

After revised admissions policy: An academic advisor's extrapolation of the achievements, challenges and critical lessons

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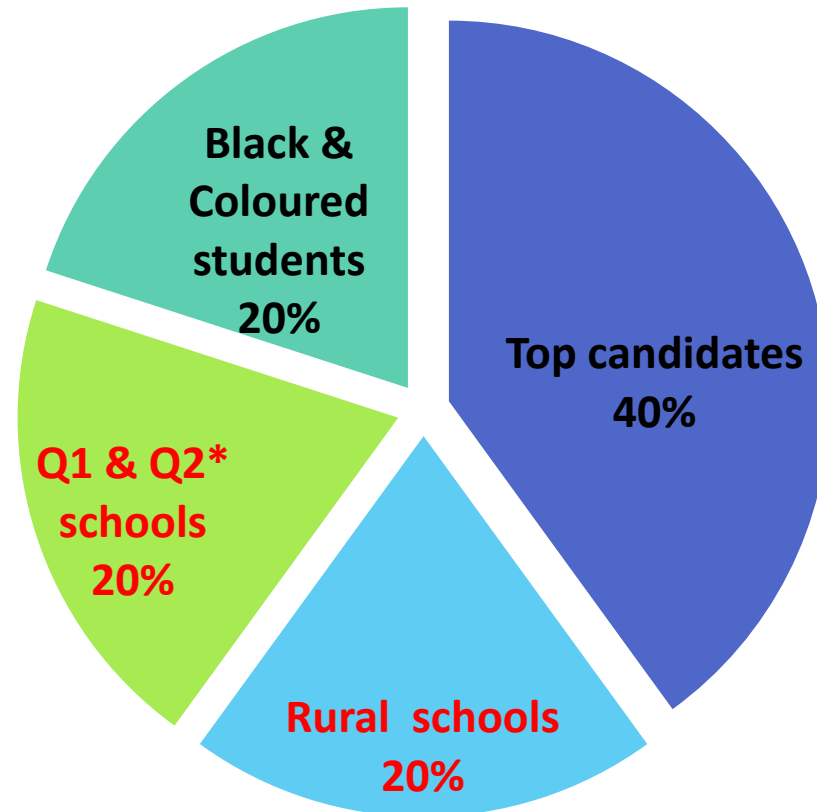
Historical admission patterns gave the impression of equal access, but...

- Not reaching a demographically diverse and representative student profile.
- Enrolment reflected the inequality in SA education provision.

Appropriate response:

- Consultation with wide range of stakeholders + close analysis of previous admissions criteria and resultant student profiles.
- Socially responsive admissions criteria that would address transformation and equity issues.
- Recommendations to change admissions criteria for 2015 cohort.

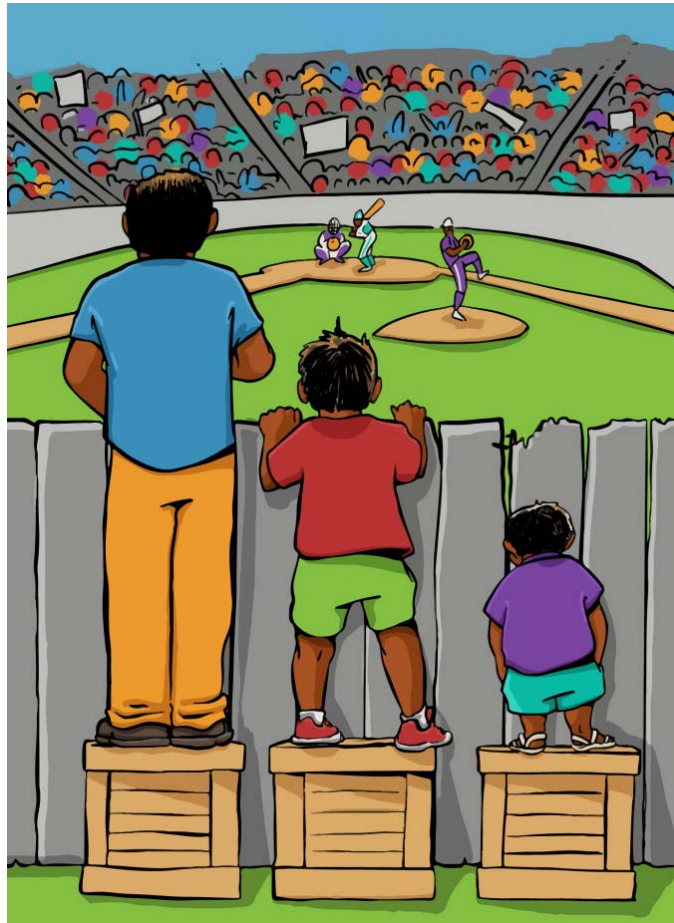
Enrolment targets by category as per revised criteria (effective 2015)



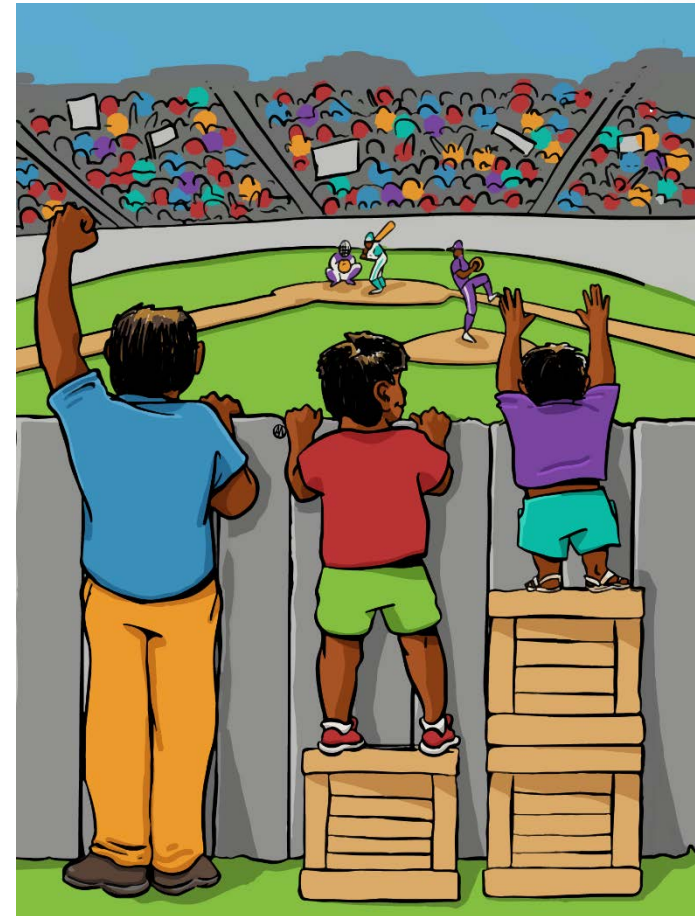
* In South Africa public schools are categorised by quintile according to socioeconomic status of communities in which are located. Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 schools are least resourced.

Expected outcome: Admissions and support that acknowledge disparity in schooling and economic backgrounds

Before



After



Methodology

Emergent intervention design:

- Flexible, responsive to the situation, sensitive to the data
- Data collection and analysis procedures evolve in response to what is learned in the earlier parts of the study (Dick, 2001).

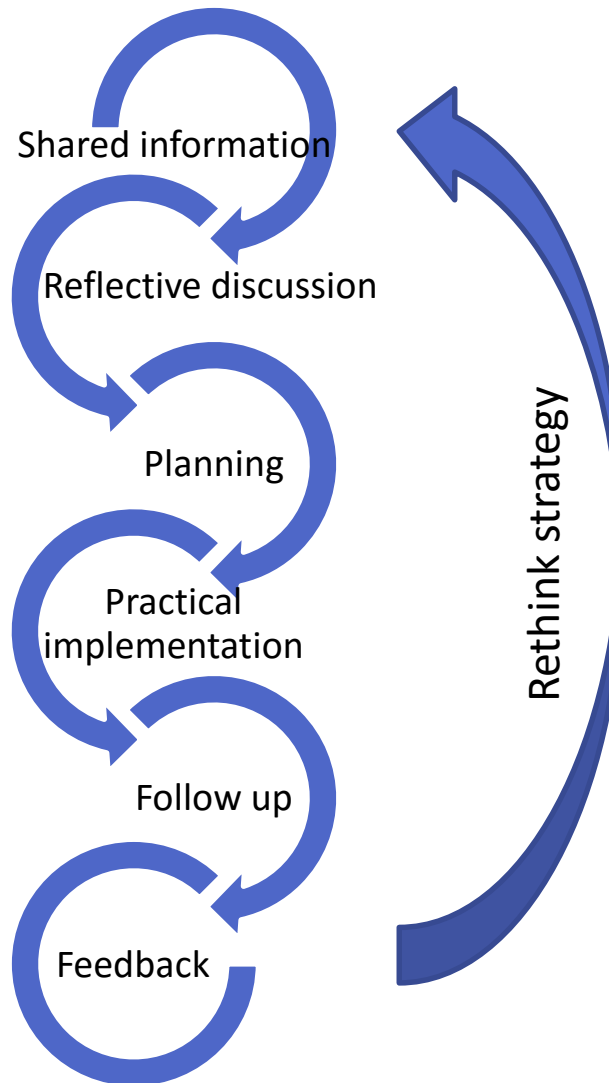
Intervention range

- Class-based academic development sessions (including reading and writing skills)
- Tutor support (subject-based)
- One-to-one sessions
- Quarterly meetings to understand QQR lived realities
- Psychological support

Based on...

- Admissions stats
- APS scores
- NBT scores
- QQR students baseline information from semi-structured questionnaires.
- Records of student consultations
- Progression stats from Faculty registrar's Office

Learning skills intervention: Aiming for perspective transformation (Dirkx, 1998)



Observations: Admissions

	Total for cohort	QQR	QQR %
2015	747	77	10.3
2016	777	121	15.6
2017	887	105	11.8
2018	899	113	12.6

Acknowledgements: Office of Faculty Registrar

Observations: University experience surveys

- 38% First-generation students. Where a family member has been to university, it's more likely to be a cousin than parent or sibling.
- 61% self-funding; 35% NSFAS or other government funding; 4% Other sponsor. 80% in University residence; 20% in private student accommodation.
- 73% in catering, 27% in self-catering residence.
- 38% have 3 meals /day; 54% on 2 meals and 8% on 1 meal.
- Q1Q2 bursary mentioned by some students but there is no documentation (contracts) for this.

Observation: QQR transition viewed through Phelan, Davidson & Cao's (1991) model of students' multiple worlds

Smooth	Managed	Hazardous	Impossible
	Difficult; rather challenging; quite challenging; challenging most of the time; wasn't easy; not easy; not that much bad; awesome only during O-Week; interesting and challenging at the same time	Horrible and terrifying; very tough; hectic; very hard; extremely difficult; really very difficult; the worst experience;	

Observation: Transition challenges

Academic/Learning	Psychosocial	Financial
<p><u>Adapting to 'system'</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Took long to get used to the system• Found it difficult to adapt to language of lecturers• University needs a lot of time to study, and is about application• Typing assignments• online tutorials <p><u>Volume of work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everything done in a short space of time• Huge volume of work and higher standard of questioning• Online tutorials are too long <p><u>Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Studying without textbooks	<p><u>Family factors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lost father in 1st Semester• Being away from home is challenging <p><u>Personal factors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not having someone to consult when not coping• Being independent is not easy• Sometimes not sure if it was worth continuing <p><u>Environmental factors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residence not totally comfortable;• Orientation week is a bad start to University• Adjusting to an institution like Wits is hard especially if you come from a rural school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food• Unpaid fees

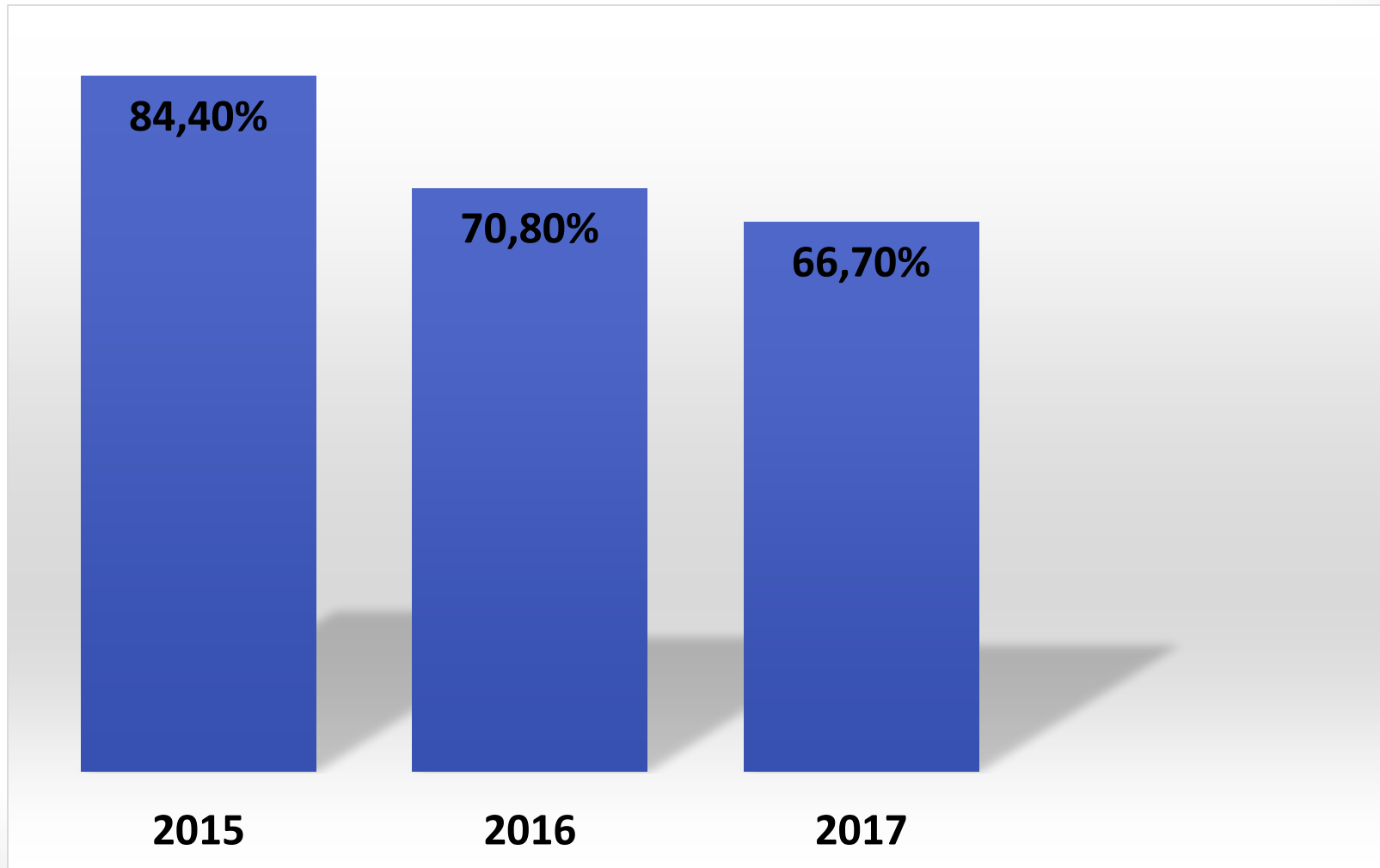
Observation: QQR students learn from their **FYE**

- Make the most of time in class. Make sure you understand.
- Manage time well. Keep up with your work.
- Ask when you don't understand.
- Forget all that you think you know as you can fall into the pit I fell in in first semester.
- Attend lectures and tutorials.
- Start working from Day 1. Leave your past achievements in the past and attend all extra lessons offered.
- Consult as soon as possible. Find someone to talk to when things are out of control.
- Stay at university residence
- Work from the first day. Do not procrastinate or fall behind at all.
- Be thoroughly prepared for class and for assessments.
- Ask questions and get help quicker when you need it.
- Attend all tutorials during 1st semester. This helps with the transition from high school.
- Apply for tutors. Don't procrastinate. Do it now.
- Be self-disciplined
- Utilise all the help you get from Faculty – all the tutors and weekend and after-school tutorials because you really need them.
- Be prepared for classwork. Stay ahead.
- It is inevitable that you are going to miss home, and university is extremely different. So it is important to keep on top of the workload.
- Stay focused at all times.
- Seek help. Varsity is different from high school in many ways. Stress is the biggest killer. Be calm. Familiarise yourself with electronic things because that's what university is about.
- Work hard every day. Take a break. Pray. Enjoy life and be yourself.
- Organise your time.
- Do not to juggle too many things at once. First adjust to the academic load.
- Attend all your after-hours tuts. They are very helpful.
- Don't allow pressure to get the better of them. Seek help from senior students.

Observation: Progression rates for 2015 cohort

	2015			2016			2017			
	1 st year	PCD	Class Pass Rate	2 nd year	PCD	Progression	3 rd year	PCD	Class Pass Rate	Progression to date (n years)
MBBCh	55	46 (83.64%)	96.7%	46	35 (76.08)	63.6%	35	29 (82.9%)	89.14%	52.7%
BPharm	12	11 (91.67%)	93.3%	11	10 (90.91)	83.3%	9	7 (77.8%)	91.92%	58.3%
BHSC	6	6 (100%)	82.9%	6	2 (33.3%)	33.3%	2	2 Completed	98.7%	33.3%
BNurs	2	1	50%	1	0	0	-	-	87.1%	0
BSc OT	1	0	83.6%	-	0	0	-	-	94.4%	0
BSc Physio	1	1 (100%)	76.6%	1	1 (100%)	100%	1	1	94%	100%

Observation: First year QQR progression 2015-2017



Achievements

- The University has reached out to some of the most marginalised communities.
- Majority of QQR students were in University residence in their 1st year – provides greater opportunity for support.
- For the challenges that they have, QQR students are making significant progress.
- Many QQR students have potential, resilience and determination.
- Senior students (especially in university residences) contributed to a more positive university experience for QQR students.

Challenges

- Most QQR students have no written assurance of funding. Finance becomes a huge stressor at 1st year. '3-in-1' promise not kept.
- Overall QQR progression is declining since 2015.
- University costs which are not stated upfront hit QQR students hard (e.g. textbooks, computer literacy & First Aid courses, student societies).
- More than 1/3 of QQR students are likely to be first-generation. They cannot look to family for guidance in navigating university.
- Most QQR students are known to require additional support in reading and writing but there is hardly space in the curriculum for such support.
- We are a long way from reaching QQR enrolment targets.
- 2015 QQR group was treated as their more privileged peers: with some of them excluded on academic grounds mid-2016.

Critical lessons

- Tuition fees, accommodation, meals and textbooks are major protective factors.
- All 1st year costs including accommodation need to be published on University website for the benefit of first-generation students.
- Student experiences and adaptations to university setting should not be taken for granted. QQR orientation/ transition should last beyond O-week.
- Academic development interventions must facilitate home-university boundary crossing.
- Need to strengthen stress management strategies in transition interventions
- University to make a computer literacy plan for QQR students – which is clearly aligned to eLearning demands and other course demands.
- Develop peer support programmes: students learn a lot more from other students than from staff.
- Ensure sensitive communication and interventions without increasing stigma.
- Quintile 3 schools are equally disadvantaged – extent new criteria to them too.

References

- Dick, B (2001). Making the most of emergent methodologies: A critical choice in qualitative research design. A paper prepared for the *Association for Qualitative Research Conference*. Melbourne, 5-7 July.
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: An overview. *PAACE journal of lifelong learning*, 7, 1-14.
- Phelan, P., Davidson, A. L., & Cao, H. T. (1991). Students' multiple worlds: Negotiating the boundaries of family, peer, and school cultures. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 22(3), 224-250.