South Africa – A Regional Higher Education Internationalisation Hub in Transformation

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This article argues that the South African Higher Education system can be characterised as a regional Higher Education internationalisation hub. Presently, it is transforming from a hub for undergraduate education into that of postgraduate education, and more specifically, doctoral education. From the day the country attained its democracy until 2011, it gained increasing prominence for undergraduate university education. In 2012, the sector saw the beginning of the slow decline in undergraduate student numbers and the increase in post-graduate student numbers, with these numbers gaining significant growth over the years, particularly in doctoral student numbers. This also resulted in the steady growth of the overall number of international students in South Africa. A new method of data evaluation allowed the authors to dissect the international student data utilising various indicators, including the level of study.

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Introduction

Internationalisation, regionalism and academic hubs

Higher Education Internationalisation and its functioning within the context of regionalism cannot be divorced from the broader discussion and identification of political and economic regional formations. It is for this reason that we need to pay attention to the general academic debates around these concepts. The following is a short introduction to these ideas.

Cohen (2001) posits an entropy-based explanation of the evolution of regional integration. In this theory, regional groupings occur systematically and come together for political, economic and cultural reasons. Cohen's (1991) delineation, though not perfect, has provided a framework with which to identify economic and political regions. Foreign policy depends on the accurate identification of a region and so does Higher Education internationalisation policy. Abstracting from a national region scenario setup, Haggett (1977) concluded that some regions are natural while some regions are man-made for planning and administrative purposes. Some regions by extension pronounce themselves regions leading to the word region having many meanings. Jimbo (2013) identifies a typology of integration that becomes useful to explain how regions can go beyond their preferred geographical social and cultural associations to integrate onto a global platform.

Internationalisation of Higher Education evolved and developed globally with a symbiotic existence of political and economic regional influences. The political and economic formations provide a differentiated internationalised landscape. It is not possible to apply a uniform definition and description of the different mutations of Internationalisation of Higher Education globally. There is also no consensus on the exact meaning and delimitation of the concept (Zeleza, 2012, 2). One of the most widely used definitions describes it as the 'process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or

delivery of postsecondary education' (Knight 2003, 2). We agree with the extension of this definition offered by De Wit and Hunter (2015), which describes it as the 'intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society' (De Wit and Hunter 2015, 29). This extended definition reflects the critical notion that internationalisation is not an end, but rather a means to achieve other ends (De Wit, 2013) and serves as a means to achieve quality and promote the public good. However, definitions of Higher Education internationalisation should be context-specific. For example, Naude and Jooste define Higher Education internationalisation at South African universities as an intentional process that promotes an acute awareness of different nations in the world and the active, willing movement across national boundaries, in processes of exchange. Internationalisation is intensified by globalisation, but respects and supports the idea of nationalities and the sovereignty of nations. They further highlight the socio-political influences on the process of Higher Education internationalisation. (Naude and Jooste, 2004).

The term education hub, as defined by Knight refers to a specific form of student mobility and internationalisation, and is also predisposed to regional and local influences (Knight, 2015). The most common use of the term education hub is linked to formal transnational activities, largely defined by the establishment of international branch campuses. The focus on the establishment of branch campuses, mostly for profit, ignores the fact that other forms of mobility influenced by factors that cannot be linked to the commercialisation of education, also influenced the creation of regional hubs. We argue that one of the core characteristics of a Higher Education hub should be that it advances the quality of education, and serves the public good. Only if those criteria are met can it, in our view, qualify as a Higher Education internationalisation hub.

This chapter will illustrate how South Africa developed as an education hub differently to Knight's conceptualisation. The country has evolved, since 1994, into a regional hub responding to the needs of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and emerging as as a driver for doctoral education in the SADC region. The vision for regional integration and educational cross-fertilisation in Higher Education in the SADC region is set out in the 1997 SADC Protocol on Education and Training, which acknowledges that 'no SADC Member State can alone offer world quality education and training programmes at an affordable cost and on a sustainable basis' and is 'mindful of the fact that programmes of human resource development, utilisation and increased productivity must have both national and regional dimensions' (Preamble to the SADC Protocol). Thus, it advocates that education should be improved through regional integration. The data provided in this article demonstrates clearly how South African Higher Education responded to the vision of regional integration as determined in the protocol. The spirit of cooperation that defines the protocol defines South African Higher Education's response after the ratification in September 1997.

Article 8 of the Protocol, which considers co-operation in Higher Education, states as follows:

1. "Member States agree to recommend to universities and other tertiary institutions in their countries to reserve 5% of admissions for students from SADC nations other than their own.
2. Member States agree to work towards harmonisation, equivalence, and eventual standardisation of University entrance requirements.

3. Member States agree that in order to prevent the costly repetition of courses taken at universities within the region and in order to contribute towards the mutual recognition of qualifications throughout the region, universities shall be encouraged to devise mechanisms to facilitate credit transfer from one University to another within the region.
4. Member States agree that it is desirable to work towards the harmonisation of the academic years of universities to facilitate staff and student mobility.
5. Member states agree that within ten years from the date of entry into force of this protocol, they shall treat students from SADC countries as home students for purposes of fees and accommodation.
6. Member States agree to facilitate the movement of students and staff from the Region for purposes of study, research, teaching and other pursuits relating to education and training. To this end, Members States agree to work towards the gradual relaxation and eventual elimination of immigration formalities that hinder free student and staff mobility." (SADC, 1997 Article 7).

The South African response to the Protocol, as with the broad implementation of internationalisation within the South African Higher Education system, has always been anecdotal. As much as internationalisation of Higher Education is seen to be an intentional process, the implementation of the SADC Protocol requires intentionality on behalf of Governments. South African universities responded, without new funding or other incentives to the spirit of the protocol. Although there is accurate data available identifying SADC students per country for the past 15 years – data that could be used to compare students from other African countries, as well as the rest of the world, is only available from 2011. In analysing the data from 2005, it is clear that the data for the period prior to 2011 would be similar. Figure 1 provides this detailed information:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
SADC	28 579	28 847	28 801	28 587	28 604	28 891	28 836
Other African	6 090	6 502	6 943	7 188	7 447	7 685	7 672
Europe	2 121	2 509	2 200	2 311	2 327	2 380	2 311
North America	1 395	1 356	1 410	1 309	1 447	1 499	966
BRIC	766	688	679	669	657	691	808
Other	113	66	180	286	239	620	693
Grand Total	39 101	40 268	40 213	40 350	40 721	41 755	41 286

Figure 1 - Origins of International Students in South Africa.

The data indicates that in 2017, 60% of international students in South Africa originate from the SADC Counties and 18% from the rest of Africa. 78% of all International students are thus from Africa. Although the South African Government is promoting closer cooperation with other BRICS countries, the number of students from these countries did not increase, since South Africa joined this regional structure, but remained constant at two percentage. It is thus clear that the South African system, as far as inward student mobility is concerned, is strongly influenced by the Southern African region and the rest of the continent. An interesting tendency over the past five years is the slow but steady increase of students from parts of Africa, other than SADC countries. Although the number of students only increased by two percentage points, in analyses, it is clear that the increase in the number of students is largely at the postgraduate level.

This is clearly illustrated by the following: - the number of students from other African countries outside the SADC region increased steadily from 10917 in 2011 to 11248 students in 2017. Analysing the programmes these students pursue, the following picture unfolds. The number of Masters and PhD students increased from 4132 students in 2011 or 37% of the total to 6112 or 54% of the total. It is also clear that the growth of student numbers from Africa outside the SADC region is largely taking place at the postgraduate level. The significance of this is analysed in the latter part of the article.

A detailed analysis of the SADC students studying in South Africa

The following analyses of the South African Higher Education data, with specific reference to the International student data, in relation to the SADC students in the system, illustrates the point that as far as student mobility into South Africa is concerned, it is mostly a regionally influenced system.

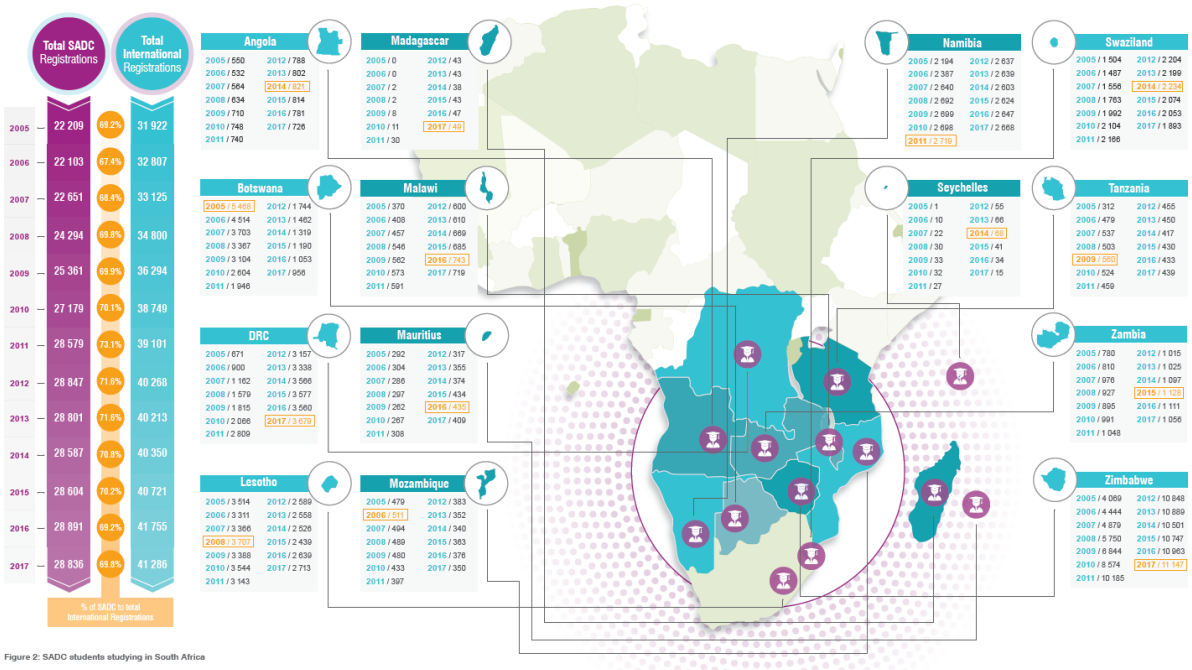


Figure 2: SADC students studying in South Africa

The student numbers from the SADC region are not only a reflection of the strength of the South African system to draw students, but it is also an indicator of the capacity constraints within the region. The cases of Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe illustrate this fact.

Botswana

The Botswana Government identified the South African system as a preferred Higher Education destination and provided comprehensive funding that allowed Botswana citizens to study in South Africa. Until 2005, Botswana was the number one country sending international students to South Africa. The decline in student numbers in the following years can largely be attributed to the investment the country made into its own Higher Education system, alleviating the need to study abroad at the undergraduate level to obtain quality education.

Botswana		
2005 / 5 468	2010 / 2 604	2015 / 1 190
2006 / 4 514	2011 / 1 946	2016 / 1 053
2007 / 3 703	2012 / 1 744	2017 / 956
2008 / 3 367	2013 / 1 462	
2009 / 3 104	2014 / 1 319	

Zimbabwe

Against a background of domestic political and financial instability, Zimbabwe surpassed Botswana as the number one country sending students to study in South Africa. Zimbabwean students currently represent 39% of all the SADC students and 27% of all international students studying in South Africa.

Zimbabwe		
2005 / 4 069	2010 / 8 574	2015 / 10 747
2006 / 4 444	2011 / 10 185	2016 / 10 963
2007 / 4 879	2012 / 10 848	2017 / 11 147
2008 / 5 750	2013 / 10 889	
2009 / 6 844	2014 / 10 501	

The DRC

The political instability within SADC is also reflected in the student mobility into South Africa. The number of students from the DRC illustrates this. The number of students from the DRC in South Africa has grown by more than 500% since 2005 as reflected below.

DRC		
2005 / 671	2010 / 2 066	2015 / 3 577
2006 / 900	2011 / 2 809	2016 / 3 560
2007 / 1 162	2012 / 3 157	2017 / 3 679
2008 / 1 579	2013 / 3 338	
2009 / 1 815	2014 / 3 566	

Other factors influencing student mobility

It is also necessary to look at the influence of student activism that played out on the South African campuses from 2015. This instability did not influence the student flows to the South African system from the region, with the exception of student numbers from the Seychelles, which showed a significant decline since 2015.

Further analysis of the student data indicates that 13% of all SADC students registered in 2005 were Masters and PhD students, whereas in 2017 this cohort represented 31% of the SADC student body. The increase of the SADC student body in South Africa outpaced the growth of South African student numbers in the period 2005 to 2011. It grew by 9% per year-on-year in this period while the South African student numbers increased by not more than 3% per year. This growth was however not sustained and from 2012 student mobility only grew by 1% year on year or showed a slight decline in 2017. The slow growth can be attributed to a real decline in the number of undergraduate students. Undergraduate SADC student numbers in South Africa peaked in 2012 when 16193 students were registered compared to 12975 registered in 2017. This represents a decline of more than 19%.

The growth of undergraduate Higher Education capacity in other SADC countries through the establishment of new universities for example in Botswana, Mozambique, Mauritius and the Seychelles during this period could have been a main factor influencing student mobility into South Africa. This could also explain the growth in postgraduate student numbers as the focus of the new SADC institutions focussed mainly on undergraduate education.

The following data illustrates the above.

The growth in PhD student numbers from the SADC region has been exponential. Their number increased from 645 in 2006 to 3661 in 2017, a 914% growth. This sustained increase relates to PhD students from all countries in the SADC region, throughout the entire period, as is evident from the data below:

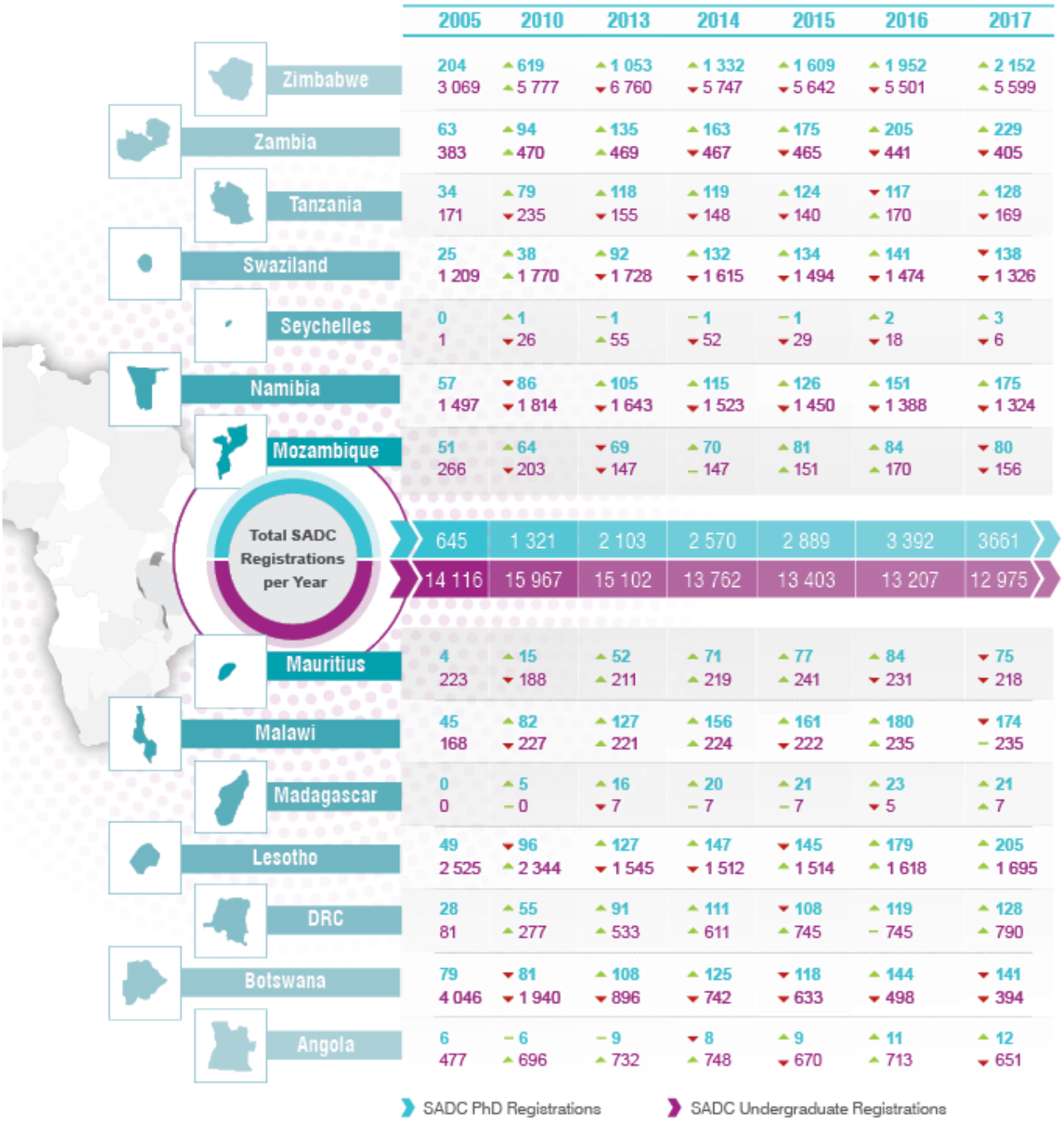


Figure 3: Comparison between SADC PhD registration and SADC undergraduate registrations

** Refer to Figure 2 for the total number of contact international students*

Graduate numbers

Providing the data on the number of registrations from SADC countries in South Africa only tells half the story about the impact and value of the mobility. Analysing the graduation data provides a clear view about the value of this collaboration to the human resources development and the benefit to the broader economic development of the region.

One of the untold success stories of the SADC Protocol is that through this initiative, without real Government intervention but individual effort and dedication, the South African Higher Education system provided 2969 PhD graduates to the region. The quest for advancing quality education and development of the SADC region are driving factors for the increasing enrolment of students from the SADC region, particularly at the postgraduate level.

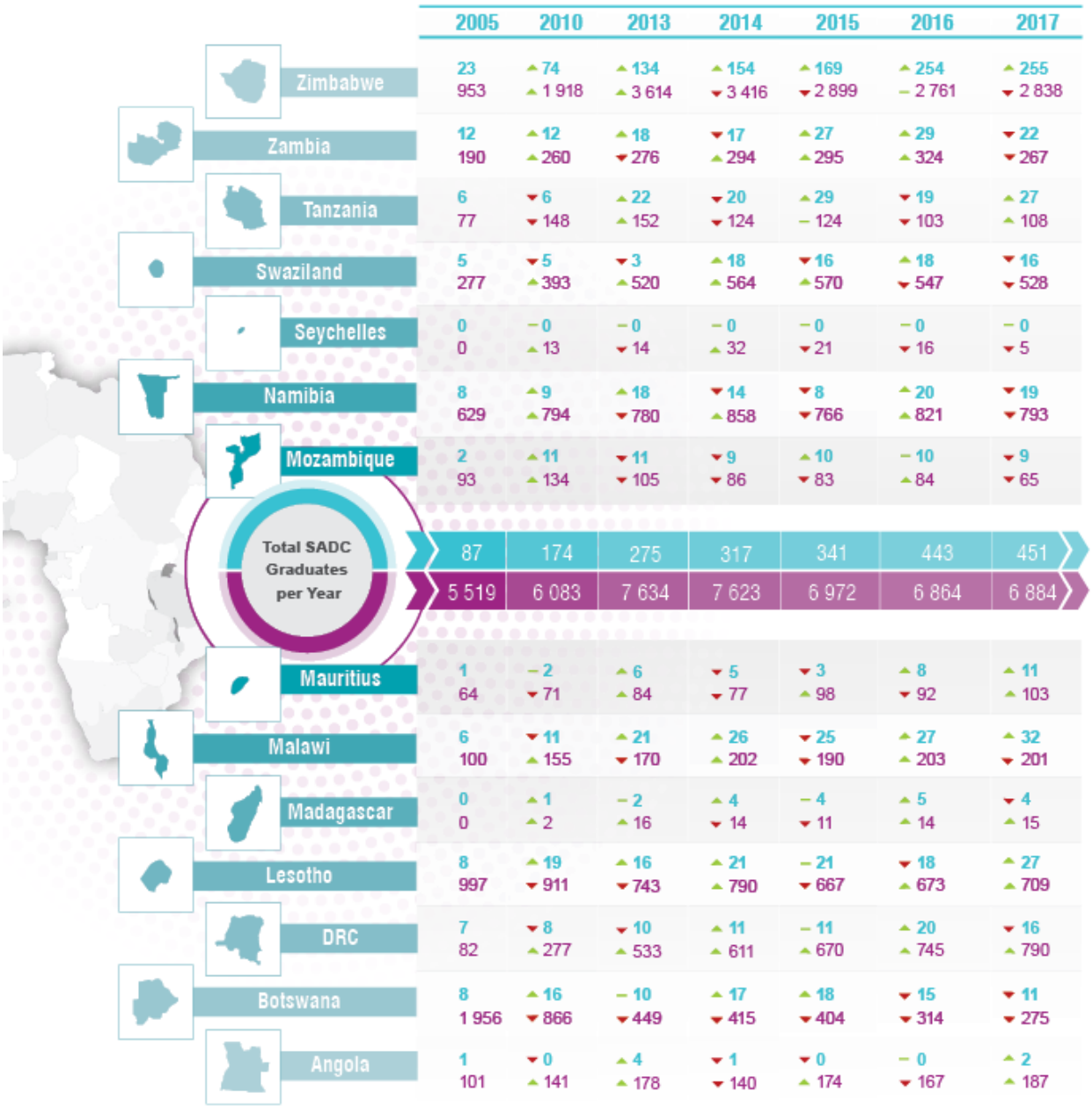


Figure 4: Comparison between SADC PhD graduation and SADC undergraduate, graduation numbers

As most of these graduates returned to their country of origin, the value of the mobility becomes imperative. The South African Higher Education hub is making a significant and sustainably increasing contribution to PhD capacity development in the SADC region. Further research tracking the PhD graduates after graduation

should be conducted as it would provide critical information about the added benefits to the SADC society and economy.

South Africa and the SADC Higher Education

In a study published by the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) in 2012, the following data was provided about the number of students studying in the SADC region outside South Africa.

Country	Undergraduate	Post Graduate <Masters	Masters	Doctoral	Country Total
Angola	46 574	190	632	2	47 398
Botswana	10 607	137	699	20	11 463
DRC	47 345	16 713	168	78	64 304
Lesotho	12 807	116	116	4	13 043
Madagascar	34 892	1 137	3 812	137	39 978
Malawi	7 419	155	340	24	7 938
Mauritius	9 751	9	989	159	10 908
Mozambique	58 839	0	889	3	59 731
Namibia	22 111	719	429	82	23 341
Seychelles					
Swaziland	5 257	155	105	10	5 527
Tanzania	46 302	2 580	3 804	68	52 754
Zambia	22 265	20	655	5	22 945
Zimbabwe	35 896	1 000	3 277	306	40 479
Grand Total	360 065	22 931	15 915	898	399 809

Figure 5: Origins of International Students in South Africa.

The data extracted for this study indicates that in 2012, South Africa registered 1780 PhD candidates from the SADC region, whereas the cumulative number of PhD registrations in all other SADC countries was 898. This data evidences that in 2012, South Africa made a significant contribution to PhD capacity development in the SADC region, and the entire southern part of the African continent. While the number of PhD enrolments may have also grown in other SADC countries since 2012, the contribution of the South African Higher Education hub to PhD capacity development has significantly increased in that the number of PhD registrations from SADC countries, more than doubled from 1780 in 2012 to 3661 in 2017 and the number of PhD graduations increased from 244 in 2012 to 451 in 2017).

From the above data it is evident that the South African Higher Education system and its implementation of the SADC Protocol assist significantly in the provision of more opportunities to citizens from the SADC countries. It is clear that the real value proposition of the South African system to the SADC region is in the provision of opportunities at the postgraduate, and specifically the doctoral level. As the table above reflects the registration of students in 2012 – comparing this with the South African data – South Africa registered 7220 PhD students while all the countries in the SADC registered 898 PhD students.

The implementation of the SADC Protocol, as with the broad implementation of internationalisation within the South African Higher Education system, the Government's involvement has always been anecdotal. The

participation of South African Universities since the signing of the agreement indicated that they embraced the opportunity. It is also evident from the data that the South African system is best placed to respond to the spirit of the protocol in the future.

Institutions reacted to the SADC Protocol, without direct Government intervention and provided access to a large number of SADC students. The South African system developed into a regional hub providing Higher Education to students from all the SADC countries. It, however, is much more than just a regional hub but a true Higher Education internationalisation hub in Southern Africa in that its Higher Education system makes a significant contribution to the provision of quality doctoral education for the SADC region and beyond. As it contributes significantly in the education of PhD students, the knowledge produced during the research activities for the PhD studies is a clear demonstration of its global reach.

The above analyses of the data provide clear evidence signalling that the real transformation process which is taking place in South African Higher Education is towards an international knowledge hub. Postgraduate and particularly, doctoral education, is increasingly taking centre stage. While this increases the hub's impact on the region, the South African Higher Education system should take care to maintain and further enhance the internationalisation of undergraduate studies. In light of the gradual decrease of undergraduate international student numbers, suitable interventions may include a focus on undergraduate semester exchange programs within the SADC region, virtual exchanges and a stronger focus on curriculum internationalisation.

The SADC region should consider a more direct involvement in the promotion of Higher Education collaboration. Instead of purely focussing on mobility and the reservation of 5% of student places within the university systems, it should also promote closer collaboration as envisaged in the protocol. The final clause of the Protocol provides an end goal — 10 years from the signing of the protocol, when it declared that "Member States agree to facilitate movement of students and staff from the Region for purposes of study, research, teaching and other pursuits relating to education and training. To this end, Members States agree to work towards the gradual relaxation and eventual elimination of immigration formalities that hinder free student and staff mobility."

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

One of the unknown factors linked to the undergraduate student numbers is a clear analysis of the number of international students studying in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. Reliable, comprehensive data for all the South African institutions in this sector is not available. The numbers appear to be significant, for example, a study of the TVET students in Cape Town indicates that international students represent around 1% of the student body. The major sender of international students from SADC countries to this sector is that of the DRC. A further study focussing on this sector will be conducted to provide an accurate picture of the internationalised character of this sector.

A glance at the complete South African Higher Education space

The fact that students from SADC countries represents 60% of all the International students studying at South African universities should not be interpreted that the knowledge created and provided by the South African Higher Education space is only relevant to regional and continental audiences. It is indeed a Higher Education space that also participates and contributes to Higher Education Internationalisation, globally.

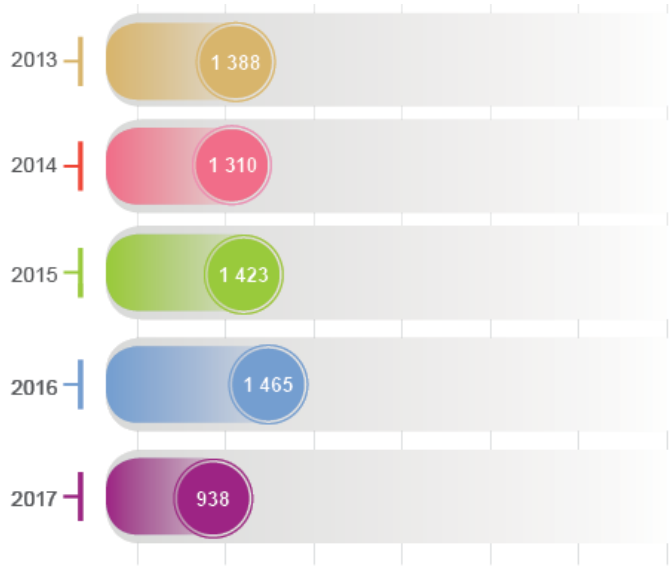
The following will provide a snapshot of the international student representation at the South African universities. It is clear from the data that the distribution of international students throughout the South African system is uneven, and as such only benefits some of the universities. This matter is addressed in the draft Internationalisation Policy. A differentiated Internationalisation Higher Education landscape could emerge once the policy is implemented that could change the international student distribution throughout the system, and as such contribute to the further transformation of the South African Higher Education space, into a real International Higher Education place.

Analysing the representation of international students amongst the South African universities can't be done without a clear description of 'who is an international student in South Africa'. This might seem to be a senseless question but as the concept is globally interpreted in a variety of ways, it is as necessary to provide a definition of an international student so that the South African data can be interpreted comparably to all the other major global Higher Education systems that report international student data.

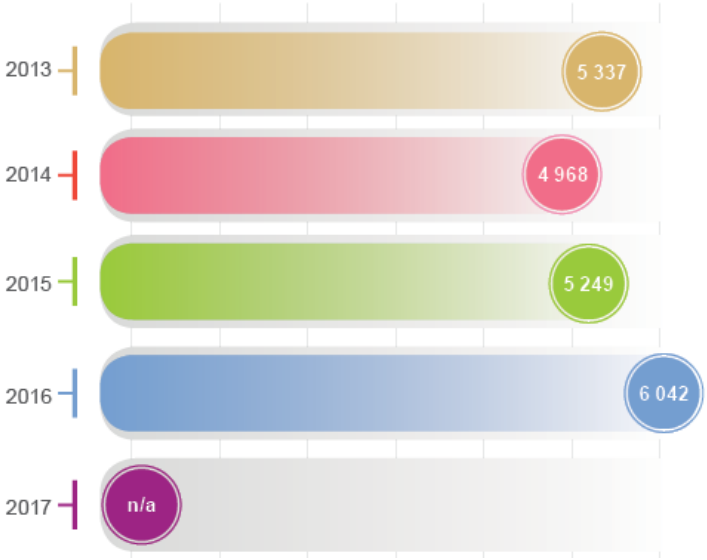
The recognised definition used by Project Atlas, an international collaboration of International Associations, is: According to the Draft Internationalisation Policy published by the DHET, an international student is defined as 'an individual registered as a student in a public or private Higher Education institution in a country other than their country of citizenship or residence (permanent residents are South Africans)'.

The counting of 'mobile' students in the case of Project Atlas excludes distance and 'on-line' students and, as such, would exclude all such student's mobility from the South African data. It is important that we report students in line with Project Atlas as it is the only way that the South African system can be globally compared and benchmarked. In the reporting we will, however, also separately report the distance education students in the South African system. As indicted earlier, the students studying in the TVET sector are not currently included in the data, although they form part of the data reported by the United States of America (USA) and Australia. It is envisaged that the data for these students would be available during the next reporting cycle.

The data as reported by South African Higher Education Institutions does not include students that visit South Africa for a short program nor those placed as interns in private companies or Higher Education Institutions. As mobility and student experience evolves, it is important that South Africa develops a mechanism that can capture all mobility into South Africa by different types of students. Only when a complete picture of student mobility into South Africa can be determined, can we begin to evaluate the impact of international student mobility on the total South African civil society. An illustration of the possible impact of international students can be illustrated by the difference in the reporting of students from the USA. According to the reporting through the Department of Higher Education's – HEMIS reporting system of Public Universities reported:

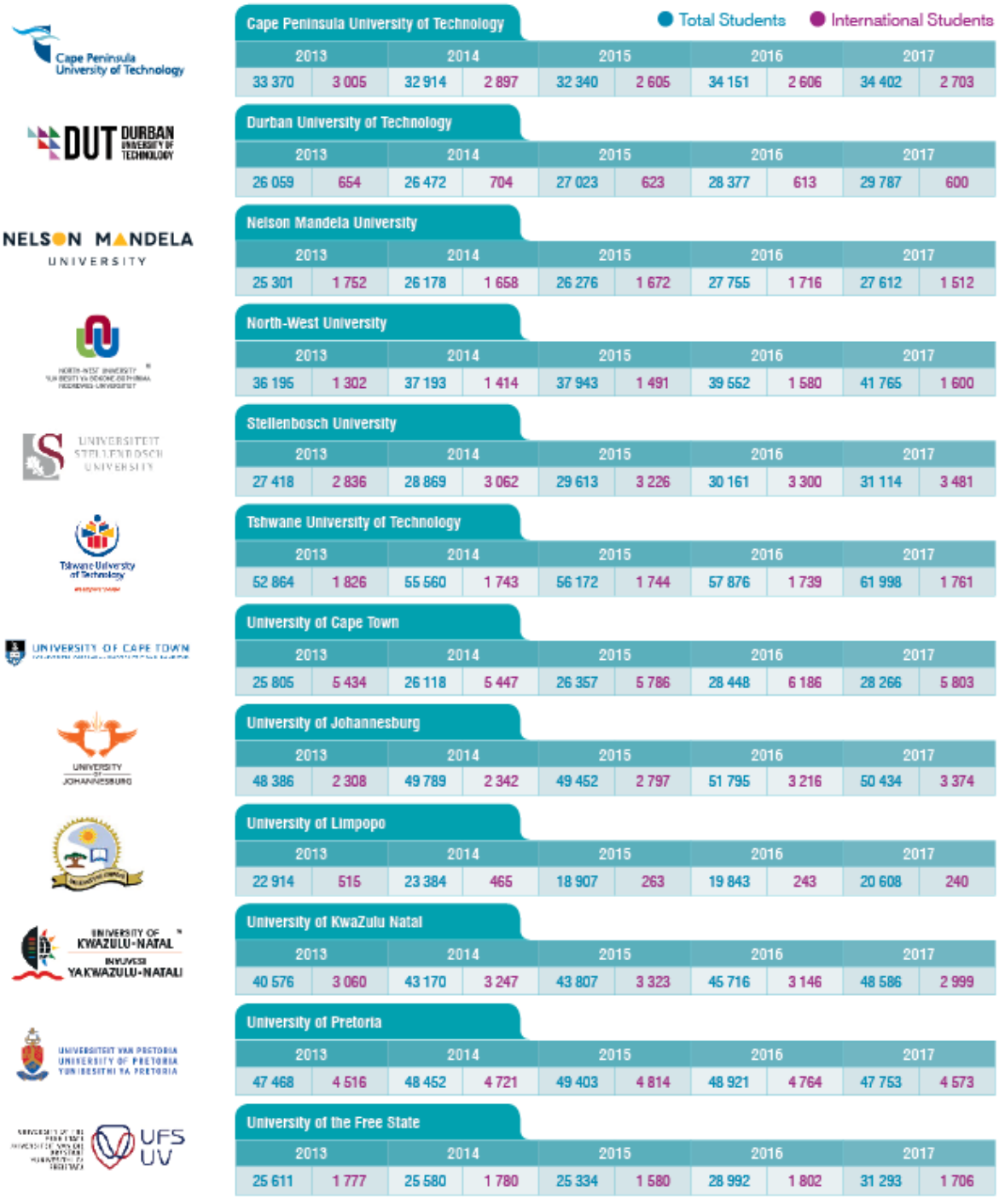


Students from the USA studying at South African universities. Open Doors, the formal reporting structure of USA student mobility reported the following:



This significant difference can only be attributed to the non-reporting of short-term programme students as mentioned above. It is not possible to determine the under reporting of short programme students to that from other countries as the equivalent reporting system provided by Open Doors does not exist for Europe or other possible sending countries.

Figure 6: Profile of universities with more than 20 000 and more students in 2017



University of the Western Cape

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
20 383	1 732	20 582	1 625	20 382	1 519	21 796	1 516	22 443	1 485

University of Witwatersrand

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
31 134	3 228	32 721	3 320	33 777	3 465	37 448	3 687	38 386	3 804

Walter Sisulu University

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
24 122	381	23 946	273	25 993	231	28 581	201	30 517	199

Notwithstanding the above shortcomings, the following will give a near complete picture of the student flows to South African Higher Education institutions:

Total Students ● International Students

Central University of Technology

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
13 050	487	14 178	483	14 117	449	15 683	477	18 185	527

Mangosuthu University of Technology

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
11 375	96	11 377	93	11 518	89	11 588	90	12 665	82

Rhodes University

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
7 485	1 659	7 519	1 610	8 007	1 587	8 136	1 578	8 077	1 558

Sefako Makgatho Health Science University

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
				5 074	179	5 402	186	5 825	203

Sol Plaatje University

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
		124	1	328	3	703	5	1 063	6

University of Fort Hare

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
12 315	1 178	13 063	1 084	13 458	1 241	13 831	1 024	15 426	1 110

University of Mpumalanga

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
		140		816	9	1 248	23	1 771	35

University of Venda

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
11 818	578	13 497	482	14 146	372	15 237	336	15 709	301

University of Zululand

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
16 591	148	16 663	202	16 891	198	17 662	208	17 208	199

Vaal University of Technology

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
20 495	1 771	19 096	1 702	17 489	1 457	19 079	1 526	19 087	1 435

The postgraduate student component of the South African Higher Education system was discussed in the previous part of this chapter, indicating that South Africa can be described as a regional Higher Education hub. The following figure clearly indicates that the distribution of international students engaged in postgraduate studies is represented in most South African Universities, although the distribution of international students throughout the system is uneven. It is clear that the universities described as research universities have the majority of International students in South Africa.

Figure 8: Postgraduate student profile of universities with 500 and more international students in 2017

University		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Int Students	340	429	445	487	548
	Total Registrations	1 380	1 586	1 606	1 850	1 930
Central University of Technology	Int Students	46	64	60	88	84
	Total Registrations	516	610	596	638	721
Durban University of Technology	Int Students	100	141	188	239	274
	Total Registrations	562	761	986	1 183	1 254
Nelson Mandela University	Int Students	436	413	425	456	415
	Total Registrations	3 468	3 396	3 462	3 540	3 493
North-West University	Int Students	533	683	733	850	854
	Total Registrations	5 955	6 329	6 328	6390	6 725
Rhodes University	Int Students	633	635	663	645	642
	Total Registrations	1 952	1 994	2 003	2 071	2 038
Stellenbosch University	Int Students	1 448	1 495	1 569	1652	1 672
	Total Registrations	7 712	7 866	8 007	8 172	8 481
Tswane University of Technology	Int Students	383	361	385	354	333
	Total Registrations	2 421	2 381	2 531	2 638	2 981
University of Cape Town	Int Students	2 032	2 245	2 404	2 756	2 925
	Total Registrations	6 926	7 368	7 833	8 630	8 938
University of Fort Hare	Int Students	562	664	688	674	715
	Total Registrations	2 205	2 649	2 732	2 722	3 268
University of Johannesburg	Int Students	671	742	865	971	913
	Total Registrations	5 834	6 030	6 593	7 271	6 474
University of the Western Cape	Int Students	907	882	904	915	929
	Total Registrations	3 365	3 228	3 507	3 769	4 087
University of KwaZulu Natal	Int Students	1 764	2 186	2 439	2 441	2 370
	Total Registrations	9 414	10 073	10 752	11 280	11 877
University of Pretoria	Int Students	2 137	2 306	2 367	2 335	2 279
	Total Registrations	10 815	13 181	13 010	12 055	11 877
University of the Free State	Int Students	828	809	682	826	773
	Total Registrations	4 650	4 719	4 281	5 143	4 574
University of the Western Cape	Int Students	907	882	904	915	929
	Total Registrations	3 365	3 228	3 507	3 769	4 087
University of Witwatersrand	Int Students	1 651	1 853	2 037	2 276	2 381
	Total Registrations	8 421	9 143	9 966	10 873	11 365
Walter Sisulu University	Int Students	75	56	65	63	67

	Total Registrations	801	655	728	941	1 228
Vaal University of Technology	Int Students	47	59	51	49	64
	Total Registrations	142	169	172	179	193

International distance education students studying in at South African universities

To complete the size and shape of the current South African Higher Education system, it is essential also to provide the data of those students registered as distance education students. These students do not travel to South Africa for their studies but do it in their country of residence. As South Africa has a dedicated distance education university the vast majority of the international students that are registered as distance education students study through the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Figure 9: International Distance Education student profile of universities with 1 000 and more international students in 2017

University		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	International	2	18	14	23	21	10	7
	National	25	160	93	249	313	294	293
	Total	27	178	107	272	334	304	300
North-West University	International	2 455	2 870	2 499	2 289	2 283	1 984	1 622
	National	22 523	21 495	22 281	23 653	23 844	21 859	19 171
	Total	24 978	24 365	24 780	25 942	26 127	23 843	20 793
Tshwane University of Technology	International	18	2	2			2	2
	National	1 032	1 236	1 293	1 225	1 074	1 023	1 032
	Total	1 050	1 238	1 295	1 225	1 074	1 025	1 034
University of Pretoria	International	59	79	68	49	47	32	24
	National	13 324	11 961	10 017	7 875	6 534	4 279	2 918
	Total	13 383	12 040	10 085	7 924	6 581	4 311	2 942
University of South Africa	International	28 021	29 143	30 633	29 749	29 360	25 035	24 683
	National	300 830	307 078	324 607	298 742	308 584	274 289	319 332
	Total	328 851	336 221	355 240	328 491	337 944	299 324	344 015
University of the Free State	International	271	356	241	293	232	214	171
	National	4 143	6 026	5 935	4 976	4 850	7 057	6 633
	Total	4 414	6 382	6 176	5 269	5 082	7 271	6 804
Grand Total	International	30 896	32 589	33 630	32 644	32 237	27 613	26 740
	National	350 234	354 544	368 926	339 498	347 479	310 106	350 185
	Total	381 130	387 133	402 556	372 142	379 716	337 719	376 925

The above sets of data provide numerous interpretation avenues. The question should be asked if it accurately reflects South Africa's position in the global Higher Education space. Data is one of the few benchmarking opportunities that exist in the position of the South African universities on the different international ranking tables. It is mostly agreed that this is not a perfect measure but it does, however, provide a particular positioning of the South African universities.

Referring to the above-ranking criteria the following picture emerges:

Ranking Organisation	UCT	WITS	Stellenb	UKZN	Univ Pret	UJ	UWC	NWU
THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS	1	2	3	4	6	5	7	-
QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS	1	2	3	6	5	4	9	-
ACADEMIC RANKING OF WORLD UNIVERSITIES SINCE 2003	2	1	3	5	3	6	-	-
CWTS Leiden Ranking	1	3	5	2	4	7	-	6
Webometrics RANKING WEB OF UNIVERSITIES	1	2	4	5	3	6	7	-
Overall Ranking	1	2	3	5	4	6	7	

The role of the different University Ranking systems in the evaluation and positioning of universities globally is constantly debated and is a contentious matter. One of the ranking methodologies that is adding more value and providing valuable insights about the value provided by the universities in the system is the U21 Ranking of Higher Education Systems. A project sponsored by the universitas 21 (U21) Network of Universities. Details of this ranking system are available in the annual ranking reports published since 2013.

In the concluding remarks of the first systems ranking publication, the authors indicated that 'a necessary condition for building up a strong Higher Education sector is to establish a favourable environment, to connect with other national systems in research and training and then to fund it appropriately.

South Africa was identified, amongst more than 200 national systems as a system that was worth including in the list of 50 National systems that could be ranked. South Africa ranked 45th out of the 50 countries ranked. It was, however an accomplishment for the system to be part of those that are ranked. The South African system improved its position since 2012 to be ranked 34th in 2019. The details of the positioning of South Africa are illustrated in the table on page 31.

The ranking committee of the U21 ranking system provided a very interesting interpretation of their 2019 ranking. South Africa gained prominence in their interpretation of the 2018 position of South Africa on the ranking list. They interpreted and analysed the South African position as follows:

'South Africa is ranked 34th overall, which combines ranks of 34 for Resources, 22 for Environment, 32 for Connectivity and 36 for Output. Government expenditure on Higher Education as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is ranked 38th and research expenditure 33rd. In Connectivity, South Africa is 22nd for the percentage of joint publications with international researchers; 28th for joint publications with industry (which show the eighth largest increase over the last seven years); and 34th for knowledge transfer with firms." As

significant observation by the rankers is that: - “over the last seven years, the increases in research expenditure and publications are ranked sixth and seven respectively. Both enrolment rates and the educational qualifications of the workforce are in the bottom decile. However, when allowance is made for differences in GDP per head, South Africa’s rank jumps to fourth and the score is well above that expected at its level of income.” (Williams and Leahy, p.46, 2019) The corrected systems ranking that took into account the level of economic development would then be as follows:

Rank	Country	Score
1	United Kingdom	19.5
2	Finland	19.4
3	Serbia	18.7
4	South Africa	17.2
5	Denmark	16.9
6	Canada	14.6
7	Sweden	13.9
8	New Zealand	13.3
9	Switzerland	13
10	Australia	12.7
	BRICS Countries	
4	South Africa	17.2
18	China	2.6
19	India	-3.6
25	Brazil	-7.3
46	Russia	-27.4

One of the major factors that advanced the normalised South African ranking is linked to research expenditure and publications. This is also linked to the research qualifications for the period 2009 -2016. The percentage improvement of South Africa in this category is attributed to the increase in research output and publications during the period 2010 – 2017. This ranked South Africa sixth and represented an increase of 82,7%. This confirms the earlier data provided about the increase in postgraduate students in the South African system. This in turn reflects the importance of the international PhD students in the South African system. (See earlier discussion on page 19)

In conclusion, the analysis of the international students in the South African system underlines the importance of data to inform rational decision-making. It also highlights the importance of accurate data in the context of the draft Higher Education Internationalisation Policy and provides needed information that allows for global benchmarking. As indicated in the adjacent figures, South Africa is the leading system amongst the BRICS countries and the only country from Africa that can be ranked within the top 50 countries in the world. One of the defining criteria that allowed South Africa to be amongst the top 50 countries, is the availability of quality data.

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All data provided and Analysed retrieved from HEMIS. Analysis of data was done by the African Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (AfriC). Detailed data can be obtained from AfriC.

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