006	Drop-outs	Still studying: Grad date not known	Total Intake
<b>Number</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>5.17%</b>	<b>1.72%</b>	<b>22.41%</b>	<b>3.45%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>15.52</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 6: Progress of SSACI cohort through various milestones

A national cohort study, released in 2005 and published in the popular press over the period of this evaluation, shows that only 32% of all technikon students who started in 2000 had graduated after four years. The 2003 intake to the REAP programme have not yet had a full four years in which to complete. There is therefore some conjecture involved in whether those still studying will pass their final exams or successfully conclude their in-service training by the end of this year. The column in table 7 (below) marked *graduated after four years* includes 8 students from the 2003 intake considered most likely to complete between now and the end of 2006 some of whose graduation ceremonies will be scheduled for early 2007.

<b>Progress Cohort</b>	<b>Dropped out</b>		<b>Graduated after 4 years</b>		<b>Still studying after 4 years</b>	
	National	SSACI	National	SSACI	National	SSACI
<b>Count</b>	58%	(15) 26%	32%	(27) 46%	10%	(16) 28%

Table 7: Comparison of technikon throughput rates: National cohort and SSACI-funded REAP cohort

Of the 11 students who started first year with REAP support in 2002 (and whose status after four years is thus known) can more reliably be compared with the national cohort study,

- Eight have graduated: Five by the end of 2005 (i.e. minimum + 1 year), and three more during 2006 (i.e. minimum + 2 years);
- Two students are still registered. One experienced a delay with securing in-service training while the second completed his in-service training, but the institution lost his records during the merger and is reviewing his practical logbook so that he can graduate in 2007. The delay is therefore not his fault; and
- One student dropped out because of incomplete practical credits. Despite this she got a job at Impala Platinum mines doing underground maintenance work which is assumed here to be a lesser position than she would have been eligible for had she completed her chemical engineering qualification.

The comparison is highly favourable to the REAP cohort and adds fuel to the argument that rural students need at least one, and possibly two, additional years of support in order to complete. Further evidence of this is provided in the following case study.

### Durban University of Technology: A case study

A higher number of SSACI students (13) attended DUT than any other tertiary institution, prior to the mergers. While a comparison using such a small group should be approached with caution, it is tempting to see how these 13 students fared in relation to students from the 2000 cohort who attended DUT.

DUT was formerly the Durban Institute of Technology. A total of 6 561 first-year students registered in 2000, the largest intake among all higher education institutions that year after Pretoria Technikon. In August 2006, following several media stories of mismanagement, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, appointed Prof. Jonathan Jansen (incidentally, a member of the REAP Board) to a temporary care-taking role to resolve governance issues at the institution. SSACI has funded DUT directly in the past.

Note: Percentages have been used for ease of comparison, but that this is a mathematically problematic approach to such a small number.

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Dropped out within 4 years</b>		<b>Graduated after 4 years</b>		<b>Still studying after 4 years</b>	
	National	SSACI	National	SSACI	National	SSACI
<b>Cohort</b>	72%	2 (16.6%)	25%	3 (23%)	3%	8 (62%)

Table 8: Throughput comparisons at DUT: National cohort and SSACI-funded REAP cohort

Three students at DUT have graduated to date, with eight still studying or doing in-service training. In other words, a similar proportion has graduated but dropout is considerably lower, with interesting indications of far greater perseverance by REAP-supported students.

To what factors can the difference between “success” and “failure” be ascribed? How much influence did matric achievement have (especially in maths and English)? Is there a correlation between attendance of study skills and lifeskills workshops and success in higher education?

### Matric results

As table 9 shows, there is little to suggest that matric results are a good predictor of performance at tertiary level, with the possible exception of a higher aggregate, thus giving credence to the new thresholds adopted by REAP.

	<b>Graduates and soon-to-be graduates (total: 28)</b>	<b>Non-graduates - including those still studying (total: 30)</b>
<b>S720 (lowest score)</b>	2	3
<b>M1260 (highest score)</b>	7	4
<b>Average mark: English</b>	60%	57%
<b>Studied matric maths</b>	18	21
<b>Maths scores above 50% HG</b>	3	4

Table 9: Comparison of matric academic profiles among students who have graduated and those who have not

Of the 19 students who had graduated at the time of this evaluation, all but one studied English higher grade, second language. The exception is a student who studied first language higher grade, the only individual in the entire cohort to have done so, and one of only two to have continued with post-graduate studies.

None of the students who have graduated thus far achieved a maths score above 50% on the higher grade. This includes students who have since qualified in information technology, engineering (4) and accounting.

### **Workshop attendance**

The following analysis is interesting, but inconclusive. Eligibility in the discussion below refers to students who could reasonably be expected to attend workshops, as explained in more detail.

Of the 17 graduates for whom workshop attendance data is available<sup>29</sup>, only six attended the compulsory academic workshop in 2004, while two of the 14 students<sup>30</sup> attended in 2005. By contrast, all students who went on to graduate attended at least one lifeskills workshop in 2004, 12 of the 15 in this group attended two lifeskills workshops and two elected to attend an extra one that year. The figures are similar in 2005.

In the group of students who will not have completed their studies by the end of this year (including those who have dropped out and those who are continuing), 11 of an eligible<sup>18</sup> attended the academic workshop in 2004. Five out of 15 still on the programme in 2005 did so. Further investigation indicated some of the reasons. Two students were based in Oudtshoorn that year, a five-hour drive away from the workshop venue. One student had returned home while seeking in-service training and a fourth was busy with in-service training. However, there were at least six students who should have attended these workshops and failed to do so. It is tempting to speculate that this may have a bearing on their delayed progress through the coursework, but closer examination reveals that these students are having more problems with the practical than the theoretical component of their courses. One has dropped out.

Asked about penalties for students who don't attend workshops, Lynette Harding responded:

They get a hard time! I often ask students who miss a workshop what they're going to do to make up for that. Some will attend a similar workshop at their institution, or go to student counselling to address that issue.

### **Stories of individual SSACI student outcomes**

[I have a] story of very great success. There was a very clever girl, **Sindiswa**, who got an [initial] bursary to do a bridging course. That's very necessary for children from rural areas. Then she got onto REAP. She was doing electrical engineering. She got her in service training at the mines, who were so impressed with her that they are paying for her third year. Her sister is also getting support from REAP. Her cousin finished last year, with REAP's support, and is doing her post – graduate course qualification.

**Fr Anthony Pathe, Rustenburg Diocese**

This student is currently in her final year of Mining at the University of Johannesburg.

My very first Sunday [in this diocese], I went to this big church. A girl came up to me afterwards, crying, saying she had no food. I went home with her, to a tin shack. There was a mother with 5 daughters; the girl I had met was the oldest. The husband had died. The mother had no work and no grant. They were literally starving. So I helped them. A younger sister had been leading the singing in the front of church that morning as a 12 year old – she's **Thobeka**, who graduated last year with REAP's help. I can name many children like that. Thobeka was the poorest of the poor. Her mother couldn't give her a cent towards her education.

**Fr Anthony Pathe, Rustenburg Diocese**

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29 Note that records were only kept for students currently funded by SSACI; students whose funding source changed during the course of their studies are excluded from these results.

30 The other five students had either graduated or were doing in-service training – in locations far away from the workshop venues - by this time.

At the end of the first semester of 2005, Thobeka's final year of support from REAP, the SSACI report compiled by her student advisor noted that:

Thobeka is a good student who keeps all her appointments. Unfortunately, she has been struggling with Marketing, which is her major subject. She did not do well again in her June exams and went to winter school. Through the help of the winter school she passed Marketing. She has been referred to student counselling and advised to take extra tutorial classes. We hope that she will be able to finish her studies at the end of 2005.

Thobeka's matric score had been low, at S720. In terms of current criteria, she would not have been considered for REAP support. She did complete at the end of 2005, as hoped. In mid-2006, she responded to the tracking questionnaires sent out by REAP as a follow-up to the 2002 cohort study. She wrote:

It has been a sad time leaving REAP. I have been struggling a bit but I'll get there. Interviews and looking for a job have been tough. I wish I had more information and experience so that I can get a job.

**Fundiswa**, who studied Environmental Health at Mangosotho University of Technology, took four years to complete her qualification. During this time, she served on the Student Representative Council. In some institutions, it is customary for SRC office-bearers to add an additional year to their studies. In her case, it was exceptional that she qualified in less time than many REAP students while holding a position of responsibility within the institution.

Her student advisor noted in late 2004 that:

Fundiswa continues to maintain contact with myself, even during her in service training period. She had a tough time in the beginning of the year because her grandmother who reared her became very sick and she had to spend time caring for her. She has also been a great inspiration to the new REAP students... She has been completing in-service training at a health centre in Pietermaritzburg and feels positive about finding work in this field. She will have to complete one subject next year before she can receive her diploma.

Attempts to track her for the purposes of this evaluation were unsuccessful.

### **Prolonged studies: A question of perseverance?**

The results of this evaluation suggest that one of the most significant differences between the national cohort and the SSACI-funded REAP cohort is that far fewer students are dropping out and are, instead, sustaining their studies for a longer time. It may be that this is more pronounced at particular institutions which have higher drop-out rates (as speculated in the DUT case study) and could be seen as a signal of success. NSFAS caters for students who take five years to complete a three-year qualification while REAP currently stretches its support to a maximum of four years.

The fact that it has taken longer [for students to complete] to me is not very important. There obviously needs to be a limit, maybe 50% extra time... they are rural youngsters and their access to good secondary education is limited. So the fact that it takes longer needs to be built in to the thinking and it's a bonus when students do complete in minimum time. To agonise over those who don't is a waste of REAP's energy.

**Sr Cathy, REAP Board member**

If you want to support a student from beginning to end, you really need a five-year contract. One funder is doing that.

**Glenda Glover, director**

### **Prolonged studies: A case study**

*Thamsanqa is studying towards a national diploma in Accounting at the Soshanguve campus of TUT. He first registered in 2003. In his first year he failed financial accounting I, but in 2004 and 2005 he passed all courses he registered for. He continued into 2006, taking five semester courses, including a third year financial accounting course which he initially failed but then passed after attending winter school. He is due to graduate this year.*

*At first glance, Thamsanqa has taken four years to complete a three-year course, for some an indication of mediocrity. However, his academic record indicates that he scored distinction-level passes in four of his courses, passing cost and management accounting with 84% in 2005. He did not study maths at matric level.*

## **5.2. Employment**

The REAP / SSACI agreement stipulated that almost 70% of the students would gain employment within six months of graduating. Again, this target has been missed and again, the story is not a simple one.

Eleven (19%) of the original cohort of 58 currently have jobs, or are about to start jobs. This includes employment with the SABC in Polokwane, an advertising agency in Cape Town, a guest lodge in the North West and at two hospitals: Johannesburg General and Tygerberg. An additional two students gained temporary jobs since graduating but are not currently employed. One is engaged in post-graduate studies (B Tech in Corporate Administration).

Analysing the employment outcomes of the eight graduates from the 2002 intake presents a mixed picture, with the majority (six out of eight) having gained some formal, paid work experience since graduating, but not permanent nor secure employment.

Two are employed (interviews were conducted with both of their employers for the purpose of this evaluation). A third student is likely to be offered a permanent position in the place where she did her in-service training, while two others appear to have had jobs at some point, but do not currently have employment. A management studies student who has not yet graduated has been managing a computer outlet, but resigned during the course of this evaluation in order to take up in-service training from October and thus complete his qualification.

Was there a relationship between attending workshops on job preparation and successful job seeking? Of the eleven students with jobs, three were not eligible for workshops due to in-service training demands while data is unavailable for two as they were receiving alternative funding. Of the seven remaining students, six attended one job preparation workshop and two attended two workshops.

The project description further stated that students would find job related to their field of study. This is the case in most instances. Two students have part-time jobs in unrelated fields. One has a learnership in the wholesale industry. Please see table 10 for details.

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Job sector / employer</b>
Marketing	Advertising agency
Chemical Engineering	Mines
Cost and Management Accounting	Wholesale industry

Travel and Tourism	Hospitality industry: guest lodge
Journalism	SABC
Management	Store manager
Mechanical Engineering	Part-time job; details unconfirmed
Public Management	State hospital
Radiography	State hospital
Human Resource Management	National chain store
Policing	SANDF

Table 10: Relationship between field of study and job sector

A currently unemployed student who graduated with a marketing diploma in 2005 from Mangosotho Technikon, provided the following update in mid-2006<sup>31</sup>:

After graduating, I did voluntary work at Manguzi hospital, I then got a temporary job in the malaria control programme for three months. I am also involved in the block-making project in our area. I also did counselling courses for HIV/Aids in 2005.

Asked if he had any suggestions for REAP, he wrote:

I would like to see REAP student advisors being connected with companies for in-service training for management students.

Information about earnings was collected from eight of the nine employed students interviewed for this evaluation.

Monthly income bracket	Number of former students
R1001 – R2500	1 (learnership)
R2501 – R4500	4
R4501 – R8000	2
R8001- R11000	1

Table 11: Breakdown of monthly earnings

There is scope for further investigation of the impact of these earnings, not just on the changing socio-economic status of the former student, but also in terms of wider distribution and repatriation to the rural area in which the student grew up.

### Feedback from Employers

The four employer interviews conducted for this evaluation cannot be considered representative. However, they provided interesting anecdotal evidence, suggesting that former students who are in fields for which they are qualified and have permanent employment, or prospects thereof, are seen to be doing excellent work and to have strong technical skills *and* impressive lifeskills – such as self-confidence and good decision making abilities. Two students, one doing part-time work and the other doing a learnership, working in sectors more tenuously linked to their studies and without job security, are performing at a lower standard. It should be emphasised, however, that even in these cases, their employers recognise their capacity, relative to other young recruits. E.g., “I think she’ll do well in a job if she knows she’s got a permanent job and if she’s able to give it all her attention”

31 In his tracking questionnaire

### **Employment case study A: Nandipha**

Interview with the supervisor of **Nandipha**, a young woman from Rustenburg who studied analytical chemistry at Vaal Tech and is currently completing her in-service training:

She's doing analysis of ferro-chrome samples and water analysis as well. She's actually responsible for the whole water section already. Within a year's period we've earmarked her for a permanent position. She's excellent. I've got full confidence [in her decision making skills.] She rectifies things or comes back to me on things. She is very confident. She's the only female in the lab and she's handling the whole thing very well. We've just advertised a permanent position and she's has been earmarked. I find her very useful in the laboratory. We have big plans for her if she's prepared to stay.

### **Employment case study B: Boitumelo**

Feedback from the manager of Boitumelo, a CPUT graduate who completed this marketing diploma in three years and now has a permanent job, working in media strategy and planning while he completes his Btech:

He's still very junior. But where he does have to make decisions, and checks with me where he has made a decision, I think he's often made the right choice. When he first came to us two years ago to work shadow, he was quiet and reserved. Now he's really come out of his shell. He's a team player... I'm very very happy [with his performance]. He's going to go far. He's obviously very bright.

This evaluation has found that while REAP is whole-heartedly committed to improving the graduation rate, it does not see its role as finding jobs for students. A developed, responsible and skilled young person (and, by implication, someone who can find themselves a job with support) is their key intended outcome. REAP is increasingly recognising the role of partnerships with organisations that hold more expertise in graduate recruitment. SSACI certainly expected more from REAP. While both used the term "job seeking support" it appears that this was never adequately qualified between the two parties.

Prompted to explain what SSACI understood by "job seeking support", Ken Duncan explained to the evaluator:

What we would expect is that, having got a technical qualification, they would have acquired life skills which would include job hunting skills. And that having graduated, they would be able to access a computer to draw up their CV, advice to improve it, advice to access the job market (computer, telephone, post-restante) and grooming for an interview once it was lined up. And then, having got a job, that someone would phone them to find out how it was going, what problems they were having. If push comes to shove, to support them if they were really struggling.

This project evaluation has encouraged REAP to more clearly define its role. The strategic thinking exercise with staff in October indicated a growing emphasis on identifying a student's potential to succeed (which includes gaining a job) and attention on enabling that potential to be realised. Staff recognised the need for more rigour and stronger systems in the delivery of student support services. These will have a positive knock-on effect in terms of graduate recruitment, but it is unlikely that REAP will implement SSACI's definition of job seeking support.

## 6. Beyond inputs and outputs

### 6.1. Catholic legacy: Community serving humanity

I'm a Catholic priest, involved in ten villages. I'm emotionally involved with the people. I see families... I'll tell you a story...

**Fr Anthony Pathe, Rustenburg Diocese**

REAP has its roots in Catholic development and retains strong links with rural Catholic dioceses and with key Catholic thinkers on the Board. As a result, REAP is able to benefit from the real strengths of Catholicism<sup>32</sup> and distance itself from some of the more controversial aspects. Strengths include 1) the significant reach of Catholic networks into some of the most inaccessible rural parts of the country, 2) the long-term commitment of faith-based structures to communities, 3) international linkages, to funders and other supporters, and 4) the Catholic ethos of "... community serving humanity<sup>33</sup>", which establishes a firmer foundation of ethics for decision-making than many CSOs<sup>34</sup> can draw on. The obvious awkwardness, particularly for an organisation working with youth, is the Catholic Church's line on condom use, which REAP has navigated with more agility than other (faith-based) agencies because of the relative elasticity of its relations with Catholic structures. Accordingly, REAP has introduced workshops on sexuality and HIV / Aids.

There are some stresses in the relationship, not unrelated to the fact that it has loosened over the years. Ownership is not always clear and REAP staff are aware that some of the priests and nuns they liaise with prefer the 'old' way of doing things (of EAS and CEAP). This is manifested, for example, in the interpretation of criteria for recruiting students. Whereas REAP advocates reaching as many suitably qualified Grade 12 students through high schools, some regional representatives perceive that the need is so high among their own parishioners that they prioritise these students. There is an argument in favour of knowing candidates personally and being able to vouch for their level of material want and academic potential.

When you're sitting a thousand kilometers away, how can you make judgements except through laws? But every now and again, you should make an exception on the strong recommendation of someone who knows the person and is at the grassroots level... Rules are necessary, but not carved in stone.

**Fr Anthony Pathe, Rustenburg diocese**

Regional representatives are not privy to the daily formal and informal conversations among REAP staff which shape the way the organisation thinks about its development mission and how best to accomplish it. This is a subtly evolving process, which does not easily lend itself to documentation. Implicit in this is the risk that regional representatives will not be aware of, or understand, shifts in thinking and thus fail to routinely apply it.

Given that REAP's selection strategy has been revised, and will place more responsibility for selection on the regional representatives, it is important that:

- ◆ selection criteria are consistently understood, agreed and applied by all regional representatives and their committees; and
- ◆ there is real investment in the relationship between REAP (especially the student advisors) and the regional representatives so that these issues can be debated frankly and openly, and hence resolved.

### 6.2. REAP as a learning organisation

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32 With acknowledgement to Belshaw's paper, "Enhancing the Development Capabilities of CSOs, with Particular reference to Christian Faith Based Organisations" (2005)

33 Extract from the REAP prayer, which opens the morning 'huddles' at REAP

34 Civil Society Organisations

There's a real feeling of a partnership with them. They listen to what we say, they react sensibly, they argue if they don't agree with us. We really value it.

**Donor**

REAP spends a healthy balance of its time reflecting on the quality of the work and creates both informal and formal opportunities to do this. Glenda Glover's leadership, in particular, enables REAP staff and board to catch strategic issues timeously, to learn from them and to generate options for decision-making. This is evident in the regular adjustments made to the programme, documented in this report, the flavour of the annual review and planning workshops, and in the comments below:

There was a time when I wanted to do everything for my students. If they call, I jump. But recently there's been a change to enable them to take the space and to trust them with more responsibility for their lives. And also, ensuring that senior students look after the newer students. I learned in the team building workshops earlier this year at each campus that they can look at themselves as a group of rural students who want to make it.

**Student Advisor**

I learned that I have to speak clearly [on the telephone]... I had to become aware of the tone of my voice because they were picking up my frustration or anger over the telephone – this is the feedback I got from my students. It's important learning for me. Also for them, to be assertive with me.

**Student Advisor**

I've learned that specific workshops need a younger facilitator. It also depends on how vibrant the facilitator is. We found that HIV/Aids or substance abuse are most valuable when older (non- REAP) students present them. Academic workshops are most useful if they're facilitated by the institution, because students can always go back for follow up. When we do team building and contracting workshops, we can get older REAP students to present, and younger students feel more free to participate.

**Student Advisor**

## **7. Summary of strategic and operational issues, and some recommendations**

### **7.1 Coverage and capacity**

So our overall impression is good, but they do need a couple more arms and legs on board.

**Claire Digby, Fund manager: Oppenheimer Memorial Trust**

At present, REAP is spread across many recruitment areas, higher education institutions and individual students, which risks diluting the attention and, possibly, the impact of its services. Student advisors are expected to stay abreast of multiple variations in the way different institutions and faculties operate, especially in terms of how they award academic credits and assess academic performance. Interviews with student advisors indicated a lack of key information in this regard. They are also expected to establish and maintain relationships with many different staff (in financial, academic and student support units) in the various institutions, in the interests of a seamless service to students. Again, interviews at institutions suggested that while these relationships exist (and are particularly active in the case of financial aid officers) these networks could be much stronger in the interests of pursuing further opportunities for reciprocity between REAP and the institutions. There is a broader issue at play here. REAP staff, with the exception of the director, are at risk of being too insular in their work – beyond their relationships with institutions. The HE sector is a very vibrant and busy sector, currently generating some critical learnings from the past twelve years of transformation. Jacqui Layman's participation, during this evaluation, in a national conference of student counselling services, indicates that there is real willingness to network beyond the usual structures.

As REAP thinks about sustaining its work in the future, in the face of uncertain funding, and in terms of amplifying its impact, it may need to consider how to maximise resources and sharpen its focus. Reducing the amount of institutions that REAP students attend may be a key strategy in this regard. Adding to the workloads of current staff does not seem a viable option.

## **7.2 Specialized student services**

Some student advisors place strong emphasis on counselling – and most have a background in social work or counselling – while others play a more parental role. What are the implications for the service that students receive? This begs questions about consistency of the service. There is a related question about whether student advisors should all be generalists, or whether some should specialise in particular issues pertinent to rural youth accessing higher education.

## **7.3 Administration and information management**

How can record-keeping in student files be more consistent? It is recommended that student advisors all make the transition to electronic record-keeping, with all records (of contact with students and decision-making regarding student needs and requests) saved on template forms to the shared drive. This would establish consistency, enable colleagues to access records and add to them (for example, if a student advisor is away from the office) and provide a measure of accountability currently lacking.

Archiving, in particular, is a priority. This has been on the agenda for some time, particularly as the implications of not archiving have slowed down the tracking process. It is a time-consuming process, with no obvious gap in the REAP annual cycle, dictated heavily by the academic year, to wedge archiving tasks into. However, the costs of not doing so now outweigh these considerations. Archiving will ensure that closed files are located in one place in the building, thus freeing up space in student advisors offices, establish clear exit points, with reasons, from the programme – which will also provide impetus to the idea of holding exit interviews – and capture valuable tracking information onto the database.

The short-comings of the outdated REAP putty database are becoming increasingly apparent as information needs become more sophisticated. While it remains an excellent tool for student advisors and administrators, it does not provide sufficient aggregate data to analyse trends or track particular cohorts of students. There will be significant cost involved in updating the system, but the increased external demands for data suggest that some funders may be willing to contribute to the technology required.

There is an argument to be made for employing someone responsible for tracking, and related research, able to compile and analyse information that would serve the growing advocacy role of the organisation, and provide funders and others stakeholders with regular updates.

An interesting initial piece of work for such a person would be to analyse the financial argument for supporting REAP. How much money could REAP save by helping students to sustain their studies longer, graduate and find jobs, that is otherwise lost in NSFAS loans? If the maximum size of an annual loan is R30 000 and a student drops out after three years of loans, the loss is significant. Allan Taylor, of NSFAS, has expressed interest in this kind of information.

## **7.4 Deepening partnerships with (fewer) institutions**

There is an argument for REAP to narrow the range of institutions it works with on the basis of certain criteria, considered key to REAP. Such criteria could foreseeably include:

- Proven capacity to provide a high level of education
- academic bridging programmes in all faculties
- graduate recruitment service with a proven track record

As a small organisation, it is unrealistic to expect REAP to leverage successful student performance in, and successful exit (into a career) from, institutions which lack the corresponding demonstrated commitment. The presence of a bridging programme and graduate recruitment services could complement REAP's attention to both entry to, and exit from, higher education. This would create opportunities for more solid partnerships, clarify respective roles and enable REAP staff to concentrate on a smaller number of institutions and geographical areas.

### **7.5 Pre-empting failure**

Should REAP make it compulsory for students to do a bridging year? This could have the benefits of:

- ◆ establishing a sound footing from which all successful students can embark on a three-year degree or diploma course
- ◆ identifying students who are unlikely to cope, even with additional support, and withdrawing funding to them before they embark on the full degree or diploma course
- ◆ turning an extra year of study into a positive, confidence – building experience rather than the experience of failure that precipitates a fourth year of study for most students.

## **8. Working conclusions and options for the future**

This section concludes the report by summarising key challenges identified by this evaluation and turning attention to what implications this has for future decision-making about the programme. The options below are intended to engage REAP in open-ended discussions (due to start at the October review and planning workshop) and should prompt the generation of further options.

### ***8.1 Matric results, particularly those at the lower end of the scale of HE eligibility, are not a reliable indicator of HE academic performance.***

Option 1: Track the 2006 or 2007 intake cohort and compare performance with the 2002 cohort, who were selected by REAP on the basis of lower academic criteria

Option 2: Adopt the pen-and-paper test of potential developed by UCT as a measure of potential

Option 3: Only select students who are accepted by institutions and faculties that use the aforementioned test of potential, or similar

### ***8.2 Not all rural matriculants who show promise, who need support to access and sustain post-matric studies, and who will use a tertiary qualification to launch a career in the formal sector are necessarily HE candidates.***

Option 1: Include FET students in the REAP programme

Option 2: Partner with an organisation that supports FET students by channeling students selected by REAP, but who are FET candidates, to the other service provider

Option 3: Continue to focus exclusively on universities and universities of technology.

There are mixed responses to this issue among Board and staff. Prior to the evaluation, possible support to the FET sector had been flagged as a key issue. It is currently being explored in collaboration with two external experts.

### ***8.3 Rural students need at least four years of support in order to complete their qualification***

Option 1: Include a mandatory bridging year (i.e. that extends full course to a minimum of four years) for all students and only support students attending faculties that provide a full bridging course. Make continued support conditional to the student on success in this bridging year

Option 2: Enlist the understanding and active support of REAP funders (new and existing) to treat the minimum duration of a course as four years

Option 3: Continue to engage with Edumap College, and track the successes of this engagement

**8.4 Many rural students, with little exposure to the formal sector through their social networks, need comprehensive pre-and postgraduate support. This kind of support is a highly specialised skill, requiring in-depth knowledge of the HE sector as well as the employment sector, SETAs and learnerships.**

Option 1: Recruit a job placement officer at REAP

Option 2: Train all student advisors (some developments are already in process in this regard, but it may result in student advisors gaining generalist knowledge, which may not be in the best interests of individual students)

Option 3: Use the availability of graduate recruitment services as a key criterion for selecting which HE institutions receive REAP support.

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