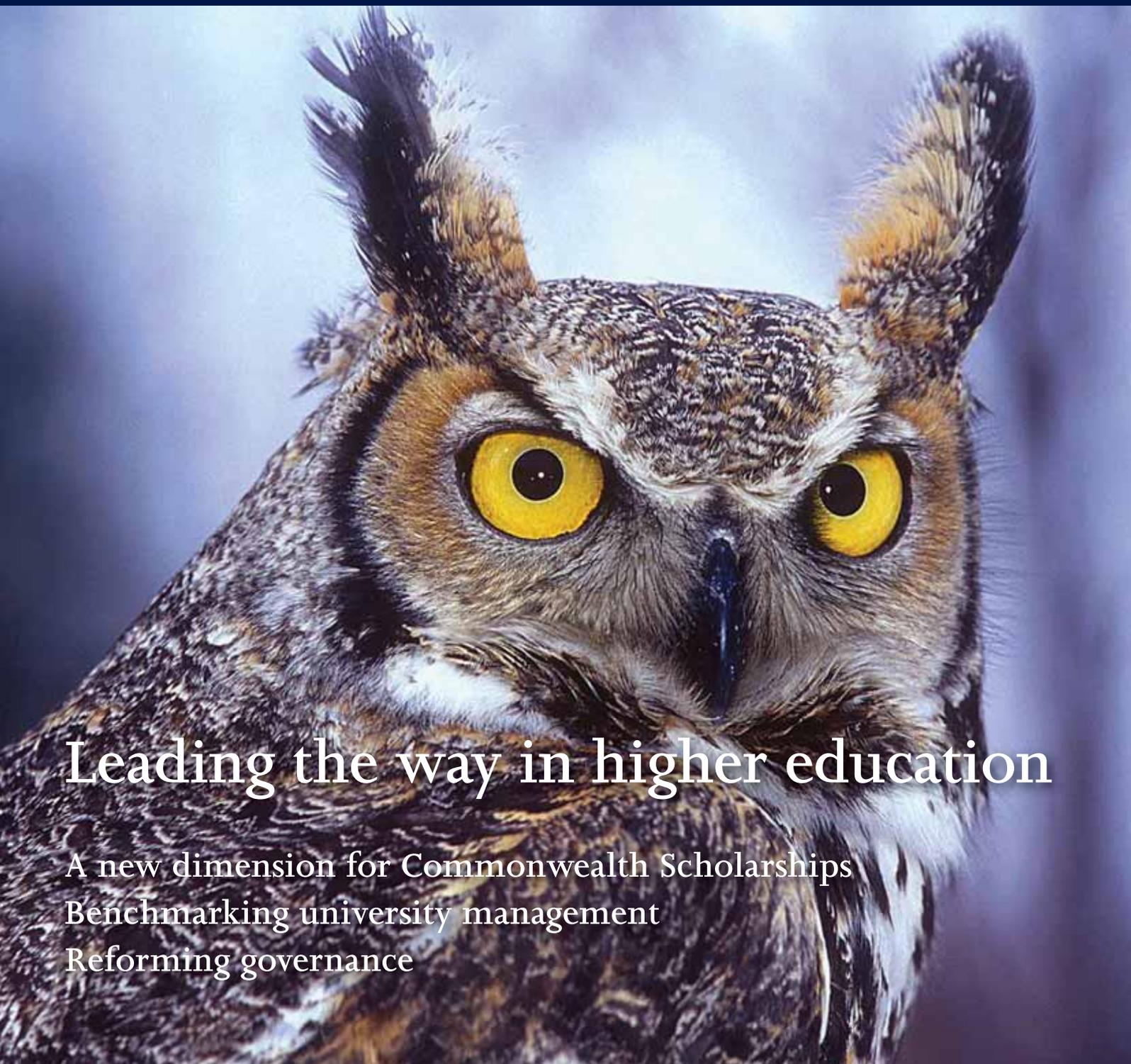


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# Challenges of expansion

**Wisdom Tetey** analyses the state of the African professoriate and implications for regenerating the academy.

**W**hile academic staff recruitment and retention constitute major challenges to African universities, there are growing concerns that the situation is worsening in terms of numbers and quality of the professoriate. To ascertain the extent of the problem and the veracity of the claims, we undertook a study of 15 universities and seven countries. The following analysis highlights some key findings.

## The student enrolment-staff capacity gap

Since the early 1990s, African universities have seen steady increases in student enrolments, with the last decade recording explosive expansions. The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania, for example, saw its enrolment balloon by 73%, from 8,439 in 2003, to 14,637 in 2007. In the midst of this unprecedented expansion, universities have, generally, not been able to respond with commensurate growth in total academic staff numbers. Thus, while student numbers at the University of Ghana went up by 167% between 2000 and 2008, staff numbers only went up by about 40%. At UDSM, the 73% increase in student numbers between 2003 and 2007 compares to a 25% growth in staff numbers. National trends, not surprisingly, mirror institutional trends – see Figures 1 and 2.

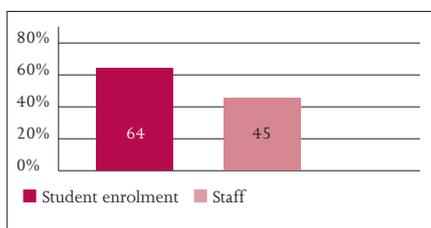


Figure 1: Growth rates for students and staff 2000-2004 Mozambique

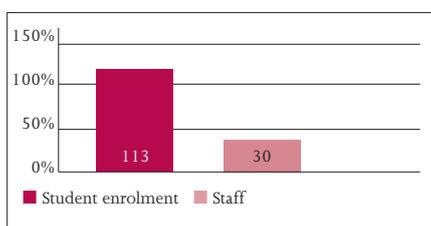


Figure 2: Growth rates for students and staff 2002-2004 Tanzania

As a result of the foregoing trends, student-staff ratios also retrogressed, putting additional burden on existing staff capacity and diminishing the educational experience for students. Unbridled growth in student-staff ratios can be very intimidating and discouraging to those considering an academic career, because of the anxiety of combining the demands of huge classes with the expectations of scholarly excellence.

## Analysing staff capacity deficits – gender, age, qualification and rank

The difference between staff establishment and vacancies is a very good indicator of gaps in human resource. All the institutions studied have significant deficits in the complement of staff needed to carry out their academic missions. While the establishment for Makerere University, Uganda, in 2004/2005 was 1,796, the actual number of staff stood at 1,052, showing a deficit of 41%. The deficit is much higher for particular units such as Public Health and Medicine, with deficits of 54% and 57% respectively. These deficits are compounded in a variety of ways, as demonstrated in the discussion below.

## Gender gap in the professoriate

One of the gaps that African universities need to close, as they struggle with staff shortages, is the gender gap. While the proportion of female staff in various institutions has improved over the years, they still, by and large, constitute a small fraction of academics (see

Figure 3). Only 6% of academic staff at both the Business School and the Faculty of Engineering Sciences at the University of Ghana are female. National-level data corroborates the evidence from the institutional data. Females made up only 23% and 25% of academic staff in Mozambique, in 2000 and 2004 respectively. In Tanzania, the proportions even dropped, from 17% in 2003 to 16% in 2007. The trend in South Africa is very encouraging, however, with the percentage of female staff going up from 39% in 2001 to 42% in 2006.

The gender gap is significant for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the fact that a potential source of academic staff is not being tapped. A second significance of the gender gap, which is also related to graduate student output, is the fact that there are not enough females in the professoriate to serve as role models who can attract prospective female academics or mentor those already in their institutions.

## Ageing professoriate

The current crop of the African professoriate is ageing very fast, with no commensurate expansion in the number of young scholars entering the profession. Only 20% of staff at Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, in 2006/2007 were 40 years old or younger, compared to 39% over 50 years old. These figures give cause for concern about the future of the academy. The fact that around 11% of staff at OAU, in the two years for which data is available, were past retirement age just amp-

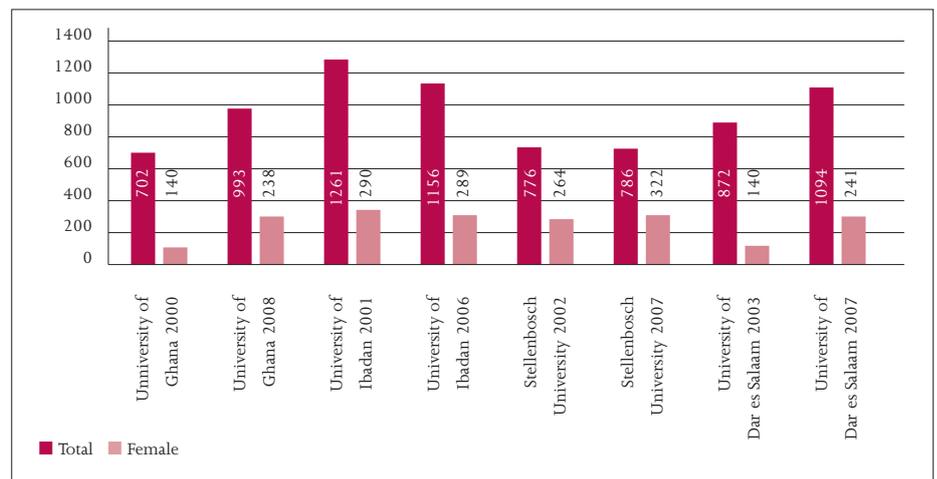


Figure 3: Academic staff by gender – institutional comparisons

## Unbridled growth in student-staff ratios can be very intimidating and discouraging to those considering an academic career.

lifies the extent of the problem. The situation at the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana is very disheartening, as only around 8% of staff were under 40 years of age in 2008, while a little over 57% were above 50 years of age. National-level data for Ghana echoes the general concern with an ageing professoriate, with 41% of staff over 50 years old.

### Calibre of the professoriate

The quality of any higher education system is determined not only by the number of people teaching in it, but also, even more importantly, by the qualifications of its academic staff. One significant measure of the capability of the professoriate to provide quality research and instruction is doctoral-level certification. The evidence suggests that there is a paucity of doctoral degree holders in the African academy. Apart from the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, where 53% of staff held doctoral degrees, less than half of all staff in the remaining institutions had doctorates. Only 19% of staff at the University of Education, Winneba had doctorates. In 2006, Master's and doctoral degree holders, together, constituted only 58% of the total staff complement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

Of even more concern is the trend of declining proportions of doctorate holders

over the years. The University of Ghana saw the percentage of staff with doctorates go down from 49% in 2000 to 41% in 2008; UKZN registered a drop from 40% in 2001 to 31% in 2006; and UDSM experienced a downward slide from 65% in 2003 to 41% in 2007. The picture is even more sobering when we analyse staff qualifications at the national level (see Figure 4).

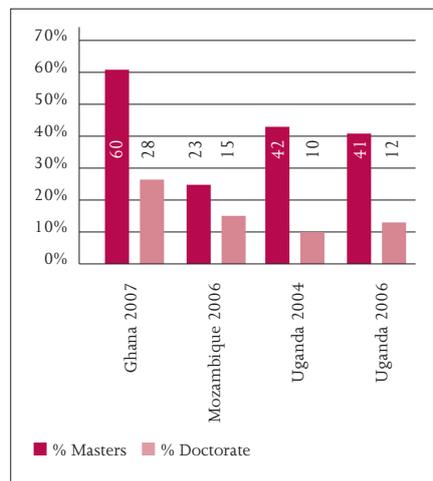


Figure 4: Academic staff by qualification – national comparisons

There are, at least, two significant implications to these trends:

1. There is a new generation of staff being hired who do not have the best possible qualifications to undertake their teaching and research mandates.
2. There is potential for these trends to perpetuate a vicious cycle, whereby institutions in these countries are incapable of training many doctoral-level students, because they do not have the human resource capacity to do so, or do a poor job if they try.

Either way, the quality of the next generation of the professoriate may be compromised.

### Gender representation within the ranks and implications for staff capacity

Figure 5 illustrates the extent to which women at various institutions are consistently under-represented within all ranks, and more so at professorial level. If upward mobility for female staff is seen as a difficult proposition, there is a strong likelihood that women will not see academia as a career worth pursuing, further diminishing the capacity of these institutions to increase the number of qualified staff.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that African universities are not only contending with significant shortages of academic staff, but are also debilitated by the dearth of academics with terminal degrees and a large ageing professoriate. The situation is accentuated by the pressures imposed on them by the phenomenal growth in student enrolment. This situation creates a huge challenge, since the ability of existing or new institutions to absorb the increasing student numbers will depend, to a very large extent, on an adequate pool of instructors. It is imperative that national tertiary bodies, universities, governments and development partners come together to address the problem of staff shortage and quality, if universities are to discharge their mandate satisfactorily. ■

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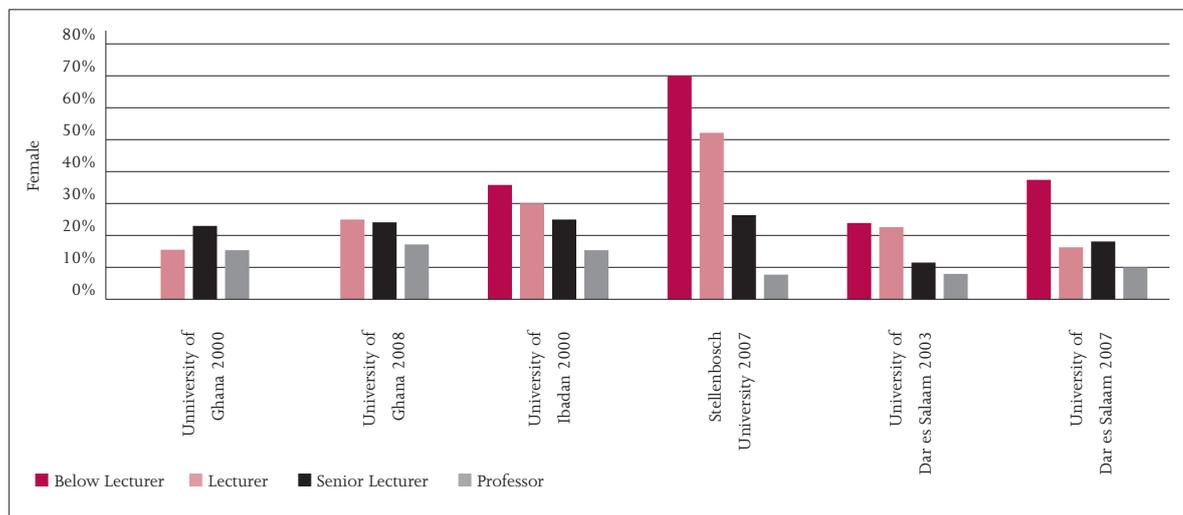


Figure 5: Academic staff rank by gender – institutional comparisons