

From the CEO



In 2000 the HSRC set itself the goal of comprehensive transformation, towards "social science that makes a difference". The new conception of the research groups, and the restructuring of support services initiated soon afterwards, have been successfully implemented during 2001/02, guided by the five aims of the COUPE strategy: contracts, outreach, user-orientation, performance management, and excellence.

As in the previous year, research earnings have roughly doubled. This has enabled the eleven research programmes to expand their staff and their services to users. HSRC projects are increasingly integrated into comprehensive packages, funded for several years. Most are now handled collaboratively with other institutions, and many are conducted in the region as well as in South Africa.

The restructuring of the administration has been completed, following a comprehensive redefinition of jobs and functions. Senior recruitment and the design of integrated systems are well under way, towards providing compact and modern management services for the burgeoning research activity.

I shall briefly outline these major developments below. The subsequent few pages contain highlights of research activities. More detail may be found in the separate sections on each research programme. The organisational transformation process is fully described in the Council's report preceding the financial statements.

Gains from transformed research orientation

A key ingredient in transforming the HSRC has been the radical re-orientation of its research structures, into flexible and interdisciplinary research programmes. Initially called new priority areas or NPAs, the programmes are aligned to national development challenges and responsive to user needs. They are listed on p. 6 with their acronyms, and their specialists on pp. 8 and 9.

Eight programmes were envisaged but eleven have proved necessary, to cover public sector-oriented research needs in areas such as health, education, families, rural development, employment, governance, and social integration. The users and funders of the research are an impressive mix of local and national departments, public sector entities, and overseas or South African foundations.

All eleven executive directors of the programmes were in place by the end of the financial year. By March 2002 the research complement had increased from 60 to 99, predominantly by recruiting specialists able to manage projects. The percentage of researchers with doctorates increased from 26% to 44%, and of black researchers from 40% to 45%. Some senior researchers hold co-appointments with tertiary institutions or NGOs, or serve on advisory councils, and three have been Ministerial advisers.

With this greatly enhanced capacity, backed by fortnightly meetings to identify opportunities, research earnings in the period nearly doubled from R16m to R28m; and a further R18m was contracted for future work.

The majority of projects are now done in partnerships among the HSRC research programmes, and with researchers in NGOs, technikons, universities, and other science councils.

For example, to study interventions regarding orphans and vulnerable children, the HSRC programme on Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health (SAHA) is working internally with Child, Youth and Family Development (CYFD), and externally with several university departments and non-governmental organisations in three countries. At the same time, SAHA has joined the HSRC programme on Integrated Rural and Regional Development (IRRD) on the impact of AIDS on rural enterprises, while CYFD is working with IRRD on human-rights indicators for the Western Cape government; and

HSRC's selected key performance indicators	Lead 2000/01 performance %	Lead 2001/02 target %	Lead 2001/02 performance %	Lead 2002/03 target %
Contracts and grants: research activities as a proportion of total research income	21	31	31	42
Outreach: proportion of projects with external researcher participation	22	26	61	64
User-orientation: successful proportion of competitive applications, as a %	24	29	32	34
Performance (equity): proportion of black researchers	40	47	43	54
Performance (efficiency): proportion of researchers in total staff	30	40	52	60
Efficiency: number of refereed journal articles per researcher head, expressed as %	20	40	25	34

In addition to this flexible networking among researchers, the HSRC is also weaving projects into large-scale ventures, often spanning several years. For example, related aspects of higher education - including private institutions, relationships with industry, and student choice - are being studied by the Human Resources Development research programme together with partner agencies, supported over three years by DACST and international foundations. And SAHARA (the Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance) is an HSRC-organised platform by which numerous organisations researching aspects of AIDS, can improve the impact of their efforts throughout Africa.

The other HSRC research programmes are also reaching out vigorously to SADC and the rest of Africa, as part of the knowledge infrastructure that will be required by NEPAD. Some of the linkages, usually in the form of research collaborations and multi-site studies, are illustrated in the map on p.7. The HSRC is part of the attempt by science councils to make an integrated science-and-technology contribution to NEPAD, and to the national strategy for research and development.

These rapid advances impose fresh demands on the organisation. On the output side, the HSRC has lately moved to a blend of web publishing and outsourced digital printing to improve dissemination, and a directorate of communications has been set up. On the input side, induction and professional development schemes still have to be systematised for new researchers, including skills such as project management and an improved study support scheme.

Among the HSRC's users there is a growing demand for a further research programme, in the monitoring and evaluation of policies and interventions. Assessment Technology and Educational Evaluation provides this service in the educational domain. But HSRC researchers already doing this work in other domains need methodological support and co-ordination.

Restructuring of management services

To provide suitable management information and support services for this rapid expansion of activities and earnings, the transformation strategy recognised that a simplified, integrated, and high-tech administration would be required.

Early in 2001/02 the new positions and functions were conceived and the restructuring process established, in extensive consultations with the staff association. The plans were finalised by the Council in May 2001, and then carefully implemented. The process is described in the Council's report, on pp. 62 to 75. The overall effect was that the proportion of administrative staff decreased over the period from 70% to 48%.

Of 136 administrative staff, 27 sought voluntary severance and 37 were retrenched. Subsequent recruitment, towards a planned complement of 93, has improved the proportion of black staff in the administration from 49% to 58%, and of women in senior administrative posts from 57% to 62%.

Substantial new offices were opened during 2001/02 in Cape Town and Durban, housing four of the research executive directors, and there are sites in Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. A video-conferencing system has been set up, and a new nationally-connected switchboard is to be installed.

The control of resources has been devolved to the research programmes, which have to be kept informed and equipped. After a review of business processes, a complete upgrade and integration of the management information systems is envisaged, followed by a knowledge management system.

Attentive corporate governance

The risks in a far-reaching turnaround place extra demands on the governance structures of the organisation. Members of Council led by the chair, Professor Jakes Gerwel, supervised the transformation policy, helped select every executive director, and reviewed the strategic cycle, from research plans through budgets to performance indicators. The Audit Committee, chaired by Mr Sikkie Kajee, initiated a timely risk analysis, and is monitoring the management improvements.

Minister Ben Ngubane and Deputy Minister Brigitte Mabandla of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and their officials offered stimulating counsel. The National Advisory Council on Innovation and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee put some far-reaching suggestions.

The HSRC is accountable to these and other stakeholders. I previously undertook to present each year six quantitative performance indicators most relevant to our COUPE strategy, selected from those furnished annually to DACST. These are shown in the table above.

It is pleasing that in four respects - contracts, outreach, user-orientation and the efficiency aspect of performance - the HSRC met or exceeded its specified targets. One target was narrowly missed, the intended proportion of black researchers. The notable shortcoming was scientific articles published in refereed journals. The figure should improve, since new specialist appointees are held to an article a year. However, taken together, these two items underline the importance of capacity-building as an intrinsic aspect of tackling South Africa's challenges through research.

Mark Orkin
CEO: HSRC