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REAP

RURAL EDUCATION ACCESS PROGRAMME

Accessing higher education for rural youth from poor communities



MID YEAR PROGRESS REPORT January – June 2010



*Building skills & knowledge
Providing opportunity
Developing a community serving humanity*



Western Cape students, seen here with REAP staff, receive donation of laptops



REAP

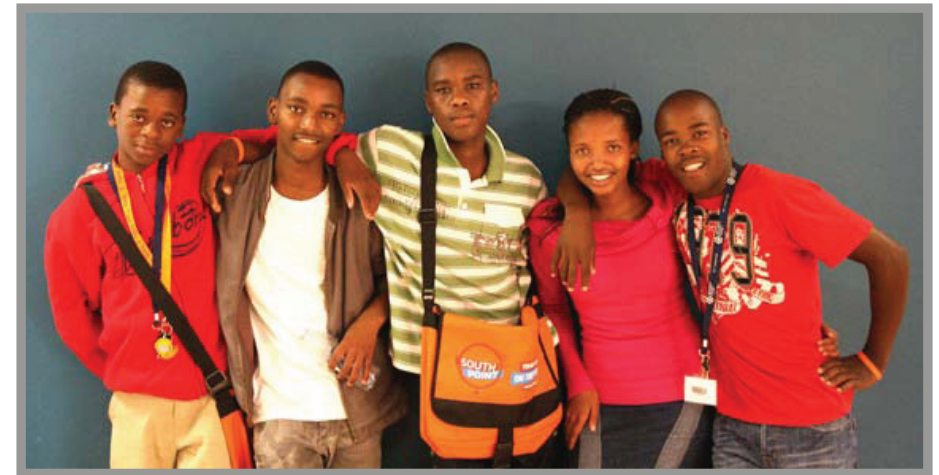
Rural Education Access Programme

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NMMU first year engineer students with their mentor

REAP's Mission Statement

REAP is a unique organisation that will provide an effective and accountable education access programme. We will endeavour to facilitate access to other funds for Higher Education and to develop and empower skilled graduates. By working with these students we will have an impact on the demographic inequality in South Africa. We will endeavour to give the disadvantaged, isolated and marginalized rural youth the opportunity to overcome inherent academic and social hurdles in order to realize their potential. REAP will carry out these actions to give our graduates skills which will contribute towards alleviation of poverty and help bring about economic and social well being for all South Africans.

REAP – A community serving humanity.

MID YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

January to June 2010

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	2
2	Changes to reporting	3
3	The 2010 student group	3
3.1	Profile of our current students	4
3.2	Financial support	11
3.2.1	NSFAS	11
3.2.2	Grants	12
3.2.3	Other models of financial support	12
3.3	Developmental support	12
3.3.1	Interactions with student advisors	12
3.3.2	Mentorship programme	17
3.3.3	Life skills development	18
3.3.4	Building relationships with HEIs	19
3.4	Student progress	21
3.5	Issues for poor students in higher education	26
4	Looking back: REAP's success in producing graduates	30
5	Looking ahead	31
5.1	Recruitment for 2011	31
5.2	New initiatives	32
5.2.1	The Early Recruitment Project	32
5.2.2	Experimenting with academic support	32
5.2.3	Extending our model of psycho-social support	34
5.2.4	Renewing our database and management information system	34
5.2.5	The Funding Practice Alliance	35
6	Organisational news and events	36
6.1	Leadership changes	36
6.2	Staff	37
6.4	REAP finances	38
7	Concluding comments	39
	Acronyms	40
	Student statistics	41

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A hectic time

The year thus far has been eventful for REAP. Staff have joined and left, new projects have been set in motion, research has been conducted and reported on, many meetings and presentations to a variety of stakeholders have taken place, conferences and workshops have been attended, staff training and development has taken place, fundraising work continues, the building and equipment have been maintained, we have made time to acknowledge and celebrate our success and the courage and enthusiasm of our students, and tears have been shed over the extraordinary hardship faced by some of our students. And then, most importantly, we have continued our usual work, supporting almost 340 students.

As always, our first semester has been a hectic round of enrolling and enabling access for new students and cementing relationships with continuing students. The process was complicated this year by the late release of the Grade 12 examination results and consequent late confirmation of offers of places to study by the HEIs. The annual work cycle was also affected by the extended mid-year break around the Soccer World Cup that was held in South Africa in June and July. Universities started earlier and the mid-year exams were brought forward. This created significant pressure for students and for REAP. In addition, we have had to deal with many students who applied late for accommodation and with accepting students onto the Programme during the HEI registration period, which hampered the support we could give them. Many first year students did not get accommodation in residence, which has created a headache for them and for REAP because we had to help them find accommodation at the last minute (See section 3.5 below).

Once the one hundred and four new students were confirmed on the Programme,

- Registration was confirmed with the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Funds were provided for meals
- Support was provided to secure accommodation (*see section of report on challenges*)
- New students were referred to REAPs mentors who assisted with orientation to campus, the ways of the institution and city, motivation, along with a range of social and practical needs such as opening bank and email accounts, introductions to other REAP students, finding accommodation etc.
- Access to books was provided through accounts with bookshops.

The two hundred and twenty-six students who met the criteria for continued REAP support were routinely provided with money for meals, access to books and advice regarding study plans for the year.

1.2 Emerging trends

In this report, we address some emerging trends that will affect REAP in the coming years. The most worrying, which affects the country as a whole, is the rising cost of higher education, which is becoming increasingly unaffordable for everyone. The Minister of Higher Education initiated a review of the NSFAS. We are seeing hardship at many levels of society: the emerging middle classes whose incomes exclude their

Students by institutional hub

Institutional Hub	University		Univ of Technology		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Bloemfontein 9		7	11	8	35
Cape Town	17	28	6	16	67
Durban 24		23	8	12	67
Eastern Cape	17	14			31
Gauteng/Pretoria 51		43	19	13	126
Limpopo	4				4
North West	0				
TOTAL	122	115	44	49	330



REAP Students meet Donor: Lord & Lady Laidlaw

Summary table of Streams by Gender and Institution

Stream	University		Univ Tech		Total		Overall
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Arts 1		7	2		3	7	10
Built Enviro	1	3	1	1	2	4	6
Business			1	3	1	3	4
Commerce 21		25	10	6	31	31	62
Education 9		1	1	3	10	4	14
Engineering 44		11	19	15	63	26	89
Humanities	7	9			7	9	16
Law	4	6			4	6	10
Management 3		6	1	11	4	17	21
Medical 9		24		4	9	28	37
Science 24		21	3	5	27	26	53
Technology			3	2	3	2	5
Travel			2	1	2	1	3
Total	123	113	43	51	166	164	330

Summary of Students' Province of Origin

Province NEW				CONTINUING			ALL STUDENTS		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Eastern Cape	10	4	14	11	18		21	22	43
Free State	6	4	10	13	9	22	19	13	32
Gauteng 3		4	7	5	4	9	8	8	16
Kwazulu Natal	16	17	33	23	26	49	39	43	82
Limpopo 16		14	30	28	10	38	44	24	68
Mpumulanga 5		3	8	3	4	7	8	7	15
Northern Cape	1	4	5	6	13	19	7	17	24
North West	3	6	9	8	3	11	11	9	20
Western Cape	6	14	20	5	5	10	11	19	30
Total	66	70	136	102	92	165	168	162	330

children from eligibility for NSFAS loans cannot afford to send their children to university. The very poor emerge from higher education with enormous debt. Many of our students begin their working lives as sole breadwinners for extended and destitute families. Their indebtedness creates a long-term financial burden that compounds their disadvantage at the very time when they need to be breaking free of poverty and helping their families to rise with them.

This year, we have seen ongoing student protests about fees and academic exclusion. Our student advisors have been caught up in violent clashes between police and students. We are concerned about the social impact of the current situation.

2. CHANGES TO REPORTING

Providing timely student progress reports mid-year has been challenging in 2010. Results were not available till after the HEIs opened late in July. Supplementary examinations were written in August and results are still awaited. This situation is primarily due to the holding of the World Cup, which led to institutions closing early and opening late. Some HEIs, such as the University of the Witwatersrand, however do not release mid-year results at all and year-long courses at universities may not have mid-year examinations. This means we have to undertake a laborious process of collecting test results and assignment marks and calculating an average mark.

REAP and its partners need to consider how we can provide the most useful information in an efficient way and the time of year when this information is best collected and reported on. It may be more useful to produce student progress reports following the August face-to-face sessions with students. This is a particular moment in the support year when overall performance is reviewed individually with each student and plans put in place for additional actions and support for improved performance.

3. THE 2010 STUDENT GROUP

This year we depart from previous practice and report on our students' profile and performance with comparative data from the previous three to six years, depending on the compatibility of data recording methods. This, together with the results of the tracking study of our 2005 cohort (see section 4 below), gives a more nuanced picture of the 2010 students and enables us to consider trends.

STUDENT STATISTICS

GENDER	NEW	CONTINUING	TOTAL
Men 49		118	167
Women 55		108	163
Total	104	226 330	

Institutional Breakdown

PROVINCE	INSTITUTION	TOTAL	NEW		CONTINUING	
			Men	Women	Men	Women
Eastern Cape	Walter Sisulu	1			1	
	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Univ	21 5			6	10
	Fort Hare Univ	1			1	
	Rhodes Univ	8	2	1	2	3
	Total	31				
Free State	Central Univ of Tech	19	2	3	9	5
	Univ Free State	16	1	3	8	4
	Total	35				
Gauteng	Wits Univ	41	11	12	12	6
	Univ of Jo'burg	40	2	8	19	11
	Pretoria Univ	13	3	2	4	4
	Tshwane Univ of Tech	31	2	4	16	9
	Vaal Univ of Tech					
	Total	125				
Kwazulu Natal	Durban Univ.of Tech	19	2	4	5	8
	Mangosutho Tech	2			2	
	Univ of Kwazulu Natal	47	11	8	13	15
	Total	68				
Limpopo	Univ Limpopo	4			3	1
Western Cape	CPUT 22		2	2	4	14
	UCT 16		2	5	6	3
	Univ. Stellenbosch	7	1	1	2	3
	Univ Western Cape	22	1	3	5	13
	Total	67				

3.1 Profile of our current students

3.1.1 Level of seniority

REAP supported 330 students in the first semester of 2010¹. This is on a par with 2008 and 2009, but an overall downward trend since 2005 is evident. For the past three years, REAP leadership has focused on maintaining a manageable number of students and offering them improved support. This is in a context of diminishing levels of preparedness for higher education among school leavers and a noticeable increase in the failure rate of first year students.

Figure 1: Students' seniority profile 2004 – 2010

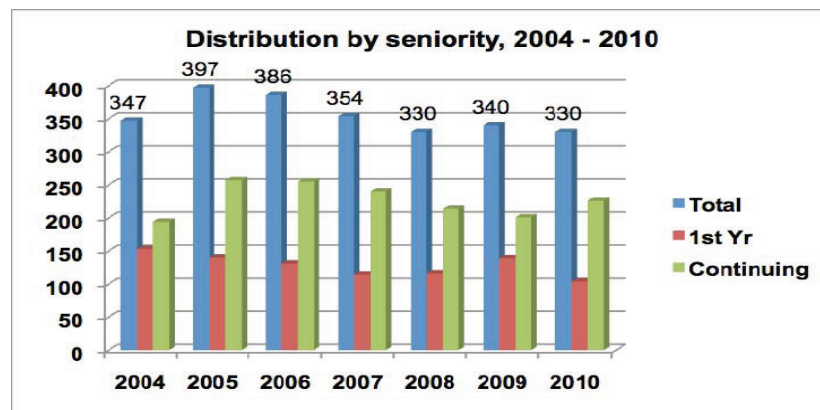


Figure 1 shows a definite declining trend in the absolute numbers of first year students since 2004. The proportion of first years has varied over the years, ranging from 32% to 44%.

REAP has been challenged to find new students who meet our tried-and-tested selection criteria, despite increases in the numbers of young people receiving matriculation passes that, on paper, qualify them for admission to higher education.

¹ A few anomalies have crept into our statistics because we have drawn on our database since the end of June and eight new students have joined REAP in the second semester.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

A & H	Arts and Humanities
BCM	Business, Commerce and Management Studies
B Com	Bachelor of Commerce
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CUT	Central University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
EBE	Engineering & the Built Environment
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IPP	Improved Performance Plan (REAP)
IST	In-service training
LLB	Legum Baccalaureus or Bachelor of Laws
MBChB	Bachelor of Medicine
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
ND	National Diploma
NHC	National Higher Certificate
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Port Elizabeth)
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
S & T	Science & Technology
SDA	Student development advisor (REAP)
SSDA	Senior student development advisor (REAP)
SU	Stellenbosch University
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria
UFS	University of the Free State
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UKZN	University of KwaZulu Natal
UNIVEN	University of Venda
UNW	University of the North West
UZ	University of Zululand
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
Wits	University of Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

Table 1: Proportions of first year and continuing students, 2004 – 2010

	No. First Years	No. Continuing	First year Proportion
2004	153	194	44%
2005	140	257	35%
2006	131	255	34%
2007	114	240	32%
2008	116	214	35%
2009	139	201	41%
2010	104	226	32%

We have maintained careful academic selection over time in a context where first-year students are widely reported as less prepared for higher education than in the past. One of the senior student advisors described the academic performance of REAP's first year students in 2009 as "alarming" compared with previous years. In 2009, for the first time, REAP experienced a significant number of first year students failing and being excluded by some universities in the middle of the year. We have seen a similar situation this year and our first year students require a lot of support to adjust to the demands of higher education because the gap between high school and university is very wide. They seem to struggle more in subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry, despite the availability of extra help. Students taking business information studies struggle because their level of computer literacy is too low. Several HEIs, including the University of the Free State and the University Pretoria, have recently declared their intention to raise their entrance requirements from 2011 in response to high first-year failure rates experienced since the introduction of the National Senior Certificate examination in 2008.

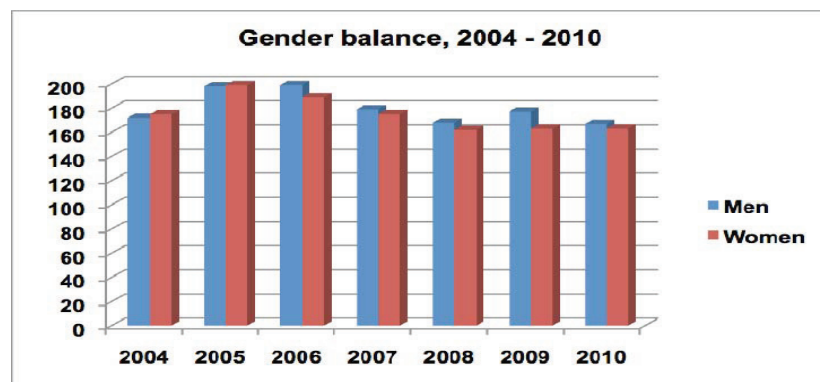
Over the years, we have become more discerning because we do not want to set young people up for the kind of failure that is so prevalent in our higher education system, particularly because this failure is accompanied by a debt to NSFAS that they have no means to repay. We have also seen a rising incidence of students we identify and select being awarded bursaries by other organisations, which reduces our numbers after we have filled our quotas. We do not see this as a problem because REAP's mandate is to facilitate access. Although we may see a falling off of this phenomenon in the current climate, we are considering offering support to rural students who are already studying and who did not gain access to higher education through REAP in order to make use of funds that are freed up in this way and to support sustained study so necessary for completion. We will weigh this tactic up in terms of the demands it will place on a programme staff team who are already fully extended.

3.1.2 Gender profile

REAP has maintained an almost even gender balance over time (see Figure 2). Since 2006, we observe a switch in the balance with a slight bias towards men emerging in recent years. Despite REAP's efforts, rural women face greater obstacles in taking advantage of opportunities offered to them. Families and peers do not expect young women to go on to HE and give them less support and motivation. Early pregnancies are an undeniable reality and households may wish to keep young

women at home for household duties and to care for young and elderly family members.

Figure 2: Gender balance, 2004 – 2010



3.1.2 Age profile

The first year students range in age from 17 to 24 years old. The average age of first years is 19.5 years. For senior students it is 20.6 years. The youngest student is a woman from Mtuba Mtuba in KwaZulu Natal, registered for the first year of Hospitality Management at Durban University of Technology. She passed all her first semester courses with marks of 66% and above and obtained one distinction. The oldest student is man from Kokstad in KwaZulu Natal. He is in the first year of a Bachelor of Social Work degree at UKZN. He obtained his National Senior Certificate in 2008. His mid-year performance is very weak: he passed one out of four exams. He will be carefully monitored for the rest of this year.

3.1.3 Provincial origin

The new students in 2010 came from eighty-five schools across South Africa. Our recruitment process relies on the voluntary services of our regional representatives. People's circumstances change over time and it is an ongoing effort to support and motivate our volunteers. Figure 3 shows the distribution of our students' home provinces. Over the past few years, we observe growing numbers of students from Limpopo, where the regional representatives are very active. Numbers in KwaZulu Natal remain steadily high and we have a regular intake from Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, North West and the Western Cape. The drop in students from the Northern Cape this year is the result of a diminishing partnership with De Beers. We are concerned about the tailing off of students from the Free State and, in particular, the Eastern Cape.

less labour intensive (at high level capacity) and cost effective way. In this regard we are privileged to be part of a Cordaid-supported project that is looking at sustainability with the social agencies and associate bodies of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, of which we are part.

7. CONCLUDING COMMENT

REAP staff are astute and enthusiastic about their work. One of our student advisors observed recently that the challenges our students face each year remain the same. As we move forward, she says, we need to ask ourselves what we can do differently and how we can create the capacity to do things differently. We are aware of these challenges. Can we tackle them differently? How can we contribute to solutions to enormous problems that seem beyond our reach? Our challenge is to develop new strategies in dealing with these issues, to evaluate ourselves around these challenges and ask ourselves whether our intervention strategies are sufficiently effective and, if not, what can be done to shift things.

The first half of 2010 has been about two things: continuity and change. At the start of the year a commissioned evaluation report provided a very positive picture of REAP's relevance and impact (this report is available in full on request). We are confident that under a new leader and with the various efforts to bring about renewal, REAP will be able to strike the all-important balance between stability and change that is necessary for sustainability. Our recently released tracking study demonstrates the value of REAP in providing meaningful access to higher education for poor rural youth and improving graduation rates, thereby making our small contribution to the real transformation of South Africa.

We hope with the 2010 project of two “trainee” programme managers as well as an approach of providing further growth opportunities for student advisors and other staff, we will be able to retain experienced capacity.

6.3 REAP finances

REAP’s budget for 2010 is R 8.5 million. As has been our practice in the past, maximum access grants¹² differed for first year and continuing students who receive R1, 600 and R8,900 respectively. The idea behind the larger grant for first years was the costs of registration. We have, however, discovered that senior students find it strange to adapt to a lesser grant after their first year and their needs do not diminish. We are therefore budgeting for a single maximum access grant in 2011. In any case, students have very differing needs and individual budgets are tailored to those needs. For example, students doing only one semester of study prior to in-service training or those with bursaries do not require the maximum access grant. This developmental and conservative approach, however, does present challenges in terms of patterns of expenditure within small donor student groupings. REAP is exploring the idea of pooling access funds to enable a more flexible approach to providing financial support to students in terms of need and reporting in terms of average actual expenditure per student.

At the end of 2010 REAP will lose two significant European donors: Irish Aid and Horizont 3000 of Austria. Both are longstanding partners and are ending their support informed by foreign aid strategic priorities. We are extremely grateful to these donors for the unwavering support provided to establish the programme, their flexibility, understanding of our context and insightful encouragement to venture into new territory, such as research, advocacy and programme expansion.

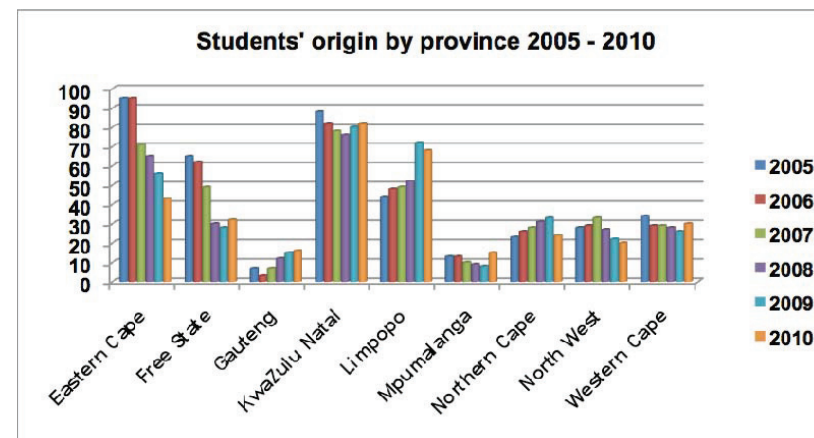
Our South African donor base remains reasonably stable at present, but with some diminishment in grant amounts. Change in the Anglo American Chairman’s Fund strategy also means, if we understand correctly, that they will be withdrawing their support for REAP over time, a sad occurrence for us.

Unexpectedly, we have received two sizeable grants from the Lottery this year. This of course presents complexity in terms of spending income we did not plan for, but it will greatly assist us in 2011 and we are very pleased to be a beneficiary of the National Lotteries Development Trust Fund again, after a 5 year hiatus.

Sustainability is about many things that we have written about previously. Financially, we have slowly built a small reserve, which would keep the organisation going at full pace for about 4 months if we were to receive no funds. We have to continue to build this to a more sustainable level to finance at least one year of operation. REAP has to work very hard to raise income for the support of students each year. We need to investigate how we can do this, and sustain partnerships in a

¹² The access grant covers the cost of books, meal allowances, local and long distance transport, equipment, spectacles, accommodation deposits or contributions, and a very small contribution to fees. It is paid in monthly transfers.

Figure 3: Students’ origin by province 2005 – 2010



3.1.4 Institutions of choice

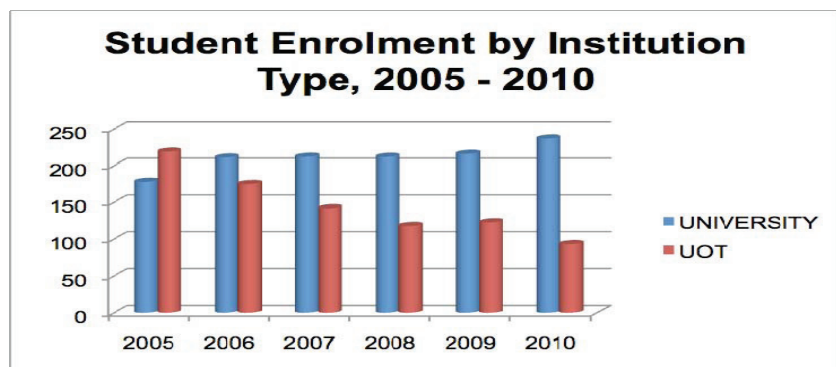
The number of students registered for courses at universities of technology has declined from 55% in 2005 to 28% in 2010 (see Figure 4). The merger of HEIs earlier this decade created three kinds of university: the traditional universities offering three- and four-year undergraduate degrees, the comprehensive universities, created through mergers of former universities and technikons (UJ, NMMU, WSU) and universities of technology. The comprehensives offer undergraduate degrees and the National Higher Certificates (NHC) and National Diplomas (ND). This year 37% of our students are registered for National Diploma and National Higher Certificate courses at UOTs and comprehensive universities². Of the other 63%, 93% are registered for Bachelors degrees (and the rest for the MBChB and the LLB).

Our experience is that many UOT students struggle to complete the in-service training (experiential learning) requirement for the ND because of a shortage of work placement opportunities and the less than adequate assistance in finding work placements given by some institutions. Inevitably word goes out, and this may discourage applicants. It is also possible that the statements on the NSC certificate that stipulate which HE qualifications school leavers’ results qualify them for contribute to the perception that UOT programmes are less desirable³. We foresee that significant effort will be needed to in change young peoples’ perceptions of the status and employability of graduates of the UOTs and FET colleges.

² UOTs often require students to register initially for the NHC if pursuing financial studies. Although students may leave the institution with the NHC, in practice, REAP students continue by registering for the ND. Through this progression, students complete a full undergraduate programme that gives access to the postgraduate B Tech degree.

³ Depending on the number of aggregate points the matriculant achieves, he/she may meet either “the minimum requirements for admission to bachelors’ degree, diploma or higher certificate study” (i.e. a university level qualification) or “the minimum requirements for admission to diploma or higher certificate study” (i.e. a UOT level qualification).

Figure 4: Student enrolment by institution type



We do not know how the REAP trend compares with national trends, but given the current focus on developing the Further Education and Training (FET) college sector, which was incorporated into the Ministry of Higher Education in 2009, REAP hopes to see a rationalisation in the post-school education and training system so that young people are easily able and willing to enter into appropriate types of institutions and succeed in their studies. In our view, many school leavers who apply to REAP are more suited to UOT studies, which are structured into semester modules that enable students to feel they are progressing because they can complete courses at both the mid-year and year-end points. These courses prepare students for vocations and give access to postgraduate study with the B Tech degree. This year we are advising applicants with Grade 12 results of less than 50% to apply for UOT entrance.

In 2010, REAP students are registered at thirteen universities and five universities of technology – see Figures 5 and 6. As the number at CPUT has grown slightly over the past six years and TUT has shown a significant increase, growing by one hundred and fifty percent in the same period. REAP is no longer taking on students at MUT, UZ, WSU, Univen, UL, NWU (see later in report) or VUT, which explains the decline in numbers for these institutions.

travelled with Lynette on REAP business quickly noticed that there was never an airport where some young professional did not come up to Lynette and acknowledge the part she had played in their development. We shall sorely miss all that she provided and acknowledge that she is irreplaceable. The REAP ethos of a community serving humanity was personified in Lynette. We wish you well Lynette – thank you for all that you have done for us and all the REAP students.

6.2 Staff

6.2.1 Programme team restructuring

REAP has grappled with sustained programme management capacity since late 2007. The start of 2010 saw the organisation try a new approach. Two student advisors were promoted as senior student advisors (new positions) with programme management responsibilities. The programme development manager stepped into a support and oversight role for 2010, making a three-person programme management team.

Regular early morning weekly programme management team meetings quickly became the norm and enabled joint planning, review and re-allocation of responsibilities as required. Each senior student development advisor (SSDA) supervised a team of three student advisors in three higher education institution (HEI) hubs. The early months were excessively demanding for the new SSDAs, as they still carried student caseloads. However, by June provisions were in place for the handover of their caseloads to a newly recruited, albeit temporary, student advisor.

Going into the second half of the year, the SSDAs have become almost solely responsible for all that programme management entails: planning, review, people and implementation management, and implementation relationships with external partners such as NSFAS and the HEIs.

2010 is the first year of a two-year period of developing and testing this model for programme management.

6.2.2 Intern student advisor programme

A very successful intern programme was run at REAP for the first time in 2009. Two recent graduates were contracted for the year, during which they accompanied and assisted an experienced student advisor and received training. One of the 2009 interns, Lethabo Tloubatla, secured a student advisor position with REAP and the second, Mpumi Williams, took up a position at the African Scholars Fund as manager for school awards.

Given that the intern programme proved its value by providing some continuity of staff, REAP took on two new interns on contract for 2010: Mbali Shange and Vatiswa Mangxola of UWC. As a REAP graduate who completed a B Soc Sc degree at UKZN in 2009, Mbali is well placed to work alongside Charity Bafana, the SDA for KZN and enjoys the opportunity of the fields trips to visit her home. Young graduates who take up student advisor positions at REAP quickly acquire work experience and after a few years of service with REAP are able to advance their careers elsewhere.

6 ORGANISATIONAL NEWS AND EVENTS

6.1 Leadership changes



REAP was sad to bid farewell to *Clairissa Arendse* at the end of July. Clairissa, who began her life with REAP as a student advisor in 2007 and took the reins as programme manager in the same year assumed the directorship in mid-2008, when Glenda Glover decided to step aside and focus on programme development, research and advocacy.

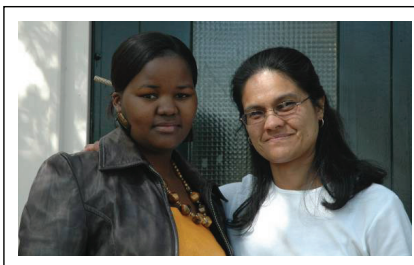
Clairissa brought to REAP a profound commitment to the development of our students. During her tenure as programme manager, she designed and implemented our mentorship programme. Her capacity for incisive thinking and pragmatism were highly valued. The Board and staff wish her well and hope she finds a good balance in the work of serving people's development, which she so clearly relishes.

REAP is excited to welcome *Russell Davies* as the new director. Russell takes up the position from the 13 September 2010. In the interim Nadeema Taliep and Glenda Glover are serving as acting directors for finance and programmes respectively. Russell comes to REAP with considerable experience, having been the executive director of HOPEHIV Africa. He has lived and worked in Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa. He has undergraduate degrees in commerce, law and theology and a Masters degree in social science.

Visits to REAP partners in Gauteng are planned for late September. Due to a prior engagement in London in the mid October, Russell hopes to visit REAP partners based in the United Kingdom and Europe at this time.

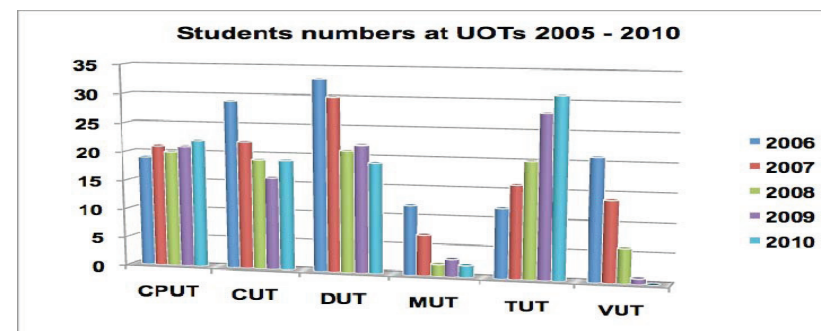
We look forward to a bright and interesting future for the programme under Russell's leadership.

Last but not least, we pay tribute to *Lynette Harding* (far right with student). Lynette left REAP at the end of June 2010. In many ways Lynette's name has been synonymous with REAP. She has been with the organisation since the launch of the programme in 2001 and with CEAP prior to that. She has seen the programme through thick and thin and it was Lynette who had been the



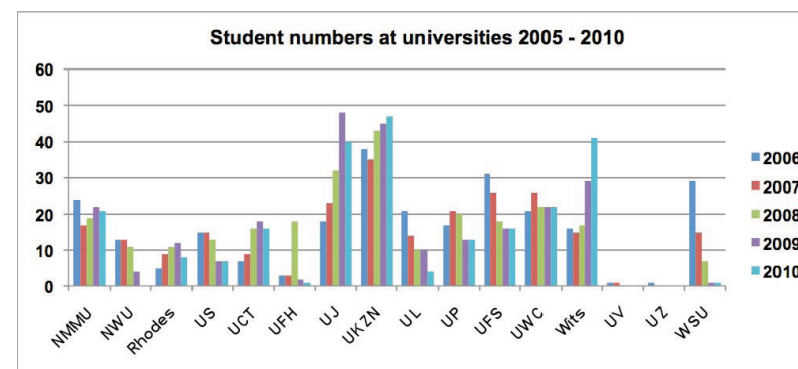
torchbearer for REAP's successful model of holistic individual support based on an ethos of developing an independent, responsible young citizen. Interestingly, Lynette never wished to take on the leadership of REAP although she is well equipped to do so. Her focus on the student never wavered. Staff members who

Figure 5: Student numbers at UOTs 2005 – 2010



The biggest growth in university enrolments has occurred in Gauteng (UJ 122% and Wits 156%) and there has been steady growth at UKZN. The Western Cape remains steady overall, but the numbers of students at Stellenbosch have halved in the past two years. REAP is cautious about students with a REAP profile studying at US. With exceptions, REAP US students have not done well. Their Afrikaans needs to be of a high level and they find it difficult to adjust to the culture of the institution.

Figure 6: Student numbers at universities 2005 – 2010

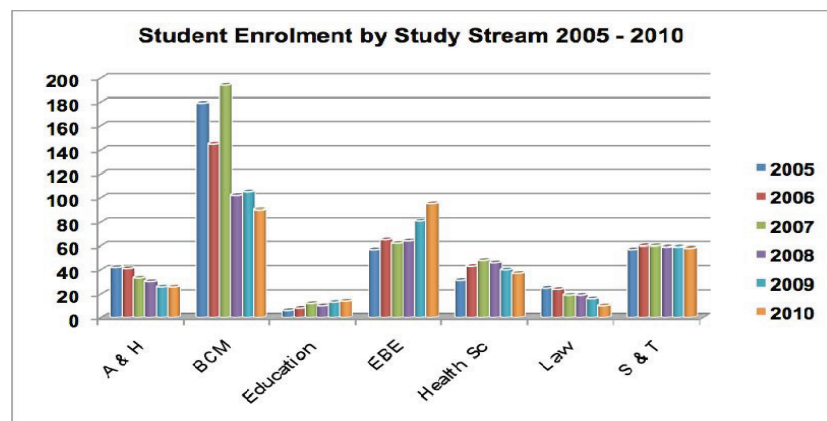


3.1.5 Disciplines of choice

When we look at the areas of study being chosen by REAP students (Figure 7), we observe a steady growth in the number of students enrolling for courses in Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE) over the past six years. We see declining numbers in Arts and Humanities (A & H), which includes Communication, Journalism, Social Sciences and Social Work, and Psychology. This phenomenon is at least partly attributable to the Government's definition of Social Work and Education as scarce skills and the introduction of bursaries for these courses. However, the profile of Arts and Humanities disciplines has been downplayed over the past

decade, while careers in Science, Engineering and Technology (EBE and SET) have been encouraged as a national priority. Recently the Minister of Higher Education published an article in the Mail and Guardian supporting studies in the Arts and Humanities, which may lead to a correction of the trend. REAP encourages students to pursue their own interest believing this to hold a better chance of success.

Figure 7: Student enrolment by study stream 2005 – 2010



We also see a significant decline in the numbers of REAP students enrolling for courses in Business, Commerce and Management Studies (BCM) from the highs of 2005 – 2007. When this category, which encompasses general management, marketing, various forms of accounting and auditing, economics, public administration, human resource management, hospitality, travel and tourism management, office management, logistics and agricultural management, is disaggregated (see Figure 8), an overall decrease in REAP students in Commerce and Management is clearly evident over the past six years. The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' Thuthuka Programme, which includes bursaries and academic support, has absorbed many black students registering for degrees in accounting and several other corporate bursary schemes also focus on commerce degrees. REAP's first year intake is providing a recruitment pool for these bursaries as it is from engineering bursaries. As more and more bursary schemes spring up, REAP adapts its focus naturally to continue creating access for poor rural youth who have no alternative route into higher education.

familiar!) and in terms of the way the Programme and our workflow has evolved over the past decade.

A consultant has held conversations with our current programmer, who developed our system in the early 1990s, five other potential service providers and three similar NGOs, with a view to a potential sharing of the process and cost of developing a system. REAP was also invited to an information exchange session hosted by the HCI Foundation, at which Foundation staff presented the bursary management system that they have had custom-built. This was a wonderful opportunity to share experiences and challenges with other organisations involved in bursary granting and student support.

It seems that the more information we gather, the more difficult it is to decide on a way forward. Negative experiences of changing precious databases abound and even the most conscientious developer cannot guarantee a problem-free transition. We have to choose between open-source or commercial/proprietary solutions, own server or hosted system, build from the ground up or adapt an existing system. REAP has student information dating back to 1993, which includes alumni who are potential supporters of REAP. Our assessment to date is that while there are custom-made bursary management systems in the market, they are inadequate for the nature of REAP's needs. An internal team, along with the consultant and our programmer has been formed to take forward the investigations.

5.2.5 The Funding Practice Alliance

During 2009, leaders from four Cape Town-based NGOs - Inyathelo, the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA), Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) and REAP - all well-established, respected, national operations, came together around a shared concern for the sustainability of civil society. All of us understand the importance of an active and vibrant civil society in the development and growth of democracy in South Africa. From our participation in a variety of NGO forums, we are aware of the closure and vulnerability of NGOs and particularly concerned about the way funds from the South African Lottery are being disbursed and the diminishment and approach of the National Development Agency. We regard these two organisations as important sources of financial support for civil society in South Africa.

Together we decided to research the practices of these two agencies in an effort to better understand the issues that inform change advocacy. Funds were raised for the project and the Funding Practice Alliance (FPA) was formed.

The research project on the NDA and the Lottery is due to be completed by the end of the year and initial findings will be presented at a conference to be hosted by Inyathelo in November. A similar but more activist grouping, the Coalition on Civil Society Resource Mobilisation, was formed in Johannesburg at the same time. The two groupings have met and agreed to work together. The FPA will meet in August to plan the next phase of research, which will look at the funding practice of other sources of resources for civil society in South Africa.

It is important to note however that this intervention does not, understandably, seem to have compensated for students' weaknesses in the science and maths subjects that underlie their engineering discipline. Generally these students' mid-year performance has been weak and REAP will have to monitor second semester performance and possibly go back to the drawing board to explore what interventions to consider for which students within our limited ability.

5.2.3 Extending our model of support

REAP is often questioned about the fact that we do not support students at all of South Africa's HEIs. There are many reasons for this. For the past few years, for example, REAP has not supported students in Mafikeng, or at any of the UNW campuses, primarily due to the cost of supporting small numbers of students in far-flung locations. Volunteers who have worked as REAP student recruiters (regional representatives) in the North West Province for many years recently approached the REAP director to reconsider this practical decision. Applicants from the area were expressing a strong preference for studying at the Mafikeng campus and contact had been made with student affairs staff on campus, who indicated their willingness to provide local support to REAP.

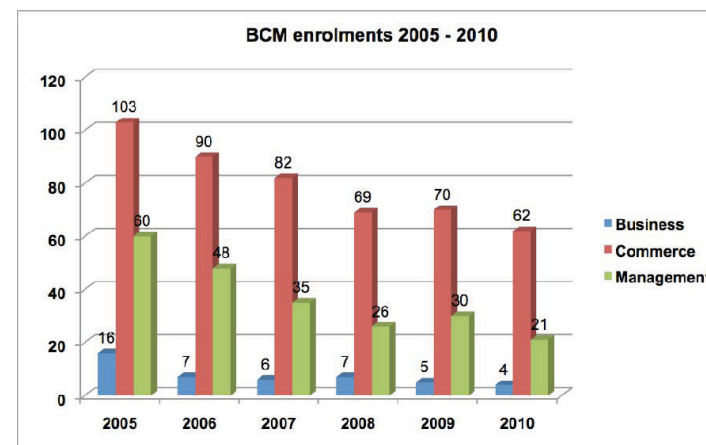
On a visit to the campus in May this year, the REAP programme development manager was impressed by what she found. All University support staff indicated their enthusiasm to provide support to REAP students. Accommodation, computer lab and other facilities are good. The campus atmosphere is a happy learning institution, hard at work. The result of the visit is that REAP plans to support ten new students at this campus in 2011. The partnership will test a new way of providing student support. To avoid excessive costs the various services on campus will provide tailored support to REAP students, partnering REAP in student development. It is expected that one or two NWU staff will visit REAP for a programme briefing early in 2011. This may be the start of a more integrated and cost effective way of providing the support needed for student success. We understand that UNW is the only HEI to meet its graduation targets, so we are happy to be embarking on a working partnership with them.

A visit to the University of Venda (UNIVEN), at the request of the vice-chancellor, was also planned, but did not take place due to the vice-chancellor's hectic schedule and the high cost of air travel during June and July related to the World Cup. We hope that this visit will take place during the second semester, as UNIVEN is probably the most rural HEI in South Africa and serious exploration of a potential relations between REAP and the University is very relevant.

5.2.4 Renewing our database and management information system

Modernising or renewing a database is a daunting task and fraught with risk. REAP has had a stable database for managing the programme since the beginning and we find it mission-critical to ensure ongoing system reliability. At the same time, our current system is outdated, both in terms of usability (our young staff are amazed to experience a user interface that people of their parent's generation would find

Figure 8: Enrolment in Business, Commerce and Management Studies 2005 – 2010



3.2 Financial support

3.2.1 NSFAS

REAP receives a limited loan allocation from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This allocation is used primarily for first year students to ensure full access. Senior students may access NSFAS through REAP in certain circumstances, if funds are available. Five continuing students have accessed NSFAS loans through REAP this year, mostly because they applied to the institutions too late and, in some cases, were either given partial loans or did not receive loans because of intense competition for loans. However, REAP's approach is always to facilitate the student's support within the systems provided, to ensure sustainability and encourage independence. Hence from their second year onwards, REAP students are expected to access their NSFAS loan through the institutions.

Our allocation for 2010 is R1,622 800. By the end of June we had submitted twenty-eight loans to NSFAS, to the value of R887,995. Further loans were processed in July. REAP expects to disburse its entire NSFAS allocation and may have to request a further allocation, depending on loans approved by HEIs for REAP students. The individual loan NSFAS limit for 2010 is R47,000, but permission was obtained for loan requirements in excess of the upper limit. The highest loan processed to date was R58,965 for a Rhodes student. Loans for students at Wits all exceed R40,000.

The cost of higher education is very high in relation to incomes, particularly at some universities. The sustainability of this ever-increasing cost in a context of endemic poverty has to be questioned. Even though up to 40% of the NSFAS loan may be converted to a bursary if the student passes all courses in any academic year, the reality is that many students fail courses and thus take longer than the minimum time to complete their studies. NSFAS allows students to take two extra

years to complete their studies before excluding them from eligibility for the loan. We wonder about the consequences of a young person graduating with a debt approaching R100,000. REAP would like to see research being done on this issue.

3.2.2 Grants

REAP provides access grants to its students from funds raised from donors. The total sum of access grants allocated to 329 students⁴ for the period to June is R1,221,005. Grants are tailored to individual students' needs. The first year grant is limited to R11,600. Senior students may receive a maximum of R8,900. This year's experience has prompted us to consider a uniform maximum, as senior students' expenses are frequently as high as, if not higher than, those of first year students. In 2011 we shall be using a single maximum grant figure, but grants will still be tailored to individual needs, to some degree. For example, if a student is studying a limited number of courses, has a partial bursary, or is only studying for one semester, smaller grants will be provided. In exceptional circumstances, REAP management might allow the maximum grant to be exceeded.

3.2.3 Other models of financial support

REAP is also in partnership with two organisations (Kagiso Trust and the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority) that identify and provide financial support for students. REAP assists with selection, provides the student support programme and in the case of iSimangaliso, manages the financial support. This semester there are forty-three students in this category. Although REAP's focus is on students from rural areas, because of the value accredited to the support programme, REAP is supporting eighteen urban-origin students from Tembisa in Gauteng and the southern Peninsula townships of Cape Town for Deutsche Bank and Lord and Lady Laidlaw.

3.3 Developmental support

3.3.1 Interactions with student development advisors

The Programme team and its caseload

In the first half of the year, we had four student development advisors (SDAs) and two senior student development advisors (SSDAs). We also had two intern SDAs, who each worked with a SDA, sharing the caseload to learn from experience during their training. See section 6.2 below for details on the programme team and its structure.

Student support is structured geographically in six hubs where the HEIs are situated: Free State (Bloemfontein), Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown), Western Cape (Cape Town and Stellenbosch), KwaZulu Natal (Durban and Pietermaritzburg), Gauteng (Johannesburg) and Gauteng (Pretoria/Tshwane, including Limpopo and North West, where there are a few senior students. REAP no longer accepts students at the HEIs in Limpopo and North West). SDAs are allocated to the various hubs. The SDAs had an average caseload of 63 students and the

universities' mid-semester breaks did not coincide. Identified students were consulted, as they needed to buy into the process, which entailed working through their mid-semester break. They were enthusiastic.

The intervention, which began and ended with assessments of the students' reading accuracy (aloud), reading vocabulary and reading fluency, including reading rate and reading comprehension on a silent extended reading task, was designed to help new first years improve their academic literacy and hence cope with the pace of their lectures by improving their reading and writing skills. The initial assessment showed that the majority of the students were functioning significantly below competence levels on reading *vocabulary*, reading *rate* and reading *comprehension*. This was predictable, since the norms are for First Language English Speakers and was consistent with other findings on similar English Second Language students.

The 5-day academic literacy programme was facilitated by Mr Lederman and a life coach, who further enriched the programme. The training intervention consolidated and extended the essential underlying reading, vocabulary and comprehension skills assessed as deficient and introduced a variety of other skills to contextualize and balance these underlying academic skills. These included the development and application of various study skills. Informational, motivational and inspirational handouts on topics such as Free Choice, Goal Setting, Dealing with Change, Stress Management, Reflections of Uniqueness were also given to each student for discussion and for their own use. Personal Development Skills were presented in an interactive manner. These included facilitating communication and discussion on a variety of life skills, emotional maturity as well as personal awareness and experiential skills (including relaxation and visualization exercises). The overall aim was to educate, motivate and to inspire the students to develop the will to grow, to believe in themselves by experiencing their capacity, and to experience sustainable growth in a meaningful way. This helps students glimpse their potential and to choose to unlock it in a joyous and fulfilling way.

Eight students attended every 6-hour session, one student missed one day and another missed two days. Arrangements were made for these two students to have individual sessions. The reported improvements have astounded us. The low starting level of the students clearly indicates how challenging it must be for them when they commence their studies at a university like Wits. But the ability to improve with a well-conceived short intervention appears amazing and heartening. The students thoroughly enjoyed the week and subsequently attended a 4-day follow up programme in July, to embed their improved reading, comprehension and literacy skills.

At a cost of R4,500 per student for the first five days excluding accommodation, catering and transport, this pilot was expensive by REAP standards, but initial indications are that the benefits are highly significant for the students. We are exploring service providers along with the student support departments of HEIs to assist students in other regions. Many HEIs do have reading laboratories and qualified staff in student support services. REAP will take forward conversations with HEI staff in the coming period, to investigate how an enticing programme of academic literacy skills development for REAP students could be delivered.

⁴ Some of our students are supported by organisations such as the Eric Molobi Scholarship Fund of the Kagiso Trust and do not receive grants from REAP.

5.2 New initiatives

5.2.1 Early Recruitment Project

Funding from Irish Aid has enabled REAP to embark on a feasibility study and design of a project we have been wanting to pursue for the past four years, to start our recruitment and selection process earlier, among school learners in the penultimate, Grade 11 year. Our aim is to offer carefully selected learners a support intervention during their Grade 12 year that includes limited career guidance, information, advice and motivation to apply early for admission to higher education and for financial aid and accommodation in university residence. Once fully implemented nation-wide, REAP envisages selecting most of the annual intake of new, first year students from this pool of learners. Our belief is that with this support, they will make better career and course selection decisions, apply early and thus be able to take full advantage of all the support on offer to first year students. The intervention is based on a model of individualised, personal engagement in the form of a mentoring / coaching / counseling conversation with qualified advisors who are experienced in career guidance and knowledgeable about tertiary education.

Working with an independent consultant, we have developed a project plan for an initial pilot over an 18 -24 month/period, starting, God willing, in the second half of this year. REAP has advertised for a Recruitment & Selection Manager and is in the process of finalising a short list of applicants for interviews. Through negotiations with a current donor we have funds for this programme for 2010 and windfall Lottery grants will assist with some project expenses in 2011. A substantial proposal for the project has been presented to another potential donor in the United Kingdom.

The timing of this initiative is opportune. The need for career guidance is clearly on the radar of the new Ministry of Higher Education and Training and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has recently launched a National Career Helpline intended to provide career development services to all citizens. REAP met Paul West, who heads the SAQA Career Helpline, at the first National Career Guidance Conference held in Gauteng earlier this year and has been in touch with him about possible areas for collaboration in reaching remote learners.

5.2.2 Experimenting with academic support

REAP has extensive experience of the difficulties faced by black students who do not have English as their home language. In 2009 the student advisor for Johannesburg-based REAP students (one of our biggest groups) spoke to Stan Lederman of Athol Desmond Study Centres. Stan was hugely enthusiastic about running a pilot programme of academic skills enhancement for HE students. Ten first year, English second language¹¹, science and engineering students from Wits University were selected for an intervention, which took place in March this year. REAP has found this category of students to be most at risk of academic exclusion. Initially we had wanted both UJ and Wits to participate, but unfortunately the

¹¹ REAP has no students who are first language English speakers.

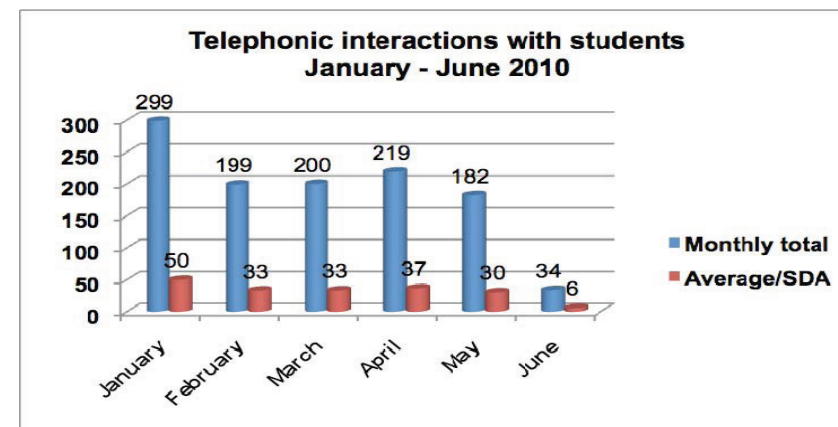
SSDAs each supported an average of 33 students alongside their responsibility for a range of programme management activities. This was not sustainable for the new SSDAs and a fifth SDA was employed mid-year.

Telephonic support

Students are required to use the REAP toll-free number for a monthly telephonic interaction with their advisor, except in the months when the SDAs visit the institutions to meet with students.

Our SDAs had a total of 1133 telephone conversations with students in the first semester, an average of 237 calls for each advisor⁵. Interaction with first year students tends to be more intensive than with senior students. The all-important first telephonic engagement with new students was mainly to link them with a mentor as soon as possible and address their immediate needs, primarily related to books and meals. Using mentors has worked well because the first years were able to engage with peers and ask questions freely – see section 3.3.2 below for a more detailed overview of the mentorship programme.

Figure 9: Telephonic interactions with students



Given that they contain the highest concentrations of students, Gauteng had the largest number of interactions (369), followed by KwaZulu Natal with 260. Figure 9 shows the variation across the months. January is a busy time, with many calls made to address new students' needs in particular. Feedback received during the first field visit included complaints that the SDAs were so busy with first years and administrative work that some senior students struggled to get through to their advisors. Advisors also reported working overtime to deal with student enquiries. Although 2010 has been exceptional because of the Soccer World Cup, which interfered with the annual HE schedules, we are mindful of the need to ensure that

⁵ These figures are drawn from booked appointments and do not take account of the ad hoc calls which can be numerous.

all students receive the help they need and as noted, have contracted an additional student advisor.

Face-to-face interaction

Student advisors visited their students in March and May.

The main purposes of the March field visit are to contract with new and continuing students, to handle NSFAS loan applications for first-year students and to deal with continuing students whose academic performance last year was poor. First-year students, usually accompanied by their mentors, attended a contracting workshop where they learnt about REAP's services and requirements and the NSFAS loans. They were informed about the donors who are financing their grants and had an opportunity to air their views and concerns. Subsequently, they met individually with the SDAs for an hour to sign their REAP contracts, complete the NSFAS loan applications and prepared budgets for the expenditure of their REAP grants. As Bongi Mahlangu, the SDA for the Western Cape observes, "This period at the beginning of the year is especially crucial for the setting of a solid foundation between the new student and the student advisor."

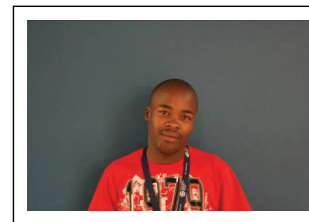
Senior students also met the SDAs individually to review their academic performance in 2009 and plan for sustained or improved performance in the coming year. Students who did not pass all their courses last year were orientated to an Improved Performance Plan (IPP). The IPP sets out actions the student undertakes to improve academic performance, or in rare circumstances, to comply with REAP's conditions such as having the monthly toll free conversation. Students review their performance during these conversations and are required to bring to the attention of the SDA any challenges that might affect their academic performance. The IPP requires actions such as attendance at tutorials, consulting lecturers, joining a study group and attending skills workshop provided by student support services at HEIs. In extreme situations, students whose performance is not acceptable may be placed on "conditional" status – see section 3.4.2 below for more details.

All students were given timetables of workshops offered by student support, counselling and development services at their HEIs and, where needed, were referred individually for counselling and support.

Selected experiences and insights from the March field visit

- Generally, first year students in Johannesburg are more articulate and confident to speak in front of an audience each year. Students at Wits University who have been on the Targeting Talent Programme (TTP)⁶ are far more mature, more comfortable in their new space and adjusted faster during the orientation week

⁶ Targeting Talent, launched by Wits in 2007, uses a rigorous process to select exceptional learners in Grade 10. These learners and their teachers interact with lecturers and tutors from Wits University until they reach Grade 12, in order to better prepare them for entry into higher education. (<http://web.wits.ac.za/NewsRoom/NewsItems/>)



Student story

Siyabonga Nyangaza, aged 22, comes from Aliwal North in the Eastern Cape. After his father abandoned the family when Siyabonga was six months old, he and his two siblings were raised by their unemployed mother in a one-roomed shack. The family depends on state child support grants it receives for Siyabonga's siblings.

Siyabonga matriculated in 2008, but couldn't further his studies due to financial constraints. In 2009, he secured casual employment with the local municipality, which enabled him to save enough to cover the application fee for NMMU. He asked a friend to post his application to the university because he was working away from town. After receiving no response from NMMU, he decided to go to Port Elizabeth himself. He required confirmation of a place to study for REAP support. Siyabonga arrived in PE in January 2010 with only R120 in his pocket. He had no relatives in the city, no accommodation and did not know whether the university had accepted him. Despite all of this, he was driven by a dream of pursuing higher education study. It was then that he discovered that the university had not received his application form because his friend had let him down. Dismayed, he persevered with a new application, although it was late.

Siyabonga was ultimately accepted for his second choice: Tourism Management and REAP facilitated his registration. As he was waiting in the long registration queue, he collapsed, not having eaten for two days while he was running around sorting out his application. With his R120 he rented a place to sleep for three nights at a cost of R40 per night. When he ran out of money, he had to sleep in a computer laboratory and pretend he was working on an assignment. After being accepted by REAP, his student advisor arranged accommodation and a meal allowance and assigned him a REAP Mentor. He said that when he was accepted by REAP he felt that his dream had come true. REAP provided for all the basic needs his family could not cover.

There are times after field trips when REAP staff members are moved to tears by stories they share in the morning Huddle: Siyabonga's is one of them.

5 LOOKING AHEAD

5.1 Recruitment and selection for 2011

This year we started our recruitment and selection process earlier than usual. The national meeting of regional representatives (volunteers) took place in December 2009, giving us the opportunity to provide application forms for distribution early in the year so that regional representatives could take advantage of the long mid year vacation over the period of the World Cup to undertake applicant interviews. As always with change, there were some hiccups with late returns, but by the beginning of July, 200 short-listed applicants had been interviewed. The selection process for the 2011 intake continues for the second half of the year.

4 LOOKING BACK: REAP'S SUCCESS IN PRODUCING GRADUATES

In 2005 we released a study that tracked the progress of our 2002 cohort of new students. That study showed that there was a potential graduation rate of 57% to 66% for the cohort, compared with the then estimated national overall graduation rate of 40% and concluded that students supported by REAP have a better chance of graduating, although they do take longer than minimum time to complete their studies. It also highlighted serious systemic problems in South Africa's schools and challenges faced by higher education institutions resulting from a combination of underprepared undergraduate students and profound changes that were taking place in the sector.

This year, we publish a second tracking study, of our 2005 cohort. It evaluates REAP's contribution to enhancing the ability of rural, disadvantaged students not only to access higher education but also, crucially, to succeed in their undergraduate studies in a reasonable time period. It reflects REAP's contribution to improving the efficiency of higher education in South Africa and the quality of the educational experience and performance of REAP's target beneficiaries. We are very pleased to find that we have maintained our good performance, with a 57% graduation rate by April this year (5 years) and a potential graduation rate as high as 70% (13% of the cohort are still studying in 2010). Of those who have already graduated 50% completed their studies in minimum time. We managed to speak to sixty-three of the 143 students who started university in 2005 with support from REAP. Eleven of them are pursuing postgraduate studies and forty are employed. These numbers may seem small in the context of very high failure rates in the very small proportion of the population that gains access to higher education and the huge number of unemployed people, but this is REAP's contribution to organic, broad-based social and economic empowerment for the poorest and most marginalised South Africans, and we are very proud of our students' success.

The full text of the study, researched and written by Wendy Ngidi, a former student advisor at REAP who is currently completing the thesis part of a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology and is due to graduate in March 2011, is available on our website, www.reap.org.za.



Senaalane (CUT 1st Year Student) and Charity

than students who came fresh from the rural areas. Some of the EDUMAP⁷ students also displayed greater maturity. This is not always a good thing, however: in the contracting sessions some students were more dominant in sharing experiences, especially those from the Targeting Talent Programme. REAP can learn from this about the value of working with students during their school years – see section 4.2.1 below.

- At UJ the B Com accounting students shared challenges around accounting and economics. They were all linked with the Thuthuka⁸ programme at UJ.
- Students who attended the contracting workshops encouraged and offered each other solutions. They realised that they were not alone in the challenges they were facing, which normalized their experience. Challenges like study skills and time management came up and when they realized that these form part of the compulsory workshops they were eager to attend. Many of the Wits students had already signed up for the First Year Experience⁹ and the few that had not done so were going to enrol for it as soon as possible.
- All SDAs had to deal with students' emotional issues, which include death of family members, being under pressure to assume responsibility for families, and being in, or having parents in, abusive relationships. Lethabo Tloubatla said she felt caught off guard by the number of students who had emotional and social problems. What made it very hard for her was that, in most cases, all she could do was to listen. She has recommended that SDAs receive advanced counselling training.
- In the Western Cape all the first year students managed to attend orientation this year, which definitely eased their anxiety.
- In KZN there were student protests at DUT, MUT and UKZN about residence and the quality of catering services. The SDAs were forced to meet students at the guesthouse where they were staying. Fortunately there were three REAP staff in KZN because of a hand-over between SDAs and the training of an intern. The senior SDA spent her time driving between campus and guesthouse while the other two worked with students. At one stage, while she was waiting in the car on campus, she heard gunshots. Hordes of students came running down the street, some jumping over walls and climbing over gates. Police were shooting rubber bullets to disperse the crowds. It was a very traumatic experience for the students and for the SDA who witnessed it.

⁷ EDUMAP is a one-year programme for selected rural students to improve their Matric maths and science marks.

⁸ Thuthuka is a bursary and support programme of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). REAP accounting students may participate in Thuthuka's academic support programme at Thuthuka-accredited universities.

⁹ The Wits First Year Experience programme, a new initiative, attempts to prepare students for the transition from high school to university by providing a rite of passage in which the students are supported and assimilated into the university.

“The first field trip is always an exciting one for the student advisor. One looks forward to meeting the first years for the first time and to linking the face to the voice. It is good to meet students who made it through from the previous year and sad to say goodbye to those students who have not made it, due to poor academic performance.”

Phumla Hobe, Senior Student Development Advisor

“Meeting 1st year students is always a highlight. Their enthusiasm is refreshing.”

Charlene Nel, Senior Student Development Advisor

The purpose of the May visit is to meet students individually, to monitor their academic performance and social progress, motivate them to prepare for the mid-year exams, check their financial aid status and discuss their community service. Advisors also took the opportunity to meet with institutional staff and follow up on issues raised during the March fieldtrip.

The Soccer World Cup clearly affected students: mid-year examinations were brought forward and assignments and tests were cramped and rushed because of the long break. As a result many students seemed exhausted and did not have time to attend workshops offered by the institutions to develop essential life and academic skills. Kanyisa Diamond, the SDA for Johannesburg, observed that effective study methods and time management skills are still lacking. She believes that these are not skills that can be mastered overnight, especially given the wide gap between school and university. She says a more rigorous intervention is required to assist these students, but that whether it is REAP's responsibility or that of the institutions is a question that is yet to be answered.

SDAs had to deal with low morale among students whose test results were below their expectations and complaints from students who were not managing their finances adequately. By May some senior students still did not know whether their applications for NSFAS loans through the institutions would be approved. On a positive note, some SDAs noticed a decrease in emotional problems in the second field trip, which indicates that counseling services at the institutions are having a positive impact.

“After this trip, I came back with feelings of hating and loving the work I do. I hate the fact that there is only so much I can do for some students... who need all the help they can get, but I can't help because of constraints. I love this job because, despite the fact that my hand can only stretch so far, the little area that I am able to touch with it helps and leaves a mark.”

Lethabo Tloubatla, Student Development Advisor

3.5.3 Personal burdens

Personal and emotional burdens weigh heavily on South African students from poor communities. Loss of immediate family members through illness is a very common experience. Lack of employment and financial resources in the family makes dealing with students' needs very difficult. Some students send funds home from their meagre allowances. REAP students are somewhat better off than many because they receive a monthly allowance and have access to a student advisor for support, but South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient in the world and the huge gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is acutely visible in the elite environment of higher education.

Student advisors found their young protégés fairly open in sharing personal, family-related information, but reluctant to follow advice that entails talking to someone at the institution because they feel uncomfortable talking to strangers and people who are not of the same background as theirs. They worry that they will not be understood.

“There were teary sessions where students have left dire circumstances back home and these are impacting on them not being able to concentrate on what they are there to do.” *Kanyisa Diamond, SDA.*

3.5.4 Career and course choice

A few students seem to lack motivation for the courses they are enrolled for. Students in this category are at high risk of dropping out. We do refer them for career assessments, but the reality is that time and money, which are both in short supply for REAP students, are wasted and students have to deal with an added burden of self-doubt and insecurity.

3.5.5 Securing placements for in-service training

Students registered for the second and subsequent years of National Diploma courses must, in many instances, complete a semester or two of in-service training. Most institutions offer some assistance to students to find such placements, but students often struggle to find placements. Students such as REAP students lack knowledge of, and network connections to, the business sector needed to manage their in-service training independently and companies' capacity to take on students for in-service training is hampered by the recession. Without completing the required in-service or experiential learning, students cannot graduate. REAP student advisors try to help as far as possible, especially by advising students to make full use of the assistance offered by institutional staff, which is something students do not always do! REAP, however, does not have the resources to offer a placement service to students scattered across the country.

The bottom line is that despite the huge sums of money being invested in higher education, many poor students continue to suffer the debilitating effects of living on the borderline of poverty, where they juggle having enough to eat with having a place to sleep and paying for transport to get to lectures. They struggle academically because they are hungry, sleep deprived and unable to prepare for assignments because they live in overcrowded and noisy conditions, on top of the difficulties they experience because of the challenges outlined in the previous section.

Seeing the state of one of the communes where a number of the UJ students live was hard for me. ... When we went to Caroline Street to see where the students live, I was horrified at the state of the place, and found myself wondering how our students are able to study effectively each day.

The biggest challenge in Pretoria is accommodation. There are not enough residences at TUT and the private accommodation is either too expensive or too far from campus. At UP, the students in Sunnyside are living in horrid environments; they are unable to study there and they just do not have enough space to live. Because the bulk of students are staying in private accommodation, most of their access grant goes towards that and it does not leave a lot for anything else. This poses a challenge for the TUT students because NSFAS at TUT only covers tuition and residence costs.

Lethabo Tloubatla, SDA for Gauteng



ZA S tichting 10th Anniversary

Student Story



Sihle Ngwenya is a very optimistic young woman. She is doing first year Bachelor of Social Science, Geological Sciences at the UKZN Westville campus. She is repeating first year because she did not do well in 2009, which she found very challenging. She comes from Jozini, a remote area in the far north of KwaZulu Natal and is the youngest of four children. Her mother is unemployed and her father is self-employed.

Sihle found the demands of adaptation overwhelming. She had no experience in using computers, could not find her way around campus, struggled to find accommodation. All of this, alongside the pressure of meeting new people and managing her workload was too much. The skills to survive can only be acquired gradually and she has evidently acquired them now. This year she is confident and feels certain about her ability to make a positive difference in her own life and that of her family.

With a sparkle in her eyes, she confides that she did not perform well because she believed that she was a mere farm girl who knew nothing about the big city. She proudly asserts that she now knows what is expected of her and how to achieve her goals. She has written a few tests, done well in most of them and struggled to pass a few. She is hopeful because she understands the material better this year.

Sihle is determined not to let her background and the fact that she is repeating her first year, undermine her progress. She passed two of three exams mid year. The course she failed is not a major.

3.3.2 Mentorship programme

Since 2008 REAP has been running a mentorship programme for first-year students, using senior REAP students as mentors. Mentors alert new students to the pitfalls of the experience ahead and motivate them. This has two benefits: the mentors have an opportunity to reflect and learn from their experience themselves and new students are motivated and informed.

This year's first year students were noticeably better prepared because they met their mentors early: in the Free State, for example, they were noticeably more open compared to the 2009 group. The impact of Gauteng mentors' efforts to share information could be seen in the speed with which the first years sorted out their email addresses for meal requests and sent book requests and required documents to REAP. Peer support seems to help with personal and emotional burdens that threaten to affect first years' ability to focus on their studies.

Mentors were challenged at the start of the academic year because first year students do not yet have email access. They used up a lot of expensive mobile phone airtime to contact mentees. In some cases, the mentees did not understand the importance of meeting their mentors until the SDAs clarified this during the first field visit. Although there are always some first years who do not respond to the mentorship programme, in general it worked well this year. In some cases, the SDAs

observed that interaction between mentors and mentees tapered off by March as students became absorbed in their studies, but at other institutions, relationships were kept up and first time students were able to settle in very well as a result.

Moeketsi Phajane who is studying in Bloemfontein has played a pivotal role in the mentorship programme. This is his second year of being a mentor. Fondly known as 'Max', his leadership has been exemplary and his dedication has gained him respect from all the Free State students on the Programme. What is unique about Moeketsi is that he is an Eric Molobi Scholarship (Kagiso Trust) student who does not receive a grant from REAP. Nevertheless, he is 100% sold on the REAP programme!

Charity Bafana: SDA, Free State



3.3.3 Life skills development

REAP staff arranged life skills workshops for students, facilitated by external service providers, and also liaised with institutions for REAP students to attend a variety of workshops offered by the institutions. At several institutions, the workshop schedule was disrupted by the long mid-year vacation, while at others the programme went well. Student attendance at workshops has been uneven as a result.

During the March Field trip, REAP organised a workshop on Sexual Diversity for forty-eight UJ and Wits students responding to an observed need. The workshop covered topics such as sexual preferences, gender stereotypes, communication and assertiveness. Students participated vigorously and their experiences, stories, voices and knowledge informed the process. The topic became heated when the facilitator touched on sexual preferences. The SDAs were interested in the way sexual preferences and diversity were linked to culture and religion. Some of the ideas that came up were shocking for the young people, who were provoked to think about their ideas and the effect of discriminating against others.

During the May field trip, fifty-seven KZN students (27 men and 30 women) attended a sexuality and gender workshop facilitated in iSiZulu by Thokozani Poswa. This was a follow-up to a women-only workshop in the region in 2009, where the women said they felt it important that men attend too. The students took ownership of the topic and engaged fully and honestly. There are undeniable controversies around the topic and the workshop was an eye opener for some and a challenge for others. The facilitator's informal approach was well received by the students and contributed to their comfort in discussing issues that are almost taboo among elders in the African community. REAP staff who attended expressed concern about students' knowledge of HIV/AIDS, in particular the way the disease is spread and proposed another workshop on this topic in the near future. REAP observes a high rate of student pregnancies amongst KZN students.

disruptions in the teaching schedule. Some institutions have limited resources, especially computers, which hampers progress for students juggling assignments and deadlines.

3.5.2 Accommodation

The shortage, cost and conditions of student accommodation presents a daunting challenge to first year students in particular and in all likelihood contributes to student drop out. REAP understands that the new Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, is fully aware of this crisis and solutions are being sought, including building residences, but the pressures of inadequate student housing are having a very negative effect on students and this issue absorbs increasing amounts of our time.

Limited numbers of students secure accommodation in university residences. In the Eastern Cape, for example, none of the REAP first years were admitted to residence. It is likely that, perhaps unwittingly, the more privileged are being advantaged, as criteria for securing residence places include academic performance and early application. Poor rural students do not apply early because of lack of funds and confidence that they will get into university. REAP's early recruitment project (see section 5.2.1 below) will try and address these challenges. Being accommodated off campus means that participating in a study group is not so easy, transport is costly and the hours in which they can use on-campus libraries is limited.

Privatization of services has led to increasing costs of accommodation, catering and transport. It seems to REAP that some landlords with little empathy for poor students have discovered a market that they exploit ruthlessly. A Johannesburg company that accommodates hundreds of students expected them to vacate their rooms before exams were finished so the rooms could be prepared for World Cup clients, but still charged students for the two weeks they were not allowed to occupy their rooms. REAP took this up with student affairs at the University of the Witwatersrand and we understand the charge was subsequently cancelled.

Universities have different policies on the use of the NSFAS loan to pay for accommodation, on and off campus. We have had to top up insufficient loan allocations at several institutions to cover the shortfall in the cost of private accommodation. At Wits, the University has started using Eduloan to channel payments for students. Teething problems led to late payments and students were harassed by landlords, even though it was beyond their and REAP's control. REAP student advisors spent significant amounts of time trying to sort out access to accommodation and dealing with the impact of different levels of financing for accommodation and meals on students' budgets. The parlous state of some private accommodation (which in many cases, had been approved by the universities) was also the subject of many complaints from our students, who find themselves living in overcrowded, noisy and unhygienic conditions where they lack privacy and the necessary quiet space to concentrate on their studies and have little power to influence their situations. Staff in student housing offices at the institutions seems to be overwhelmed by the situation and we are increasingly finding ourselves caste in the role of advocates for decent accommodation for our students.

shows that some students who have been excluded from REAP go on to complete their studies, which demonstrates the value of our intervention process and procedures (for details, see our recent Tracking Study, discussed in section 4 below).

3.4.4 Continuing student withdrawals

Two continuing students were excluded from REAP in the first semester. *Lucia Maluleke* (Female, 2nd year ND Travel at TUT) was academically excluded from the institution at the beginning of the year because she had passed only one of nine courses. *Ntandazo Magwentshu* (Male, ND Mechanical Engineering at TUT) was withdrawn for non-compliance. He did not meet with his student advisor in March or in May and her attempts to contact him were unsuccessful.

3.5 Issues for poor students in higher education

3.5.1 Adapting to university

First year students face a range of challenges, including missing orientation because of late acceptance by the institutions or REAP and failure to secure accommodation in time, further aggravated by the late release of National Senior Certificate results this year. This means they missed out on receiving crucial information that could make the entry into the institution easier. They suffer social isolation and have difficulty making friends in the unfamiliar environment of the university and city life. Simple things like getting to campus from where they live and finding their way around campus, or shopping in the city and preparing their own food are very daunting. Some of them undergo an acute form of identity crisis as they realise how different they are from the rest of the community at the institution because of where they come from and the way they speak. They often get lost and feel lost and homesick. REAP's mentor programme is put in place to relieve these anxieties to some degree.

They also struggle with the academic challenges of teaching styles that differ radically from what they are used to and the requirement to work independently and be able to manage time. The social and psychological structure of the lecture theatre is designed for people who are confident and fluent in English. Rural students struggle to understand lecturers whose accents are unfamiliar. They feel rushed and flustered because lecturers speak quickly. They are shy to speak up in class because they worry that their command of English is inadequate and fear humiliation. Reading English textbooks demands enormous effort, is time-consuming and does not always lead to understanding. Academic language is unfamiliar and the culture of the academy can feel overwhelmingly foreign. In an attempt to address some of these issues, REAP piloted an academic enhancement initiative with ten Wits first year engineering students this year, see section 5.2.2 below.

Student protests and strikes at some institutions were deeply disturbing and anxiety-provoking for some students, leaving them feeling very insecure and pressurised because lots of work had to be crammed into limited time due to

First year students in Pretoria had an opportunity to attend a workshop on study skills and senior students took part in a CV writing workshop, which was fun and interactive. It alerted them to what they need to do to make sure they market themselves according to what employers want. A job opportunity for the World Cup was also presented to the students who attended this workshop, which reinforced the benefit for them.

“The workshop has been great I must say. To hear everyone's view about diversity more especially on sexuality was an eye-opener. What I have learnt is that we should appreciate everyone's differences without feeling inferior about ours. Great workshop.” *Gauteng student*

3.3.4 Building relationships with HEIs

During both field visits, SDAs met with staff in various departments of the institutions and with other service providers. A wide range of topics were covered, including financial aid, academic development, counselling and support, and specific programmes offered at the institutions, some in individual faculties and some institution-wide. Topics of particular concern to students are discussed in greater detail in section 3.5 below.

In Grahamstown, we visited GADRA, a long standing educational NGO, to explore options for GADRA to provide IT training for new REAP students. In KZN, REAP student advisors met with the St John Ambulance Eye Clinic to arrange eye testing for students.

Much time with Financial Aid personnel was spent dealing with the amount and timing of loan approvals and payments, which affect students' capacity to cover the full cost of accommodation and whether they can afford to pay for meals and transport. Funds at some institutions are very low this year and there were more students whose late NSFAS applications were declined, which increased the number of loan requests REAP received from senior students.

REAP staff who visited the University of the Free State met the new Vice-Chancellor and REAP board member, Prof Jonathan Jansen, who praised REAP's work and offered to support REAP students in a number of ways.

Student advisors are REAP's eyes and ears on the ground in the HEIs, bringing back useful information that helps us understand the environment of our Programme. This year we received overviews of two institutional programmes aimed at first years, the *Wits First Year Experience* programme and the *Stellenbosch First Year Academy*, as well as feedback on the progress of a group of first years who were recruited from *Wits University's Targeting Talent Programme* (TTP).

The *Wits First Year Experience* attempts to prepare students for the transition from high school to university by providing a “rite of passage” in which the students are supported and assimilated into the university. It aims to improve learning, academic

performance, satisfaction, campus involvement, retention and graduation rates and focuses on both academic and social integration. It includes a "First in Family" programme for first generation students who do not get the support they need to succeed from home. We understand this to be an optional programme for first years.

Megan Burgoyne, an educational advisor at the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Stellenbosch University informed Bongi Mahlangu, the Western Cape student advisor, about the University's work to coordinate academic support services in the institution. Their biggest project is the *First Year Academy*, a comprehensive University initiative to improve the success rate of first-year students by implementing or facilitating a variety of research actions, programmes and projects. These include the establishment of Teaching and Learning Co-ordination points in each faculty, basing subject tutors in academic departments, an Early Assessment process for almost all first year modules, designed to give students an idea of their progress and areas needing attention well before the June exams, and a Residential Education programme to extend the academic learning culture into the student's living area. One challenge, of course, is that the majority of students are not in residence and much of the initiative is understood to be IT based.

It was also useful to get information on the amount of support that the students who came from the *Targeting Talent Programme* at Wits (TTP) get once they are at university. They are secure in the knowledge that there is money for them to attend extra classes and private tutoring. With all the added support, Kanyisa Diamond, the student advisor for Johannesburg, wonders whether REAP's support is really necessary for these students. They often receive full-cost bursaries, once at Wits because the TTP programme staff actively looks for opportunities for them. Kanyisa thinks that, even though they come from disadvantaged background, these students are advantaged through their participation in TTP. She suggests that REAP revisits its new partnership with TTP, as the support these students are supposed to get from REAP is available from TTP. REAP might also explore with Wits providing similar support to REAP students as the TTP students. More insights on the TTP students are provided in section 3.3.1.

At CPUT we learned about changes still arising out of the merger process that affect our students, including the relocation of several faculties and units between the various campuses designed to bring similar departments together.

We took the opportunity of the field visits to acknowledge the important work being done by institutional staff and the co-operation they give REAP by presenting Certificates of Appreciation to them. These were well received and contribute to creating sustainable relationships with institutional staff in the service of our students.

Staff who visited HEIs in Gauteng came back with an important realisation that student advisors would be able to build relationships and service the students better if they were situated in the province. As Lethabo Tloubatla said, "A lot happens at institutions and keeping contact with institutional staff is the only way we can keep in touch with new developments in and around the institution. I think that this fieldtrip has made it clear to me that we would be able to service the students better if we were nearer to them."

Two women students, both of whom began their studies in 2007, completed their studies in the first semester: *Thobile Sibiya* will get a B Sc Medical Science from UFS and *Portia Dlamini* will graduate in October from UJ with a B Com Accounting degree.

Well done – we are very proud of you!

3.4.2 Students who were awarded bursaries by other organisations

Thirty-one students selected by REAP were awarded bursaries from other organisations this year. Twenty-eight of them still need some financial support from REAP to top up their funding.

Table 5: Students awarded other bursaries in 2010

Province		Province	
Eastern Cape	2	KwaZulu Natal	2
Free State	1	Tshwane	8
Gauteng	5	Western Cape	13

3.4.3 Students placed on "conditional" status: February – June

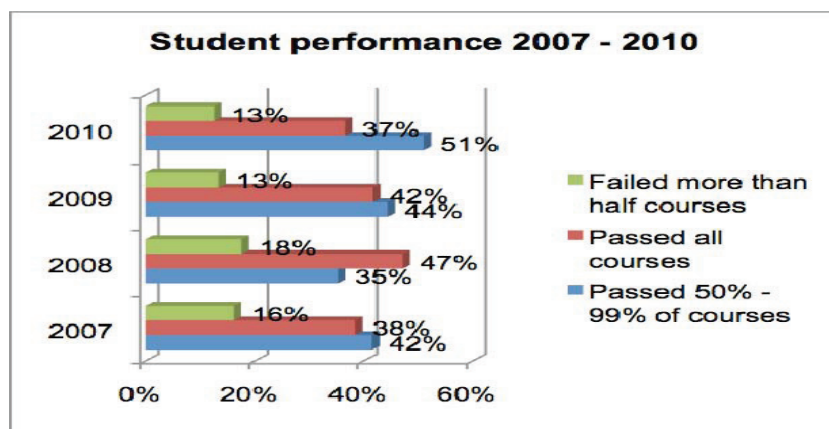
Students whose academic performance is poor and who are assessed as at risk of failure, or who do not comply with REAP's requirements, e.g., to maintain contact with their student advisor, may be placed on "conditional" status.

Thirty-six continuing students whose failed courses in 2009 included their major subjects were placed on "conditional" status in the first semester. Conditional status agreements require the student to take actions similar to those stipulated in the IPP, including achieving performance targets (See section 3.3.1 above for details on the IPP). Students are made aware that failure to achieve the targets makes it likely that they will lose REAP support.

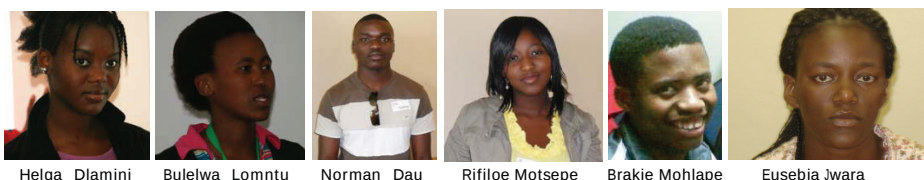
Dealing with students whose performance is below par is a delicate matter. Charlene Nel, a senior student advisor, has summed up the factors that distinguish successful and unsuccessful students. Students who succeed tend to be hard working, are not afraid to ask for help when they need it and have very supportive families, even though they cannot afford to contribute financially. In contrast, we find that students who fail have no family support, show little or no self-knowledge, have limited career knowledge when choosing a course of study, demonstrate lower levels of resilience and independence and are either overly dependent on the student advisor or do not communicate with their advisors.

It is a difficult but necessary step to deal with poor performers and another instance in which we are called upon to demonstrate "tough love" in the interests of our students, individually and collectively, that can be better applied to those who are able to succeed. Some of our student advisors have questioned the stringency of our rules, e.g. the practice of limiting the grant during conditional status students, which has put a few students in difficult situations because of the high cost of accommodation and meals (see section 3.5.2 below). We believe it is necessary to highlight the risk for them, even if this means shocking them. Our experience

Figure 10: Student performance 2007 – 2010



Top achievers



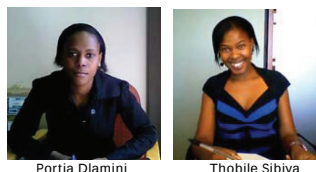
Students who achieve a mark of 75% and more earn distinctions. This year 73 REAP students achieved 110 distinctions.

Table 4: Distinctions

	Women	Men	Total
First year students	20	8	44
Continuing students	18	27	66

Bulelwa Lomntu, a first year student doing the ND in Biomedical Technology at CPUT earned distinctions in all of her six subjects. *Helga Dlamini*, registered for the ND in Civil Engineering, also at CPUT, achieved five distinctions. *Norman Dau* (ND Agricultural Management, TUT) and *Rifiloe Motsepe* (ND Public Relations, TUT) each received four distinctions and *Eusebia Jwara* (B Pharmacy, UKZN) and *Brakie Treasure Mohlape* (ND Electrical Engineering, CUT) each got three distinctions.

Graduates



3.4 Student progress

3.4.1 Mid-year results¹⁰

OVERALL PERFORMANCE		PERFORMANCE CATEGORY	
Interim overall pass rate	88%	Women	88%
Passed all courses	37%	Men	86%
Passed half+ but not all courses	51%	First year students	73%
Failed more than half of courses	13%	Continuing students	90%

Pass rates

In our context, we find it viable to report on student's performance by defining a "pass" as passing 50% or more of courses. By this definition, of the 304 students who wrote mid-year examinations for whom we have results, 88% passed and the number could be higher, as there are 10 students whose results are not yet available – see Table 1 for details. Fifty-one percent of students who wrote passed more than 50% but not all of their courses and 37% passed all their courses. The gender distribution of passes is mixed: an equal proportion (51%) of men and women passed 50% and more but not all of their courses. However, in the group that passed all courses, women at 38% did somewhat better than men at 35%.

Thirteen percent of students failed more than half their courses and 4% were engaged in in-service training and did not write exams. Four students withdrew from the Programme: two because they were awarded full-cost bursaries by other organisations and two who failed.

Table 2 shows that students at university did somewhat better than UOT students: 80% of university students passed while 77% of UOT students passed.

Among the 112 first year students who wrote mid-year exams this year, 73% passed: 26% passed all courses and 47% passed more than half but not all their courses (see Table 3). The lower pass rate for first year students is normal, as the highest dropout rate in higher education occurs in the first year. One of the students who withdrew was doing a ND Mechanical Engineering and received a full cost bursary soon after entering the University of Johannesburg. She made no contact with REAP after this and received no money from REAP.

¹⁰ The student numbers for this analysis are drawn from REAP's database. Students who were not on the Programme during the first semester were included in the data analysis; hence the disparity in totals.

Table 1: Overall student performance in the 2010 mid-year exams

Category	Men	Women	Total	Percentage of 304 whose results are known
Passed more than half but not all courses	79	76	155	51%
Passed all course	54	57	111	37%
Failed more than half courses	22	16	38	13%
In-service training	6	6	12	
Withdrawn	1	3	4	
No results, including 8 mid-year new entrants	11	7	18	
Totals	173	165	338	

Table 2: Performance by institutional type

	Category	Women	Men	Total
UOTs	No results	5	6	11
	Pass half & more but not all courses	25	28	53
	Pass all courses	23	19	42
	Fail more than half of courses	0	4	4
	In service training	6	6	12
	Withdrawn	2	0	2
	Totals	61	63	124
Universities	No results	2	5	7
	Pass half & more but not all courses	51	52	103
	Pass all courses	36	32	68
	Fail more than half courses	16	18	34
	Withdrawn	1	1	2
	Totals	106	108	214

Table 3: First year students' performance

Category	Total
No results, including mid-year new entrants	6
Passed more than half but not all courses	53
Passed all course	29
Withdrawn	1
Failed more than half courses	23
Totals	112

Comparison with previous years

We are able to compare the performance of this year's student body with results since 2007. Before that, we reported our overall pass and failure rates, but did not differentiate between those who passed all their courses and those who passed more than half but not all courses.

Figure 10 shows that the failure rate has dropped to 13% in 2009 and 2010. We also observe a decrease in the number of students who pass all their courses over the past two years and a concomitant increase in the number who are able to proceed with their studies but have to repeat courses.



Lethabo hands Eddie Ntho (TUT financial Aid), REAP's Appreciation Certificate