COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Reflecting on Student Success During COVID Times

Siyaphumelela Conference
28 June 2023

Outline of this session

- *Welcome and introductions*: Dr Britta Zawada, CHE
- *Background to the RELATE project*: Dr Whitfield Green, CHE
- *Quantitative analysis of student success during the pandemic*: Dr Charles Sheppard, NMU
- *Qualitative analysis of student success during the pandemic*: Prof Francois Strydom and Dr Sonja Loots, UFS
- *Reflections*: Dr Whitfield Green, CHE
- *Q&A, discussion*: All, facilitated by Dr Britta Zawada, CHE

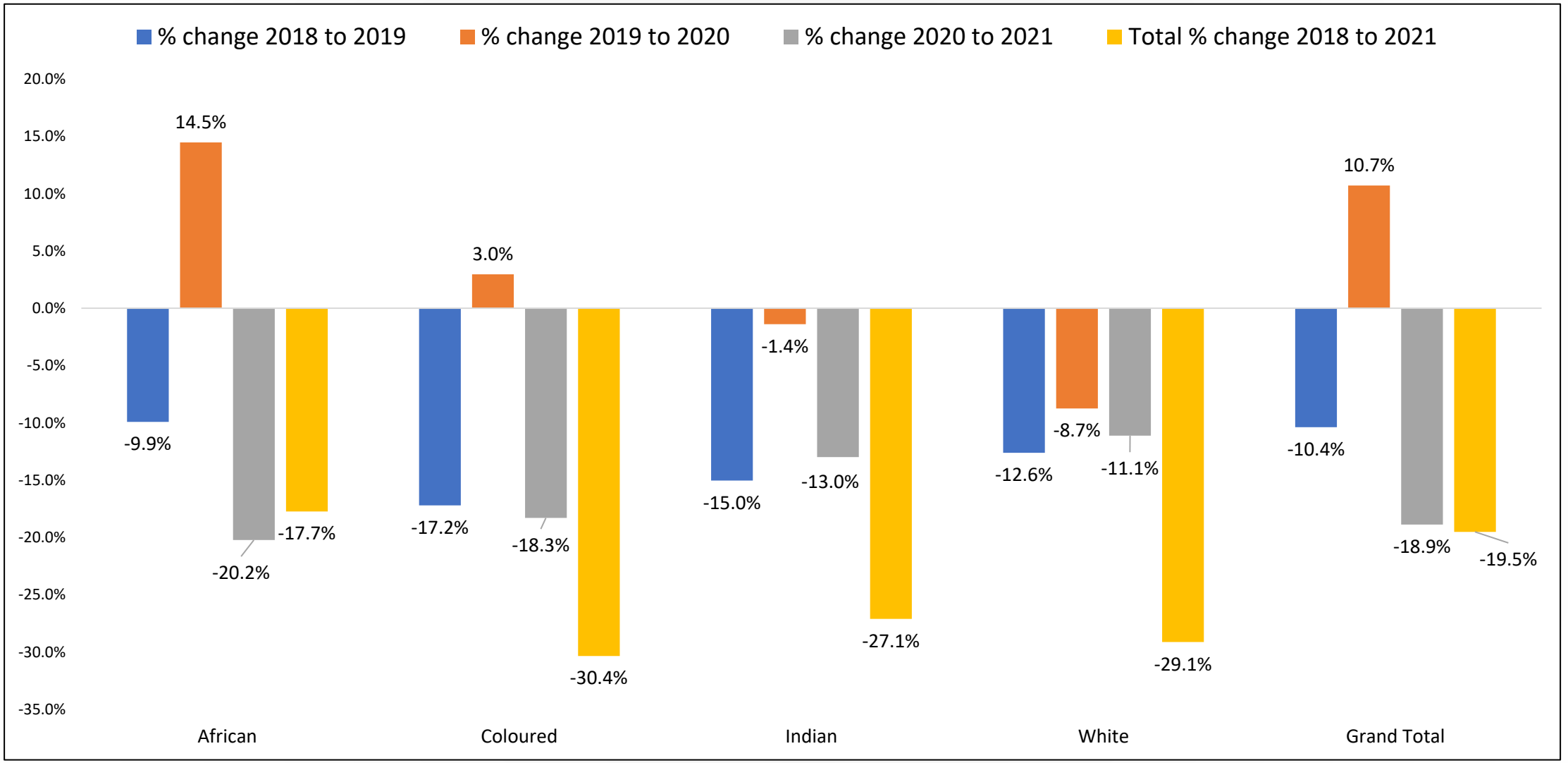
Background to the RELATE Project

Dr Whitfield Green, CHE

Quantitative analyses of student success during the pandemic

Dr Charles Sheppard, NMU

Percentage change in first-time entering undergraduate students from year to year by population group, 2018-2021



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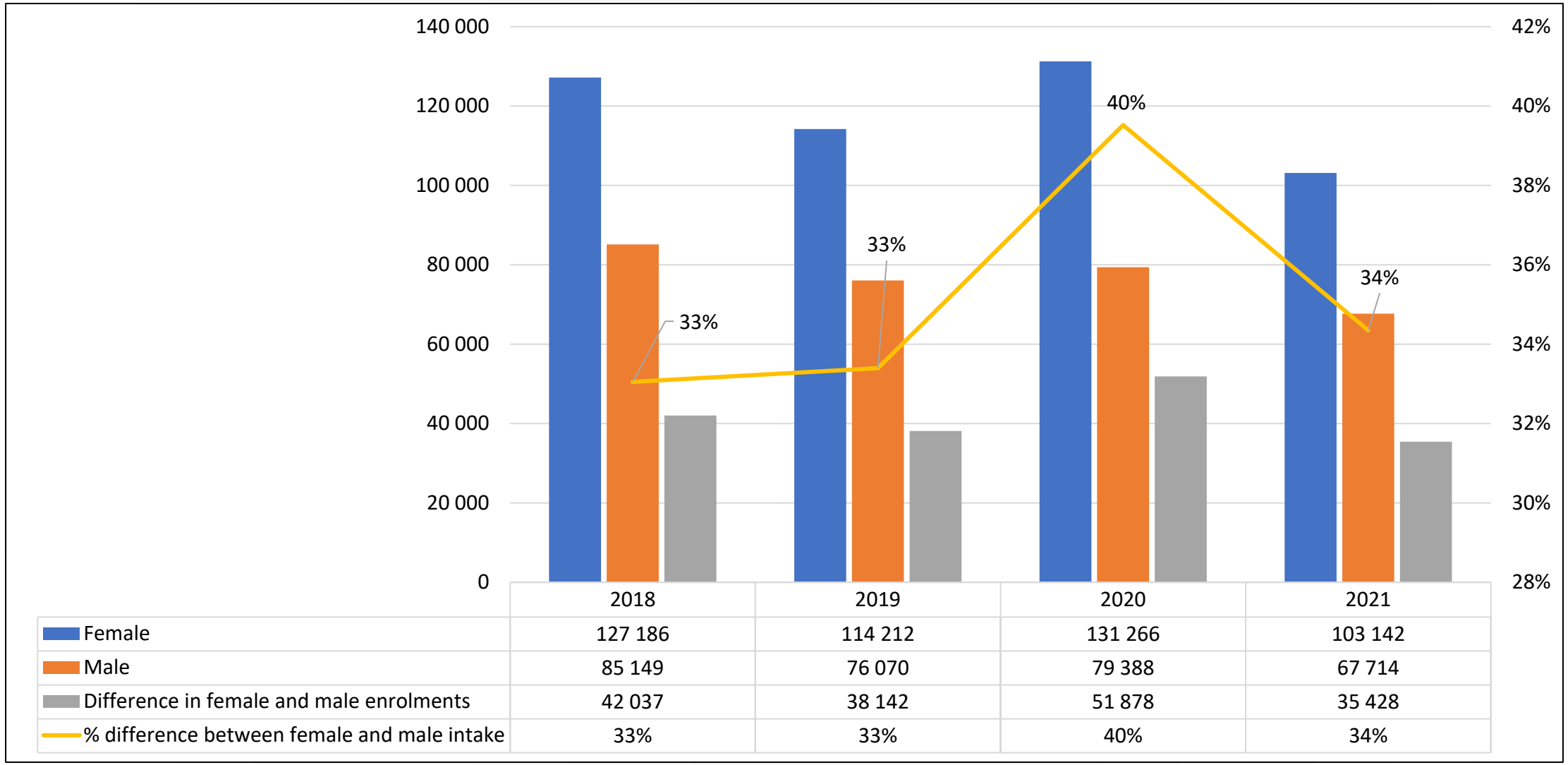
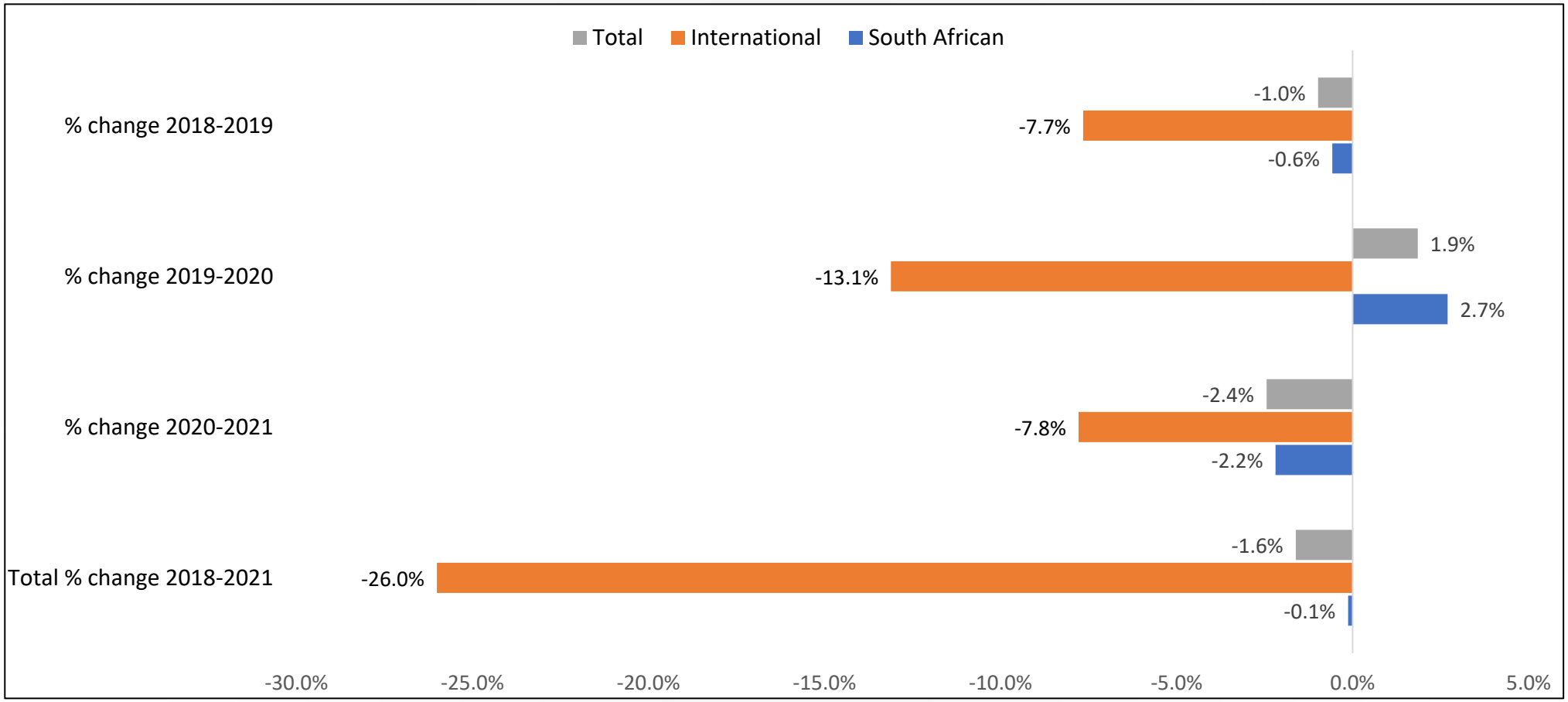
First-time entering undergraduate intake by gender, 2018-2021



	2018	2019	2020	2021
Female	127 186	114 212	131 266	103 142
Male	85 149	76 070	79 388	67 714
Difference in female and male enrolments	42 037	38 142	51 878	35 428
% difference between female and male intake	33%	33%	40%	34%

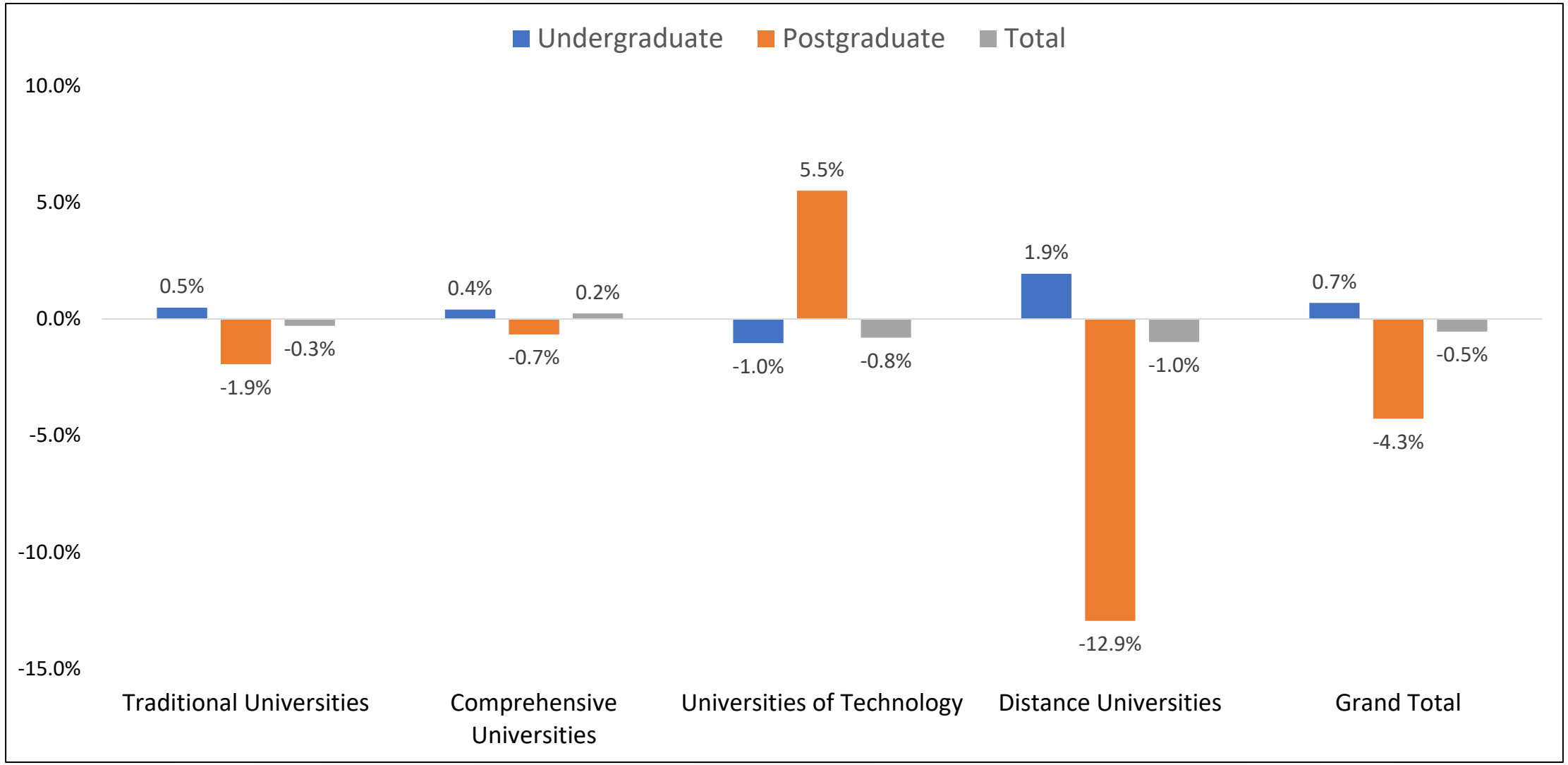
Percentage change in total enrolments by nationality from year to year, 2018-2021



Percentage change in total enrolments by population group and gender from year to year, 2018-2021

Pop Group	Gender	% change 2018-2019	% change 2019 -2020	% change 2020-2021	Total % change 2018-2021
African	Female	2.2%	6.3%	-0.4%	8.2%
	Male	-0.2%	0.1%	-3.2%	-3.3%
	Total	1.2%	3.8%	-1.5%	3.5%
Coloured	Female	-5.1%	0.3%	-3.3%	-8.0%
	Male	-5.8%	-2.5%	-5.8%	-13.6%
	Total	-5.4%	-0.7%	-4.2%	-10.0%
Indian	Female	-9.5%	-4.8%	-5.5%	-18.6%
	Male	-9.5%	-4.7%	-6.0%	-18.9%
	Total	-9.5%	-4.8%	-5.7%	-18.7%
White	Female	-9.4%	-5.7%	-8.0%	-21.4%
	Male	-10.1%	-7.6%	-8.2%	-23.7%
	Total	-9.7%	-6.5%	-8.0%	-22.3%
Grand Total	Female	-0.2%	4.0%	-1.5%	2.2%
	Male	-2.1%	-1.2%	-3.9%	-7.1%
	Total	-1.0%	1.9%	-2.4%	-1.6%

Average annual growth rates in enrolments by institutional type and level, 2018-2021



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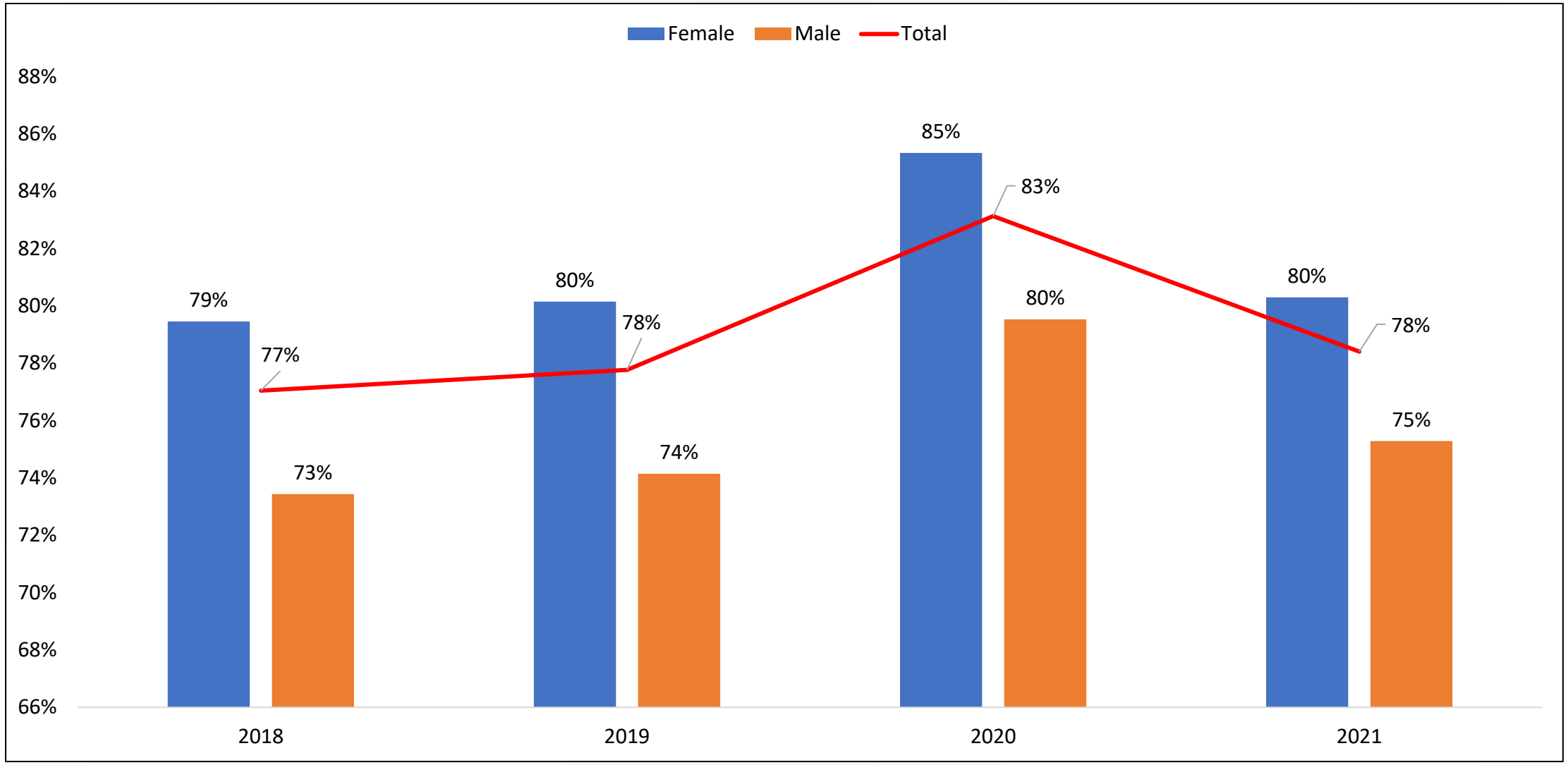
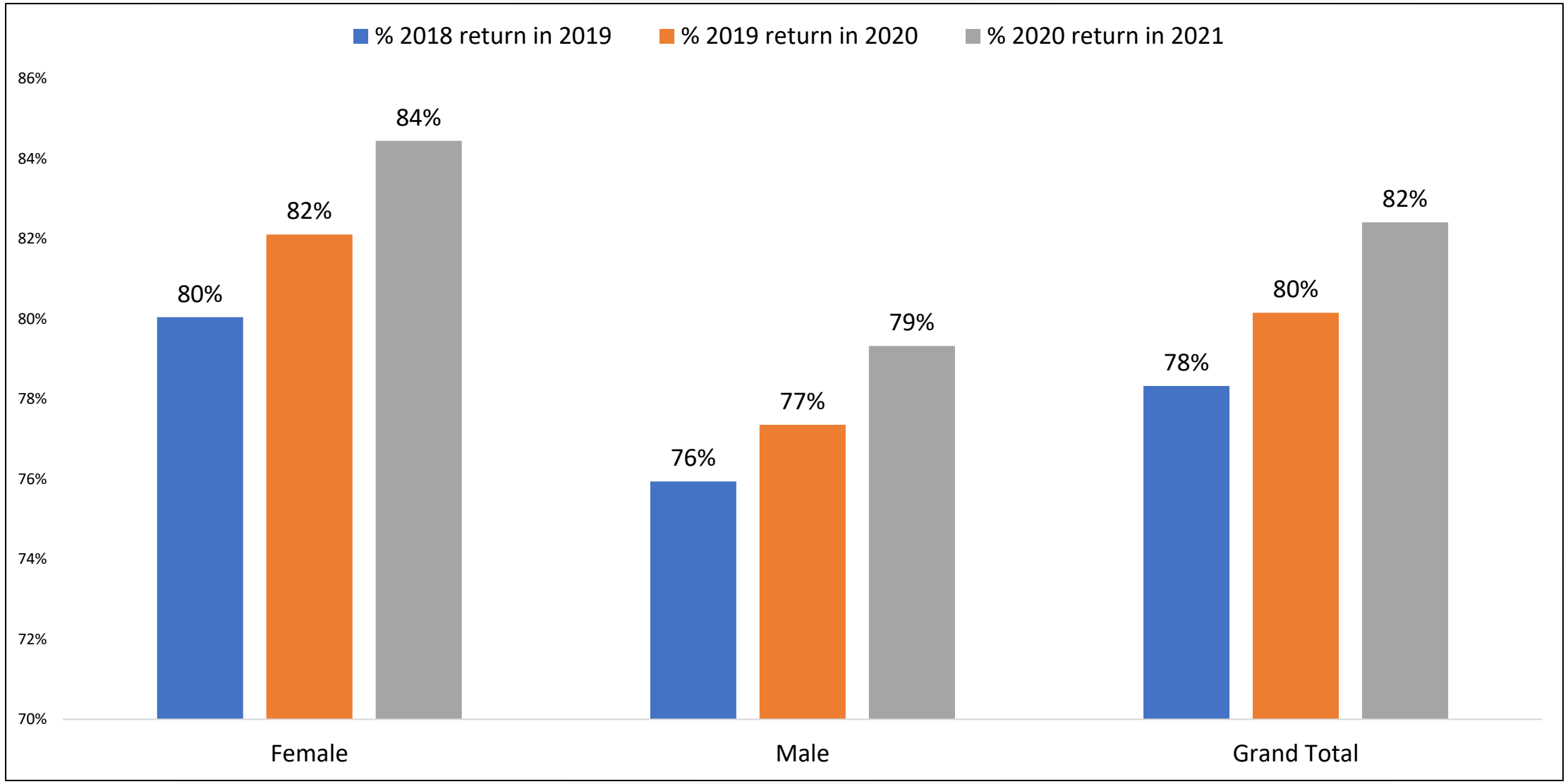
Success rate by population group and gender, 2018 - 2021

Population Group	Gender	2018	2019	2020	2021
African	Female	78%	78%	84%	79%
	Male	72%	72%	77%	74%
	Total	75%	76%	82%	77%
Coloured	Female	81%	83%	88%	83%
	Male	74%	76%	82%	77%
	Total	79%	80%	86%	81%
Indian	Female	82%	84%	89%	85%
	Male	77%	79%	87%	82%
	Total	80%	82%	88%	84%
White	Female	88%	89%	93%	89%
	Male	82%	84%	89%	84%
	Total	86%	87%	91%	87%
Unknown	Female	81%	84%	88%	83%
	Male	76%	79%	84%	77%
	Total	79%	82%	86%	80%
Grand Total	Female	79%	80%	85%	80%
	Male	73%	74%	80%	75%
	Total	77%	78%	83%	78%

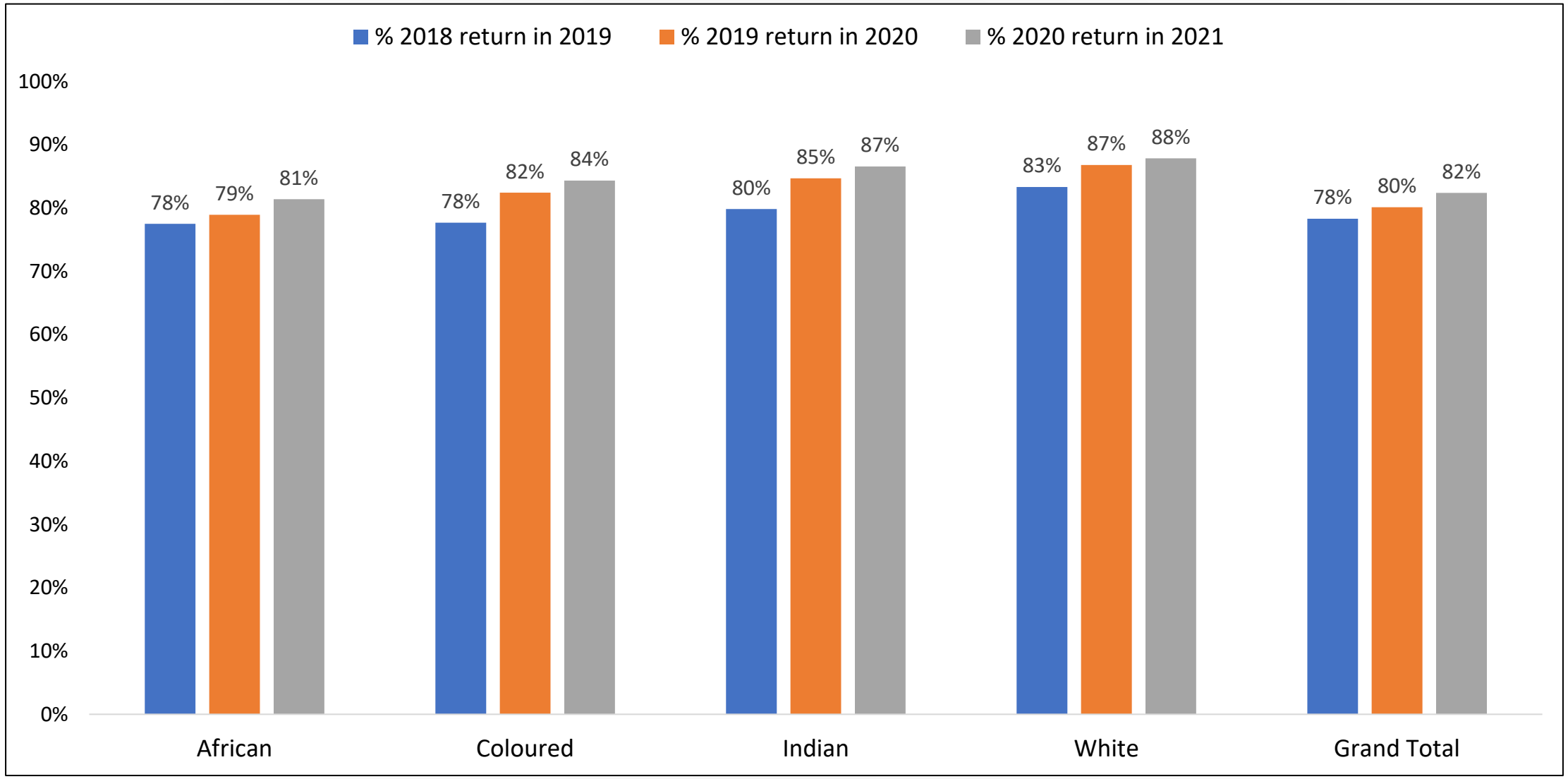
Success rate by gender, 2018 – 2021



Returning students by gender, 2018 - 2021



Returning students by population group, 2018 - 2020



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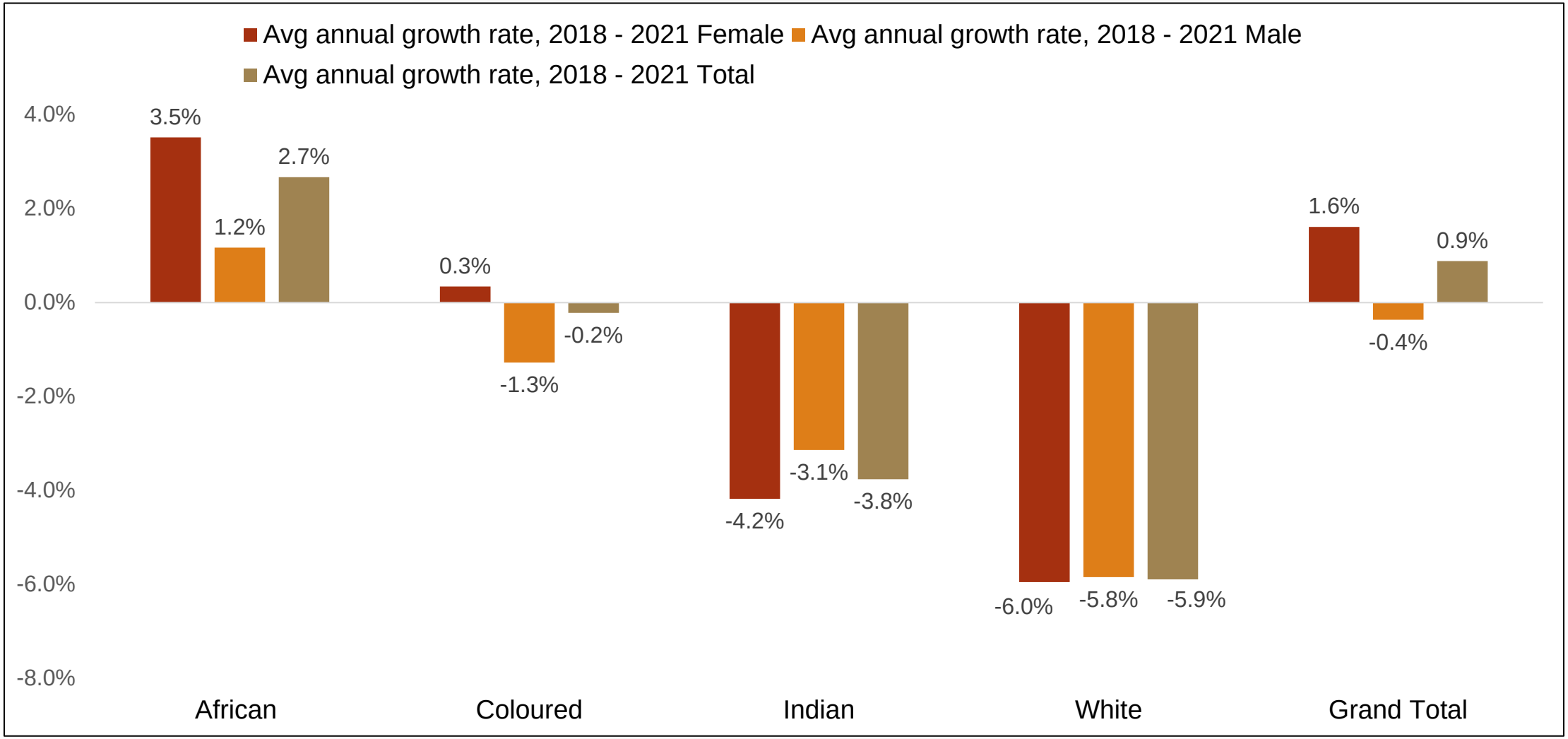
Average annual growth rate in graduates by population group and gender, 2018 - 2020



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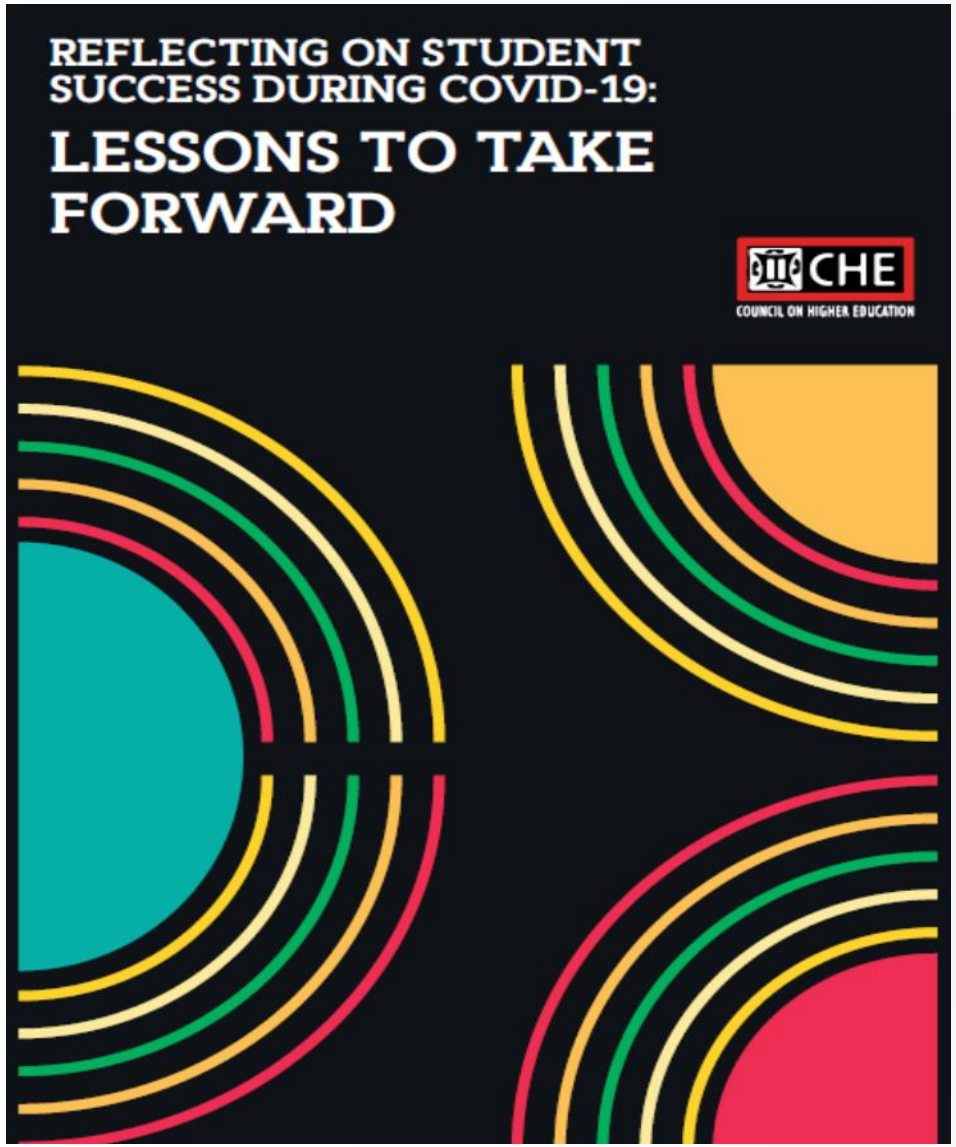
Qualitative analyses of student success during the pandemic

Prof Francois Strydom, UFS

Dr Sonja Loots, UFS

Qualitative experiences of student success during COVID-19



The report focuses on:

- How student success features conceptually in South African literature
- Taking stock of student success literature to identify what scholars deem as important contributors to student success.
- Revisiting qualitative data from two national surveys SAULM (2020) and the (2021) to identify the key factors that contributed to or hindered students' successful navigation of their studies during the pandemic.
- Key lessons on how to think of student success in a **post-pandemic digitized higher education environment.**

Defining student success

The CHE (2014, 13) defines student success as "*enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable*." In its Framework for Institutional Audits, the CHE (2021a, 9) expands on this definition by clarifying:

For the institution, it refers to students' academic persistence in completing their studies, academic results that reflect equity of success in terms of race, gender, and disability, as well as their achieving credible results within a minimum time to completion; successful entry into employment or some other form of economic activity and/or successfully progressing to postgraduate studies.

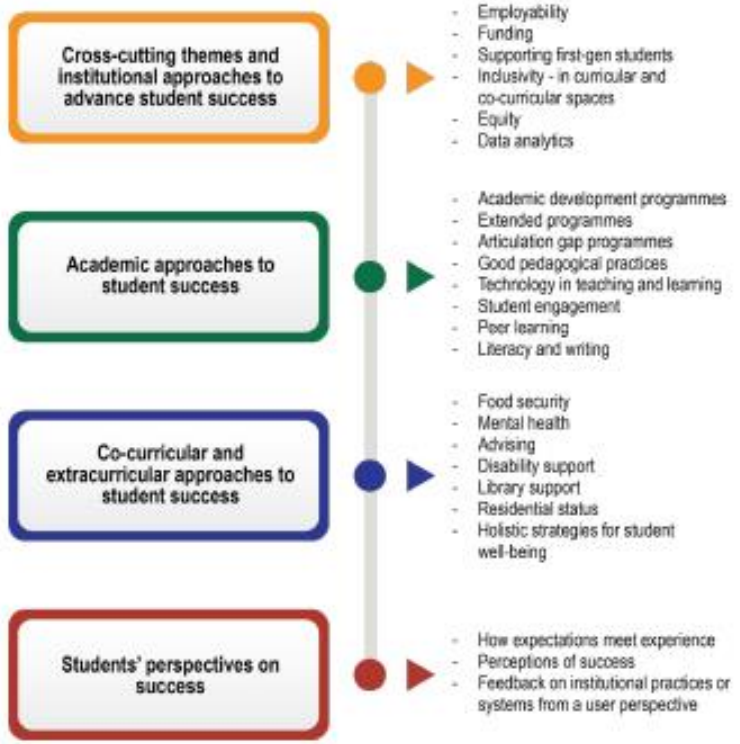
Student success, therefore, has elements of **throughput** (getting students to complete their studies in a decent timeframe), **equity of outcomes** (particularly between social groups), and **navigating the world beyond graduation** (employability, personal and socially valuable attributes, continuation of studies).

Key findings of analyses:

1. **There is a <u>diversity of theoretical viewpoints</u> that enrich our understanding of the student success conversation**. By broadening the definition of student success to include employability, the concept aligns with the social justice imperative of addressing poverty and inequality in South Africa. It also positions work in this field within global higher education debates around the role of higher education in society.

2. **The <u>literature</u> on factors that contribute to student success <u>is expanding</u>**. It especially informs the sector's understanding of the needs of first-year students and what support helps them to adjust to university and navigate their studies. There is, however, a need to explore student success efforts at scale to identify common trends that could be replicated nationally.

Themes that South African scholars are writing about in terms of student success



Key findings of analyses:

3. **The SAULM and SEP-TLF qualitative data emphasises the importance of certain factors that support <u>good pedagogy-related practices</u> that stand out as contributing to students' progression through the system**. These include:

   - ***Being transparent and communicating well***. This implies better communication between institutional management and staff so as to align expectations with capabilities and resources.
   - ***Designing blended learning and teaching pedagogy to leverage the best of both worlds***. This includes using learning and instructional design to enhance student engagement on digital platforms, as well as optimising learning environments for students and staff.
   - ***Providing relevant training to students and staff in the use of educational technology to facilitate learning and teaching*.** Providing appropriate support in the form of access to hardware, software, and data; and providing technical support.
   - ***Providing training and support to lecturers in blended learning environments in alternative assessment practices*.** Keeping up-to-date with the latest trends and security concerns regarding technology that might enable academic dishonesty.

Key findings of analyses:

4. **<u>Digital inequities</u> often manifest within the same group of people who are also confronted by other inequities related to their race, gender, or socioeconomic status**. The challenge higher education faces is to leverage technology to advance the sector, while ensuring that digital inequities do not further disadvantage social groups. This will require a national collaborative approach to align policies and to strategically incentivise institutional practices that further equitable outcomes for students. Importantly, it will require a stronger focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the context of digital learning to ensure equitable education.
    - Quantitative data show an increase **in quintile 1-3 students** in public higher education which emphasizes the **importance of understanding students and the support they need to succeed.**

5. **Student engagement data show that less than a quarter of students engage in <u>practical work experience</u> while studying**. While some reference to desired graduate attributes for employability featured in the data, there seems to be a general lack of intentional curriculum and programme design to scaffold the development of desired attributes. Taken together, there is a need for more research to understand how higher education contributes to the personal and professional development of graduates.

Key findings of analyses:

6. Based on the analysis, **some <u>considerations for planning</u> in higher education include**:

- **Quantitative study:** Enrolment planning is vital to advance student success and optimize funding.

- **Qualitatively study:**
- Aligning national policies to address digital inequities.
- Building capacity in technological support, instructional and learning design, and administrative support, as well as capacitating students and staff with the necessary digital skills, competencies, and knowledge to leverage technology in teaching and learning.
- Advancing data analytics.
- Balancing the leveraging of technology with the possible threats to academic integrity and learning posed by artificial intelligence-driven technologies.

Key findings of analyses:

7. The **financial implications of a more technologically enhanced system require innovative responses**, such as redirecting current funding or investing in partnership initiatives like Social Impact Bonds. Critical questions that could be tabled for discussion on funding include:

    - University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) should maintain and expand initiatives that enable and support student success efforts
    - How can the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) facilitate national partnerships with other ministries and industry to bridge the digital divide and allow equity of access for students to networks, devices, data, and digital literacy skills?
    - How can infrastructure grants be refocused on bridging the digital divide?
    - How are student funding sources being reimagined to align with national and institutional priorities?

Key findings of analyses:

8. **Mapped against the <u>16 standards of the Quality Assurance Framework</u>, quality assurance considerations drawn from the report include**:

- Ensuring alignment of national and institutional policies at a strategic level.
- Investing in more sophisticated data analytics to track progress, identify areas of improvement, measure the impact of interventions, and inform decisions while aligning with ethical and legal data governance practices.
- Developing capacity in programme and curriculum design practices.
- Introducing continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for lecturers with an intentional focus on post-graduate supervision.
- Introducing significant efforts to rethink assessments in a digitalised system.
- Promoting good pedagogical practices that support student success.
- Intentionally integrating digital skills and competencies development for students and staff.
- Using quantitative and qualitative data that represent the student voice to guide curriculum transformation, and creating environments that optimise student success.

Final reflections on student success:

- The quantitative study captures the importance of factors that define student success: **throughput**, **equity of outcomes (gender and racial gaps)**, and **navigating the world beyond graduation, especially transitioning to postgraduate studies.**

- The qualitative work supports this data in highlighting **what we can do** to advance retention and throughput, ensure that achievement gaps are reduced, and that undergraduates are equipped with a strong epistemic foundation to enable entry into the world of work, or pursuing postgraduate studies.

- All these recommendations are tied into the appropriate **planning, funding, and quality assurance** of higher education institutions.

Reflections

Dr Whitfield Green, CHE

Q&A

Discussion