



Executive Summary

There is starkly unequal access to quality education in Grahamstown. Statistics show that middle-class black learners at fee-paying schools have a three out of four chance of exiting the system with a good quality matric and thereafter entering a top university. By contrast, learners at “non-fee” schools have a less than a one in ten chance of reaching this level.

The underlying problem is dysfunctional schooling in Grahamstown. This has a range of consequences that condemn the learners to lives with few opportunities and prospects. These include drop-out before reaching Grade 12, failing Grade 12 or obtaining a weak National Senior Certificate (NSC). Youths who find themselves in these situations invariably join the ranks of the unemployed. The problem of youth unemployment is one of the most serious socio-economic problems facing contemporary South Africa, and it has its roots in the generally dysfunctional public schooling system.

Rhodes University is the most significant institution in Grahamstown; it is the biggest local employer and it serves as the educational hub around which the city functions. Since late 2014, the University has been led by Dr Sizwe Mabizela. When he was inaugurated as the University's 6th Vice-Chancellor in early 2015, he signalled that he would lead a University that would address head-on the challenges of local young people and build a more inclusive City. He positioned the University firmly and unambiguously within its locality, the City of Grahamstown.

Dr Mabizela summarised the prevailing reality as follows:

“The Eastern Cape Province is the worst performing province when it comes to public education. Since 2007, except for two years in 2009 and 2010, the Eastern Cape has come last of all provinces in matric pass rates. Every single year its matric pass rate have been way below the national pass rate. In Grahamstown, we have a collection of some of the best schools in the country interspersed with some of the most dysfunctional schools imaginable serving the majority of our young people.”

Having outlined the problem, he then suggested that Rhodes University should take some responsibility for addressing it.

“As an institution of higher learning we cannot sit and watch when young people amongst us are condemned to a life without hope; a life of despair because of the failure to provide them with the education they need and deserve. We must brighten the corner where we are!” – Dr Sizwe Mabizela.

Public schooling is one priority area in which the University would focus its attention and capacities. Specifically, Dr Mabizela has positioned Rhodes to assume the leadership of a determined, focused and practical commitment to revitalise public schooling in the City.

Rhodes University, has however recognised both its inherent limitations in managing and sustaining community engagement and the fact that there is considerable off-campus civil society competence in this regard. The University has thus entered into a partnership arrangement with GADRA Education, the city's oldest, most established and most effective education NGO.

Vice Chancellor's Inspiration

Dr Mabizela's inspiration is based on a number of critical selling points:

Its big, bold vision: Embracing a whole town, building agency and pride in a wide range of stakeholders.

Shared future: Built on the founding principle that University, town, community and learners are in this together. Without a fundamentally transformed public schooling system providing quality learning to all, the city has no future and the University has no future. This means that the University and its partners are committed to the programme for the long term.

Unlocking new energy and commitment: On an annual basis, over 700 students are mobilised in structured mentoring and tutoring roles to bring a new positivity to the town and the University.

Partnership: The University is working with schools, principals, teachers, parents and learners in partnership through the trusted educational agency - GADRA Education whose educational activities in the city over 50 years make it the most widely respected agency across all sectors of the community.

Targeted programmes: Based on GADRA's first hand understanding of the challenges and its successful work in opening opportunity and access for working class learners to higher education (e.g. GADRA Matric School as the largest feeder school to Rhodes University), the programme is working in ways that deliver measurable progress in a short time.

Tight, disciplined focus: Working only in those schools and spaces where stakeholders are positive and engaged, building achievement and winning others over to participation, as success and ownership under the programme by early participants grows.

Learning and sharing: Through its "from the ground up" approach, the programme is trialling many innovative interventions. It is committed to sharing these models and the learning and strategy they have informed. Rhodes University is committed to developing research and advocacy depth to become the national centre for schooling research and transformation.



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn



Connecting Pathways to Learning in Early Childhood Development and Education

Children's learning starts at prenatal development and there is widespread consensus that one of the most important formative periods for children's learning and development are the early years, framed by the concept of Early Childhood Education which includes the trajectory 0-9.

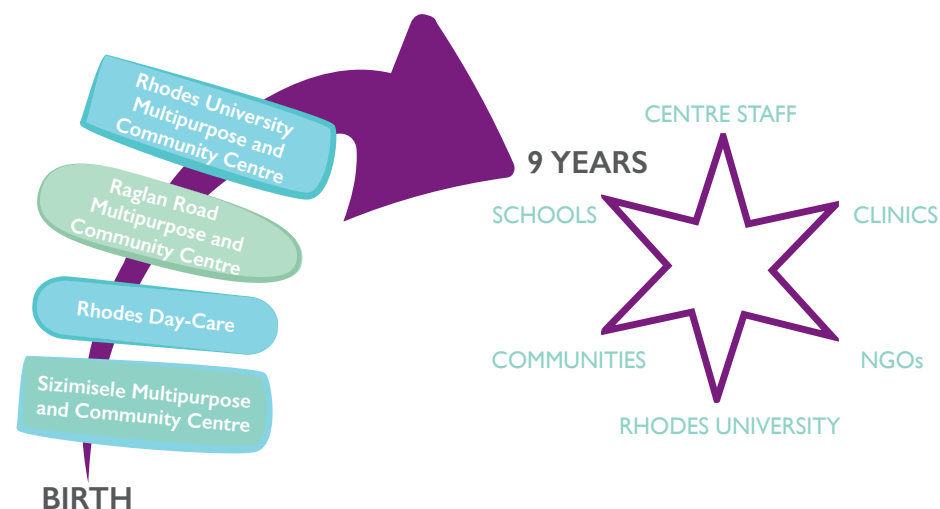
When connecting learning pathways, there is a need to focus on the notion of **in-betweenness**, as this is the connecting space between diverse learning spaces:

- The interconnections between home and schools or care centres
- The interconnections between parents, teachers and children
- The interconnections between reading, mathematics and the life world of the child
- The interconnections between Grade R, 1, 2, 3 and 4 and early learning and development
- The interconnections between home language and languages used in school
- The interconnections between formal learning and play-based learning.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme is geared towards opening up and supporting these “connection spaces”, emphasising three key aspects of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE):

- An interconnected learning pathway approach that focuses on children aged 0 to 9
- The interconnectedness of the broader community in the development and learning of the child
- A social-cultural, play-based approach to the development and learning of children.

By establishing nodes of access at existing facilities such as the Raglan Road Multipurpose and Community Centre and Sizimisele Multipurpose and Community Centre, as well as the Rhodes University Multipurpose and Community Centre, an immediate space for trialling new ways of learning and being will be created, as there is immediate access to a wide range of facilities and support.



Each node will be central in connecting the learning and development of children to the broader community (parents/caregivers, clinics, schools, NGOs and the university).

The emphasis at the centres will be play-based learning with the intention to develop the following:

- Connect children's life world experiences with development and learning
- Developing children's emergent literacy including story-telling, emergent reading, vocabulary development, etc.) through play-based learning
- Developing children's emergent numeracy with an emphasis on problem-solving and the role of mathematics in the lived world of the child through play-based learning.

Homework Clubs: Rhodes Education Faculty work at Core Primary School

The change of curriculum-focus from 'learning to read' in the Foundation Phase to 'reading to learn' in the Intermediate Phase is one for which the majority of learners are inadequately equipped. In addressing this problem by leveraging GADRA Education's strategic partnership with Rhodes University (specifically the Education Faculty), the programme was recently redesigned and is now geared up for full implementation to Foundation and Intermediate Phase learners.

The overall objective of the Homework Clubs programme is to support learners' academic development in such a way that each individual learner is developed in areas of particular weakness to a point which enables full and meaningful engagement with text and thus access to the curriculum in all subject areas. The programme leverages the strategic partnership with Rhodes University by using Education faculty students (B Ed and PGCE students) to work with Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase learners to support literacy development.



Addressing 'Barriers to Learning' Pilot

The educational progress of many learners is hampered by barriers to learning. These can, at a very basic level, be issues such as hearing and eyesight which can be easily addressed. There are, however, more challenging developmental issues some of which relate to foetal alcohol syndrome.

The programme includes full screening for all Grade R learners, including screening for hearing, sight and occupational barriers as well as support to assist learners to overcome mild to moderate barriers, as identified. All Grade R and Grade I learners participate in an occupational therapy programme designed by the Settlers Hospital occupational therapist. The combined Grade R and Grade I programme is currently being implemented by Rhodes B.Ed students and forms part of their service learning programme.



Nine-Tenths

The quality of education offered at the “non-fee paying” schools in Grahamstown that is delivered in the classroom is variable and uneven depending on the schools where learners are enrolled.

In addition, the learners’ home situations are frequently fragile and challenging, and their societal contexts are not conducive to study and academic performance.

Both these environments promote resignation, despair and sometimes even destructive behaviour in the learners.

“The top 60 Grade 12 learners at selected ‘schools of excellence’ in Grahamstown are linked up with students from Rhodes to mentor for the year. Mentoring focuses on personal planning, studying skills, written work (especially summarising) and tertiary applications. The mentoring intervention has been successful in recent years in increasing the number of disadvantaged learners that accesses Rhodes University.”





High Impact Supplementary School (HISS)

Grahamstown's overall performance in the NSC examinations is inadequate. The cause of this problem is bad schooling. However, the consequences of this under-performance are carried not by the schools but by the learners. Learners who fail and those who pass poorly have very few meaningful options ahead of them. Their schools will not take them back, their applications to tertiary study institutions are unlikely to be successful, and their prospects of securing work without a reasonably strong National Senior Certificate are slim. In short, these learners are stuck, and face a life of hardship and strife ahead.

The High Impact Supplementary School intervention prepares Grade 12 learners for supplementary examinations in February/March following the final National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations in October/November of the previous year. It does this through offering an intensive 'high impact' programme of educational activities. Teaching is delivered by Rhodes University academic staff and tutoring and mentoring are offered by students. The school offers its disadvantaged beneficiaries the opportunity to access the University, either directly on receipt of their supplementary examination results in May, or indirectly via the GADRA Matric School.

Virtual Learning Initiative

This project aims to tackle the problems faced by the schools in Grahamstown by targeting ‘foundational’ knowledge in English and Mathematics.

There are specific language challenges. The pass mark for English is 40% (as opposed to 30%, like it is for other subjects). Rhodes University requires a minimum of 50% for English as a prerequisite for considering any candidate. Furthermore, in order to obtain a Bachelor-level pass, one needs four designated subjects over 50%. The quest, therefore, is to maximise the number and percentage of Bachelor passes to ensure that as many learners as possible obtain more than 50% for English.

Another problem faced by learners is the generally low level of competence in English. The issue to understand is that while 40% or 50% for that matter in English may seem like an acceptable result on the surface, it represents a very low level of competence in the language. This constitutes a major constraint to good academic performance because English is the prescribed Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). That is to say, learners are supposed to be taught in English and they are required to write their examinations (in all subjects other than isiXhosa) in English. Because of their poor English competence, they struggle in these subjects, especially vocabulary-heavy content subjects such as Life Sciences and Geography.

The local schools also share a common set of problems pertaining to Mathematics. These include the following:

- ▶ The numeracy competence that Grade 8 learners come into high school with is poor.
- ▶ The Teaching of Mathematics in Grades 8 and 9 is inadequate to enable the learners to catch up.
- ▶ Consequently, at the end of Grade 9, most learners have no option but to select Mathematical Literacy. The proportion of learners doing Mathematical Literacy is very high and conversely the proportion doing Mathematics is very low. For example, of the 139 learners in Grade 12 at Mary Waters in 2017, 130 (94%) are doing Mathematical Literacy and only the remaining 9 learners (6%) are doing Mathematics.
- ▶ Most of the few learners taking Mathematics obtain less than 40% for the subject, thereby undermining their chances of accessing any Bachelor degree course.
- ▶ The Mathematical Literacy results at Grade 12 level are poor in all Grahamstown under resourced schools, including Mary Waters, Ntsika and Nombulelo.

Rhodes University offers Mathematics to selected high schools in the form of technology resources and enrichment support.

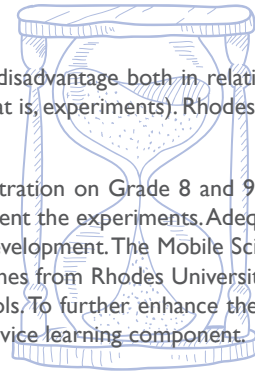
The programme is delivered by Rhodes University student volunteers in two programmes, namely liNtetho zoBomi (Existential Conversations) and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) senior phase.



Mobile Science Lab

Most under resourced schools do not have science laboratories. This puts the learners at a disadvantage both in relation to developing scientific 'curiosity' and to obtaining good results in compulsory practical assessment tasks (that is, experiments). Rhodes University offers a Mobile Science Laboratory to high schools.

The recently refined approach for this programme is characterised by the increased concentration on Grade 8 and 9 Natural Science; teacher participation and commitment as a prerequisite, with teachers being expected to present the experiments. Adequate capacitation of the teachers will be provided by Rhodes University, in the form of Teacher Professional Development. The Mobile Science Lab will act primarily as a transportation and logistical resource. Academic and educational leadership comes from Rhodes University and the MSL is best viewed as one piece in a larger puzzle of an effective science intervention in local schools. To further enhance the programme, the Faculty of Science has integrated the Mobile Science Lab into its third year curriculum as a service learning component.



Supporting Rhodes Support Staff to Support their Children

Few children of the support staff at Rhodes University gain access to and graduate from Rhodes University. This relates to the contextual problem that their children attend dysfunctional schools. Because Rhodes University is committed to revitalising public education in Grahamstown, it is appropriate for it to place particular emphasis on the children of its employees. Rhodes University is an institution of higher learning and therefore it should take a particular interest in the education development and advancement of the children of its employees.

The project recognises that children go through sequential phases in relation to educational development and academic challenges. Specifically, it suggests that there are five distinct stages, as follows: 0 to 5-year olds (ECD), 6 to 10-year olds (Foundation Phase), 7 to 13-year olds (Intermediate Phase), 14 and 15-year olds (GET Band), and 16 to 18-year olds (FET Band). Therefore, particular interventions have been designed for each of these stages. There are some common types of activity that feature during all the stages; these are parent support (workshop series), learner support, and monitoring and evaluation. With regard to the latter it should be noted that this is an outcomes-driven intervention. The project is intended to empower and equip parents to manage their homes for particular educational outcomes. There are specific outcomes for each development stage. The culmination evaluation document to be produced annually will consider performance in this regard for each of the five stages, in relation to the targeted outcomes set below.

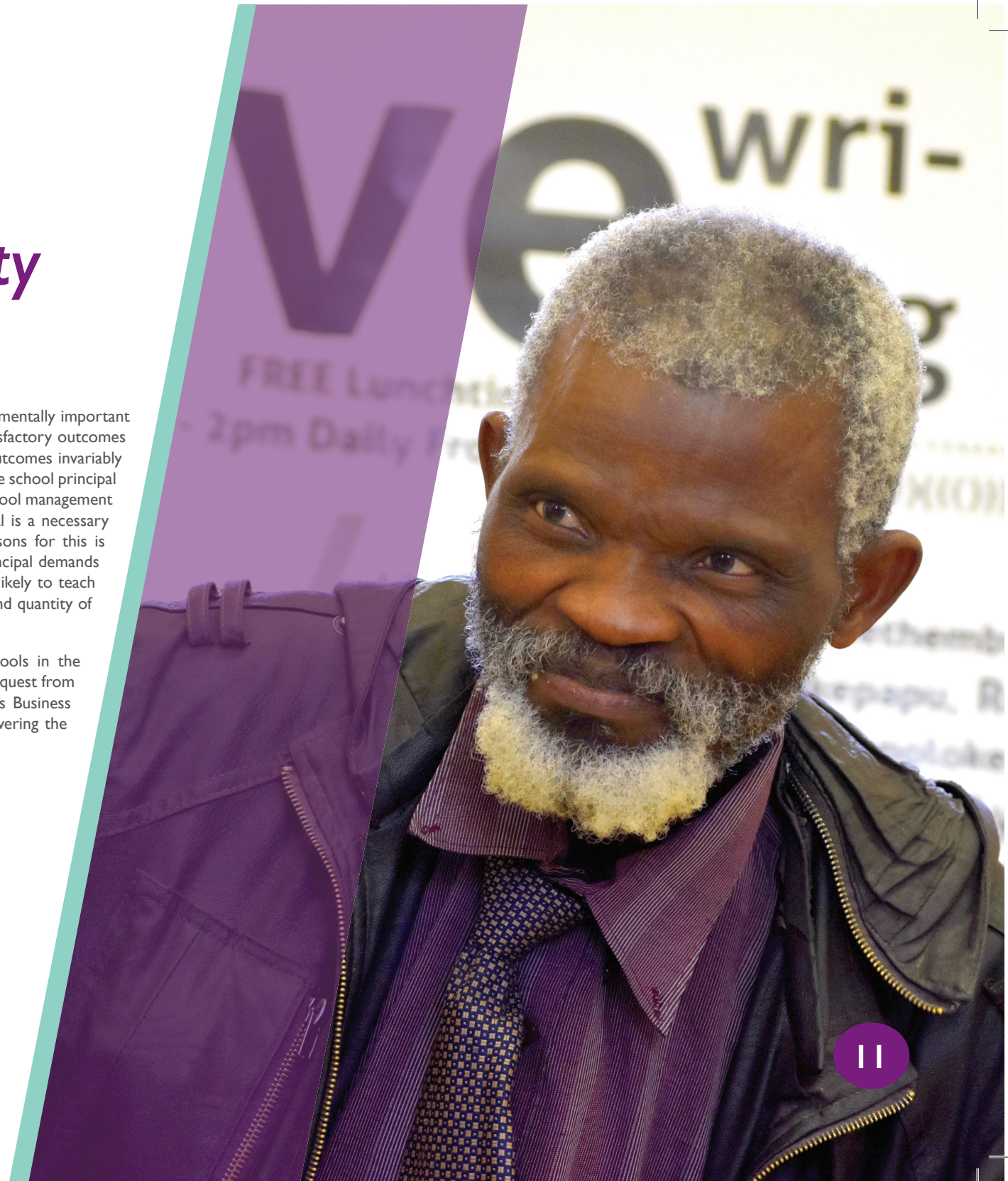
At the broadest level, the key output will be the successful delivery of a complex, five-phased project to a high level of professionalism. Specifically, this will entail the conducting of a series of approximately 20 parent workshops, the offering of a wide variety of learner support interventions across all age categories, and the maintenance of a detailed, rigorous monitoring and evaluation system.



Short Course on Leadership for Public School Deputy Principals/HoDs

There is general recognition that school leadership and management are fundamentally important in relation to educational outcomes. In schools where these are adequate, satisfactory outcomes are produced. In schools where these are lacking, unsatisfactory educational outcomes invariably follow. School leadership and management go beyond the office and person of the school principal but there is no doubt that it is the principal who is ultimately responsible for school management and leadership. Perhaps one can go as far as saying that a competent principal is a necessary condition for good school leadership and management. One of the key reasons for this is that the principal is responsible for the teaching corps at any school. If the principal demands accountability and performance from the teachers, then they are much more likely to teach consistently and effectively than if this is not the case. At present, the quality and quantity of teaching in many Grahamstown schools are poor.

Offered to Principals and Deputy Principals/HoDs of primary and high schools in the Grahamstown District, the programme was initiated in response to a specific request from the high school principals to Dr Mabizela. Designed and offered the Rhodes Business School, the NQF 8 certified leadership course is particularly helpful in empowering the heads of schools to lead their schools.



In Summary

1. The future and sustainability of Rhodes University is intimately bound up in the future and sustainability of Grahamstown. The University has both a responsibility and a degree of potential influence in the matter of schooling that sets it apart and imposes a special duty of leadership.
2. The more accessible Rhodes University is to the young people of Grahamstown, the greater the influence it will have and the stronger the bonds of association with the entire community, eroding the dominant schooling culture of exclusion and despair.
3. The process of reviving schooling in Grahamstown, if set up and developed with students at its heart, will lead – inexorably – to fundamental change. Student energy will be fundamental to the solution, powering a range of effective interventions and partnerships.
4. Schools are complex social organisms. Effective change can only take place in schools ready and willing to embrace it. The approach to reviving Grahamstown's schools cannot be a blanket, one size fits all approach. It must be multi-pronged, multi-stage and multi-partner. This insists that resources be directed to where they can make the most difference – into the community at large to create a supportive environment and into those schools that display readiness organisationally and educationally. Such readiness is determined by the willingness of school leadership and a critical mass of parents and teachers to support and own it.
5. None of this change will happen overnight, but supporting the emergence of centres of excellence, school by school, will be the quickest and most sustainable route.

The model is intended to provide a way for many organisations to work effectively together under shared direction in a Rhodes University-led coalition:



Operating at different levels to address different dimensions of the challenge whether simultaneously or in agreed sequence.



Recognising that different partners have different strengths and interests which can be combined and aligned to achieve greater impact.



Taking advantage of what is already in place and strengthening it while building new capacity to address other identified priorities.



Progressing at different speeds in different spaces and so not all being held back by resistance or lack of capacity in specific areas or institutions.