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# The merging of the only two veterinary science faculties in South Africa

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## Abstract

In South Africa, the education sector, like other sectors of the community, was divided along racial lines during the apartheid era. Hence, the veterinary faculty at the University of Pretoria was established for whites, whilst the Medical University of Southern Africa's faculty was established for blacks. This article discusses the merger between these only two veterinary science faculties in South Africa. This merger was first of all contemplated in the early 1990s under the apartheid regime. And even then, the running of the two faculties was not cost-effective. From the evidence available, this merger was motivated solely on the basis of costs: given the internationally acknowledged costs of operating veterinary science training faculties, managing two state subsidized faculties within a 20 kilometre distance of each other was not cost effective. As a result, after 1994, when the new government began to work on reconfiguring the higher education landscape, this merger was inevitable.

This article maps out the policy context which led to mergers of higher education institutions, the history of the two faculties and the effects of the merger on the curricula, efficiency, and equity, as well as on the staff. According to the results obtained from the data collected, until 2002/2003 financial year, this merger had not achieved cost savings. Instead, it has become even more expensive for the University of Pretoria to run the merged faculties. Also there have been negative repercussions as far as staff and students are concerned, especially on the issues of equity and students' orientation into the new arrangement. Overall, the merger resulted in more losses than gains.

## Rehearsing the policy context

In the few years following the demise of the dominance of the decades-long apartheid education model, the higher education system in South Africa has undergone a policy-driven restructuring of higher education sector. The founding policy document on higher education after apartheid is the Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) entitled *A Framework for Transformation* (1996). The NCHE report laid a foundation for the 1997 Education White Paper 3 on Higher Education named *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. The White Paper for Higher Education (1997) was subsequently followed by the promulgation of the Higher Education Act of 1997 which first legalized the issue of merging higher education institutions in South Africa.

After the second democratic elections in 1999, the newly-elected second post-apartheid Minister of Education, Kadar Asmal, in his *Call for Action: Mobilising citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* announced that:

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system. . . The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners (July 27, 1999).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), a statutory body that advises the Minister of Higher Education, was duly approached to provide advice on the reconfiguration of the higher education system. In December 1999, the CHE responded with a memorandum to the Minister entitled *Towards a Framework and Strategy for Reconfiguring the Higher Education System in South Africa* and in which a Task Team was proposed to deliver on this “reconfiguration” exercise.

In July 2000 the CHE Task Team presented its report, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The Task Team took the bold step of listing “examples of possible combinations” (p.60), warning that: “These examples are not meant to be exhaustive. They must also not preclude the Minister identifying other possible combinations” (p.63) that could achieve the national goals for higher education.

On 5 March 2001, and in response to the CHE Report, the Minister released a *National Plan for Higher Education* that essentially agreed with the Task Team recommendations. Later, in March 2001, the Minister appointed a National Working Group (NWG) consisting of eleven persons from business, labour, higher education and government “to advise on the appropriate arrangements for restructuring the provision of higher education. . . including institutional mergers. . .” (Department of Education, December 2001, p.4). In December 2001, the NWG released its report, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, and recommended the reduction of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 through the specific mechanism of mergers, listing the specific institutions in various provinces to be targeted for merging.

Several research questions arise from the policy decision to merge specific institutions. For instance, why was veterinary science – of all disciplines – singled out for merging? How did the merger deal with differences in curriculum and focus given the divergent communities and needs served by the two Faculties hitherto operating independently? Did this merger – motivated primarily on the basis of costs – in fact lead to a more financially viable, new Faculty of Veterinary Science (FOVS)? And was this really a ‘merger’ in the first place, given the powerful position of the University of Pretoria FOVS compared with the smaller and less well-resourced FOVS at the black Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA)?

## Methodology

This article is a part of a broader study which was conducted in 2002 by a group of doctoral students, including the author of this article, from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The research team started with a broad sweep of policy documents and institutional documents such as media reports, official speeches, and minutes from meetings. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with top management structures at both institutions, academics, technical and support staff. Since students formed a crucial part of this cross-racial merger, their perceptions were elicited in focus group interviews and questionnaires. This article discusses the findings of this study in an attempt to highlight the implications of a merger in terms of equity, finance and human resources.

## Introductory history of the two faculties

On 20 December 1998, the first post-apartheid Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bengu, formally announced the merger of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at MEDUNSA and that of the former white Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP). Behind this simple announcement lies a story of one of the longest running and most complex merger deliberations in the higher education literature. The complexity of this merger was influenced by numerous factors. The UP Faculty began operations in the 1920s, while the MEDUNSA Faculty was only established in 1982. The UP Faculty, as a result of its long established operations, as well as being a white university Faculty through the apartheid years, enjoyed world class facilities such as its impressive animal hospital. The history and origins of the MEDUNSA Faculty of Veterinary Science were very different, being established for black students and with a golf club house converted into an animal hospital. Indeed, until the 1980s, veterinary education in South Africa had been available only to white students with the result that the profession was not well established in black communities.

Attempts to admit blacks to UP in the 1960s and 1970s were frustrated by the government of the day, the weak academic preparation of black students to meet the stringent entry requirements, and a lack of interest, knowledge and information regarding veterinary sciences as a profession in black South African communities.<sup>1</sup>

Another barrier to entry and success at the UP Faculty was the fact that Afrikaans had always been the medium of instruction, while MEDUNSA had used English in matters of teaching and administration. Another dividing line between the two Faculties was the practice and ongoing perception of a difference in curriculum emphasis; historically, UP focused on companion animals since its clientele were whites with a traditionally strong passion about pets, and from which community students typically aimed to practise veterinary science in an urban-setting. The MEDUNSA focus, on the other hand, was more towards production animals, and most of its community projects were based in the rural areas with rural, subsistence farmers. As one MEDUNSA lecturer put it:

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<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs has made it difficult even today for veterinary sciences to be able to attract students from black communities. This has been echoed by the Director of Higher Education as a factor which makes it difficult to attract black students.

... blacks are more interested in animals which can produce food, be it milk, meat or eggs, not just animals that you feed expensive food and take them to doctors, and you gain nothing in return. If my dog is sick in the village, I start negotiating with my neighbour whose dog has just had puppies to give me one puppy as soon as the puppies are big enough to eat 'papa' (porridge) not dog food.

With these differences in mind, the purpose of this article was to unravel such complexity by describing the origins, process and outcomes of the only merger in the history of South Africa involving two academic Faculties from different Universities.

## Merger effects

### **Curriculum effects**

The new curriculum contained courses and modules from both MEDUNSA and UP curricula, balancing the needs of veterinary science within different communities, and to make a versatile qualification in which all kinds of animals were catered for. The names of some courses were changed. In some cases, the content of the course stayed the same depending on the importance of such a course, while in other cases, the content was added to or decreased. The merged institution has clearly made progress with its curriculum integration. But how do students experience the curriculum of the merged institution? Both MEDUNSA staff and students interviewed experienced the curriculum as alien to their own academic and linguistic backgrounds; in their view, the curriculum privileged both the majority of white students and the minority of black students from well-endowed 'ex model C' schools. One of the main reasons for these experiences of curriculum alienation among black students was the language problem. Previously, the MEDUNSA curriculum had offered first year students a course in the English language and study skills to assist black students from rural areas and poor schools to cope with the language demands of the veterinary programme. Such a facility no longer exists.

To illustrate the challenge of language, a former MEDUNSA lecturer, originally from the United States of America, pointed out that when he first taught at MEDUNSA, he was surprised by the way the students were slow to compose notes as he taught; they also took their time in responding to his questions. So he decided to check the notes of some of these students, and found that:

Some students were actually writing notes in Zulu or whatever African language, not in English. In the same way, when he asked a question, some students would translate the question in their mother-tongue and formulate the answer likewise, then translate their answer into English (Interview records, 18 March 2002).

Related to this experience, one of the main concerns for MEDUNSA students and lecturers has been the apparent lack of understanding from the new Faculty that black students are not from advantaged schools or advantaged families that use English on a daily basis. For this reason, black students continue to feel alienated and disadvantaged within the new curriculum. As one student put it:

If we had the same type and level of primary and secondary education with the white children, we would be able to compete or to be compared. But for now, there is no competition nor a comparison between us because this place is so foreign in many ways to us – in technology, language (some Afrikaans-speaking lecturers still use Afrikaans) and the method of teaching (Interview records, March 2002).

### **Efficiency effects**

For three reasons it is difficult to assess the *efficiency gains* in the case of this merger. First, the Faculties of Veterinary Sciences are expensive entities to maintain in a university environment given the unusually high operational costs resulting from the low student-staff ratios, and high costs of hospital facilities; in practical terms, this means that FOVS will always operate within the context of financial deficits. Second, from 1998 to 2003/4, the FOVS merger was heavily supported by a time-limited *ad hoc* grant from the State through the Department of Education (DOE) as a facilitative measure for the merging process. This has offset the extent of the deficit within the merged entity. Third, the planned staff reorganization (retrenchments, retirements, redeployment, etc) in the new Faculty will be finalized only within the next two years, and it is therefore unclear as to the magnitude of real 'savings' due as efficiency gains as a result of this merger. It is possible, however, to begin sketching possible efficiency outcomes based on trends in the flow and direction of efficiencies from the period before the merger (1998) through to 2002, as well as efficiencies based on fairly rigorous projections by the University of Pretoria.

In 1996, the cost of training a veterinary science student at MEDUNSA was in the order of R150 000 per annum, and at the University of Pretoria, about R50 000 per annum. In Full Time Equivalent (FTE) terms, the State subsidy for MEDUNSA was approximately R20 million per annum for 90 FTE

students, implying a cost of R220 000 per FTE student per annum – in these terms, representing a student to staff ratio of less than 1:1. At that stage, the corresponding student to staff ratio of the UP Faculty of Veterinary Sciences was approximately 5.5:1. By the year 2000 (that is halfway through the merger process) the ratio of student FTEs to academic staff stood at 5:1 – a favourable ratio given that international benchmarks require a ratio of less than 7.5:1.<sup>2</sup> In order to facilitate the merger, and especially the costs associated with MEDUNSA salary levels, leave gratuities, overhead and operating expenditures, the Department of Education granted *ad hoc* allocations per financial year as follows:

Table 1: Department of Education's *ad hoc* allocations from 1998/1999 – 2002/ 2003

Financial Year	Amount
1998/1999	R32.0 m
1999/2000	R29.0 m
2000/2001	R16.5 m
2001/2002	R16.5m
2002/2003	R18.5 m

Notwithstanding the slight increase in 2002/2003, these figures show a significant reduction in Department of Education allocations over time (R12.5 m). The Faculty has accordingly planned strategies to further reduce staffing expenditure:

- a. the planned reduction of mainly C1 staff, with an expected reduction in expenditure from R29.1m in 2001 to around R22.3m in 2004, i.e. a 25% reduction in real terms.
- b. the re-organisation of eight academic departments into five, a plan already realized by 2001. This step is expected to reduce operational expenses associated with more streamlined departmental structures.
- c. the planned increase in second year enrolment from 90 to 120 (33%) without increasing the teaching staff complement so that the student to

<sup>2</sup> The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) of the European Commission for the training of veterinarians has set a benchmark of less than 7.5:1.

staff ratio will stand at 10:1 by 2004. This will increase the subsidy income substantially.

- d. the planned review of operational strategies and expenditure of the veterinary hospital and laboratories, in part to increase efficiencies in this area.
- e. the planned reorganization of the BVSc qualification involving a new three-year general degree that precedes the new four-year professional qualification. The new structure is also expected to enhance efficiencies in the current training model.

Despite all the planned strategies underway, and the reduction in inefficiencies after the merger, at the end of 2001 the Faculty still operated at a deficit of R26.1m even after the *ad hoc* allocation of R16.5m had been taken into account. Furthermore, despite all the recorded efficiency gains since 1998, and the planned efficiencies for 2004<sup>3</sup>, the deficit without further *ad hoc* allocation would increase from R26.1m to R28.7m in 2004.

In the assessment of efficiency gains in the merged Faculty it is evident that the character of veterinary science means that deficits will continue to exist under the current funding regime, and this cannot be attributed to the benefits or otherwise of mergers. Second, that institutional cross-subsidisation of veterinary science is inevitable even with substantial increases in the state funding formula for the discipline; the issue in question is what levels of cross-subsidisation would be regarded by the institution as acceptable, given its overall position. Third, that efficiency gains in the case of veterinary sciences would therefore have to be measured in terms of the scale of the reduction of overall operating costs of the merged institution. On the basis of evidence, the new FOVS has definitely reduced the overall costs of operating a veterinary science faculty in South Africa; in other words, the merger has generated efficiency gains.

However, it is also clear that such efficiency gains could in fact be lost if the levels of state subsidisation are not increased over and above the *ad hoc* allocation provided in the transition period from two to one Faculty of Veterinary Science. It is this nuance in terms of the nature of the discipline (veterinary science) and the peculiarities of state funding that must be taken into account in reporting on efficiency gains in a merger of this kind.

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<sup>3</sup> The University of Pretoria estimated a reduction in expenditure from R 64.4m (2001) to R57.6m (2004) and an efficiency improvement of 10%.



### Equity effects – staff

Before the merger (1999), the MEDUNSA Faculty had 76 members of staff, and this number included academic staff, technical staff and support staff. The categorical divisions of the staff are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Categorical Distribution of MEDUNSA staff before the merger

Group	Blacks	Whites	TOTAL
C1	6 (19.35%)	28 (62.22%)	34
C2	12 (38.71%)	17 (37.78%)	29
C3	13 (41.94%)	-	13
TOTAL	31	45	76

**Key:** C1 = Academic staff  
 C2 = Technical staff (secretaries)  
 C3 = Support staff (cleaners)

As is evident from the above representation, white staff is mainly employed in the professional or academic category (C1) and black staff mainly in the lower categories. What is not evident is that of the 6 professional black staff, only 2 are South Africans. This data is not inconsistent with other merger data involving at least one former white institution i.e., black staff appear in the lower categories of employment, and white staff in the upper or academic-professional categories of work. What is striking about the MEDUNSA data, however, is that white staff dominated in the upper professional categories despite the fact that this was a historically black institution. The explanation no doubt lies in the fact that mainly white students have occupied veterinary science training much longer than in most other professions since the 1990s.

The University of Pretoria data shows a similar racial distribution of staff in the year preceding the merger (1998):

Table 3: UP Staff Distribution by Race before and after the Merger

Staff	Before merger (1998)	After merger (2002)
African	88 (29.24%)	109 (36.95%)
Coloured	1	1
Indian	1	4
White	211 (70.10%)	181 (61.36%)
Total	301	295

The 'before' and 'after' merger distribution of staff is most interesting. In general terms, the number of African members of staff increased by 21 (7.12%) while the number of white members of staff decreased by 20 staff (6.78%). In addition, there were only 5 black South African lecturers in the new Faculty out of 98 lecturers or C1 staff. Despite vigorous efforts by the University of Pretoria to change the racial distribution of staff, it is not going to be easy. As one lecturer put it:

It will take at least 20 more years before the issue of equity can be fully addressed by this Faculty judging by the fact that this year (2002) there are only 4 black students whom one cannot tell if they will finish their first degree within 6 years, do their Masters and PhD degrees before they become lecturers here (that is, if they are good enough to proceed to postgraduate level, and if they are interested in the teaching field).

The current (2002) distribution of staff by race and gender amplifies the need for increased black student enrolments in the veterinary sciences as the basis for changing the *status quo* in terms of staffing in the only Faculty of this kind in South Africa.

### Equity effects – students

There have not been student equity gains as a result of the merger. Before the merger, and taking 1996 as baseline, MEDUNSA had very few students, with no white and Coloured students enrolled between 1996 and 1999.

Table 4: MEDUNSA FOVS Student Headcount Enrolments, 1996–1999

Year	Blacks	Whites	Indians	Coloureds	Total
1996	6	-	2	-	8
1997	10	-	3	-	13
1998	11	-	1	-	12
1999	12	-	2	-	14
TOTAL	39	0	8	-	47

The University of Pretoria, on the other hand, had large numbers of mainly white students, and small numbers of black students. However, there were more black students trained at UP in the period 1996-1999 than at MEDUNSA, even though the absolute number of black students at UP were marginal in relation to the large numbers of white students.

Table 5: UP FOVS Student Headcount Enrolments, 1996-2000

Year	Blacks	Whites	Indians	Coloureds	Total
1996	22	621	7	7	657
1997	24	579	11	6	620
1998	27	574	17	7	625
1999	80	556	42	10	688
2000	77	553	41	12	683

In this context, the merger marginally increased the student numbers. However, there were only 80 (11.63%) black students in 1999, as opposed to 556 (80.81%) white students. The numbers decreased slightly in 2000 for all groups (for instance 553 whites and 77 blacks). But this decline continued so that in the 2002 academic year, the data depicts a noticeable decrease in black student enrolments.

Table 6: UP Student Numbers after the Merger

Students	Before merger (1998)	After merger (2002)
African	27 (4.36%)	20 (3.93%)
Coloured	7 (1.13%)	8 (1.57%)
Indian	11 (1.178%)	28 (5.51%)
White	574 (92.73%)	452 (88.98%)
Total	619	508

In order to attract more black students, the Faculty has developed a new marketing strategy focused mainly on townships and rural schools. There have been reports from the Faculty Administration of an increased interest in veterinary sciences on the part of Indian students. But there is no evidence at the moment that the racial distribution of students will change dramatically in the near future.

### Organizational integration effects

According to the senior management of the Faculty and the University, the merger led to the development of a new institutional identity. First, the Faculty developed a new academic mission. Secondly, the Dean, Deputy Dean and Director of Veterinary Clinic were appointed as new leaders of the Faculty in 1999. Thirdly, a new curriculum was developed and implemented in 2000.

Finally, the issue of the medium of instruction – which was one of MEDUNSA's main points of concern – is now English only. Although the University of Pretoria as a whole is a dual medium institution, the Faculty of Veterinary sciences decided that, in the light of the merger, English would be the only medium of instruction since MEDUNSA had been a predominantly black, English language Faculty. This shift in language policy did not go unchallenged by the Afrikaans-speaking students who formed almost 90% of the student body. While Afrikaans students were provided with notes and other learning materials in Afrikaans, the language used in classroom instruction was English. While there was thus clearly a strong integration of the two Faculties in terms of vision and structure, the integration was weak in terms of people and values, as the evidence in this article has shown.

### **Physical integration effects**

Given the small contingent of MEDUNSA staff and students, the only physical demands on the new Faculty were minor additions to the physical plant. There were no legal concerns or issues involved with respect to property claims. As the Department of Education's legal advisor put it, most of the agreements were made on the basis of consensus since there was no legal framework to support mergers at that time. When the Higher Education Act of 1997 was promulgated, most of the issues regarding this merger (facilities, personnel, finances, etc) had already been dealt with through the use of sub-committees. Furthermore, the Labour Relations Act of 1995 was already in place; some of its clauses were invoked to ensure that all the staff were treated fairly, and that there would be no unfair dismissals. This was the only legislation which was used in the management of this merger.

### **Staff and students perceptions of the merger**

Before the merger began, both Faculties established Committees to take care of the concerns and fears of staff, including job security, salaries, the retention of senior posts, and other matters. After the merger, all the academic, technical and support staff remained in their jobs with the same benefits they had held at MEDUNSA or UP – except for those who took retirement or early retirement packages. In the meantime, UP organized through the Department of Human Resources that there should be counselling and support personnel available to assist members of staff through the merger process. The staff who were able to use this facility found it to be of great value. However, the access to

professional support and counseling was based on the means of the staff concerned. For example, the academic staff who had time and the means to drive to the Main campus – 20 kilometres away – enjoyed easy access. As far as the technical and support staff were concerned, the picture was a little different for their working hours were not flexible enough to allow them to leave the workplace and return within the given time. Indeed, during interviews with C3 staff, some of them were unaware of this facility. Clearly, staff experiences of the merger varied according to race and level of appointment. These differentiated responses are described below.

### **Academic staff perceptions**

The academic staff from both institutions were delighted to work together, and to share their expertise and the new workloads. This group of staff felt that the added pool of resources and expertise promoted the training and research in the merged Faculty. Staff even spoke of positive competition, especially in terms of research activities and outputs required in the Faculty's commitments.

MEDUNSA staff, in particular, felt that coming to UP was an advantage to their academic careers. One lecturer said

Coming here has made us feel more professional than before – the facilities here are excellent and the quality of teaching is easier as we do more of lecturing than actual teaching. We are also able to embark on more research since there are excellent facilities and opportunities, and more time since students are more likely to work on their own here than at MEDUNSA.

For black lecturers from MEDUNSA, however, the picture was not completely positive. All the black lecturers from MEDUNSA and UP were concerned that although they were equal to their white counterparts, from time to time they felt subtle pressure from both white colleagues and students that they might not be 'good enough.' For example, there have been direct challenges from white students to black lecturers in the merged Faculty. As a result, these lecturers have had to work more diligently and to be on the alert for white students who – in their experiences – literally "harass" black lecturers. In this case, senior black lecturers seemed to be more capable of handling the situation compared to their inexperienced counterparts. This situation was particularly frustrating for junior lecturers who did not know what to do.

On the other hand, the white staff of the University of Pretoria pointed out that their main concern was that the standards for veterinary science training in

South Africa would decline as a result of the merger. As far as the former MEDUNSA staff were concerned, their main problem was the dwindling student numbers and the rather inconsiderate treatment of the few who registered.

Summarised, most MEDUNSA staff voiced the following concerns:

- a. the high failure rate of black students and the high entry requirements which could not be met by ordinary black students who come from rural or township schools; the exception was the few black students from former white schools;
- b. the declining numbers of black students being admitted to the new Faculty each year. Twenty black students were admitted in 2000, ten in 2001, four in 2002; and
- c. the perceived “neglect” of black students’ academic needs within the new institution. As one MEDUNSA lecturer put it:

We used to work extra hours with students and we helped them like primary school children. But here there are many students, and all of them – regardless of their background – are expected to know and use self-study methods which black students are not familiar with. Some of them even struggle to understand the English language written in the books.

### **Technical and support staff perceptions (black)**

The technical and support staff had much more to say about the merger. The persons interviewed used their mother-tongue (Zulu and Pedi) in an effort to deliver their message clearly. They felt that their grievances had fallen on deaf ears since the merger occurred. The MEDUNSA staff had more complaints than the UP staff, who kept quiet and nodded repeatedly at what was being said during most of the focus group interview sessions. The staff felt that they had problems which nobody was prepared to sort out. For instance, the use of Afrikaans for almost all forms of communication left them with no option but to learn the language. In some cases, unclear job descriptions made some of them “Jack of all trades” – one person doing messenger services, gardens, maintenance and anything else required. In the experiences articulated by these staff members, the merger did not bring any benefits.

The MEDUNSA staff claimed that at first they were consulted and briefed about the merging process. But as time went on, they heard less and less about the formal process as decisions were made by what they saw as “the white

authorities”. Suddenly they were told that they were to move to *Onderstepoort* on the 1 July 1999. For UP staff, information and messages were sent through the Internet and mostly written in Afrikaans. Accordingly, those staff who had no access to the Internet, or who could not read Afrikaans, felt left out in the process.

### **Technical staff perceptions (white)**

The white technical staff (since there were no white support staff in this case) did not have much to say; they were only concerned that the merger had brought more people into their particular jobs (especially secretaries) and therefore raised questions about job security. However, they believed that those who remained with the Faculty would be the ones who deserved to continue in their work. They did not have the same anxiety over their jobs like their black colleagues. One secretary was particularly confident that her Head of Department would not allow her to be retrenched because “it is difficult to get a good and experienced secretary”.

### **Student perceptions**

During the merging process, the University of Pretoria organized an informal mentoring system through which MEDUNSA students were divided into groups of five, each one led by one of the senior students from UP. The new students received an orientation with regards to facilities, rules and regulations in the hostels, hospital laboratories and other places. This system pertained for almost two years during which time these voluntary mentors assisted MEDUNSA students in order to make them feel welcome and to know where to find help if necessary. It was somewhat difficult for MEDUNSA students since UP had numerous rules and regulations governing hostels, laboratories and other shared facilities. However, even before the merger, some of MEDUNSA’s students were using UP facilities such as the hospital, so some of the students were not totally new to the campus. And they were able to help the new ones to acclimatize much faster by showing them around and allaying their fears on a number of academic and campus issues. Despite these efforts, the MEDUNSA students expressed continuing problems experienced during and after the merger.

The seven MEDUNSA students (there were 15 remaining MEDUNSA students in 2002) who responded to the questionnaire said that the merger was

“an outright failure” which had either no impact, or negative impact, on their academic and social lives. Their major concerns were the use of Afrikaans in teaching and the display of administrative notices, and a general feeling of alienation on the campus. For one student, “we were swallowed not amalgamated as MEDUNSA Faculty”. On the other hand, the 11 original UP students who responded to the questionnaire expressed a range of feelings about the merger and its effect on their lives. Some claimed ignorance about the merger and its influence on the new institution; others felt that the merger was positive; and a few expressed concerns about the lowering of standards and possible threats to the international status of the BVSc degree.

## Conclusion

The merger of the Faculties of Veterinary Science was the longest running merger deliberation in South Africa. It took almost ten years to complete, spanning two governments (apartheid and democratic governments) and three Ministers of Education. The advent of a non-racial government in 1994 simply accelerated an inevitable process of merger between the two Faculties.

This merger was in fact the incorporation of a weak (in terms of staffing, infrastructure and resources) historically black Faculty into a strong historically white and privileged Faculty. The staffing, curriculum, culture and infrastructure of the stronger entity – the University of Pretoria – therefore dominated the merger process and its outcomes. The student effects were mixed, following racial patterns of response. Black students experienced language and social alienation in a new and demanding majority culture; white students felt indifferent but held concerns about so-called “standards” being lowered as a result of the merger.

The staffing effects were varied, but can be classified on the basis of race and level of appointment (academic, technical-administrative, support staff). Since the merger transferred a largely white staff from MEDUNSA (most of whom had studied with or worked at UP before) to an equally dominant white staff (UP), this group experienced minimal problems in the process compared to the technical and support staff, who were mainly black.

The efficiency gains can be tracked more closely in this merger than in the other cases, given the longer history of the process. The University of Pretoria clearly managed the process in ways that reduced inefficiencies. But clearly,



the attainment of long-term and sustainable efficiency gains was dependent on further state subsidization and deliberate rationalization on the part of the merged Faculty. Neither process can be taken for granted, and therefore no firm claims can be made about efficiency except that it is contingent on both external decisions (the state) and internal operations (the institution). Neither set of decisions is devoid of politics, for government funding of the veterinary sciences at higher and sustained levels of subsidization will almost certainly mean the diversion of funds from other institutions and priorities; and retrenching staff will mean making decisions based on the unequal racial distribution of staff and informed by vigilant staff unions.

The single most important challenge facing the merged Faculty will be the volatile business of increasing staff and student equity. The dearth of black students frustrates institutional recruitment efforts; declining black student numbers mean a declining pool of qualified graduates from which future academic staff can be recruited. It remains a vicious cycle, and failure to change the *status quo* risks negative political exposure of this state-subsidized programme.

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