

IMPLICATIONS OF THE GREEN PAPER FOR CETC ESTABLISHMENT

Expansion and diversification of the post-school landscape

Massive expansion of the FET college system, exemplified initially in the target of one million learner enrolments in the FET college system by 2014 (DoE, 2008), remains the key policy goal of the current administration despite the revision of the enrolment target to four million learners *in the post-school system as a whole* by 2030 (DHET, 2012). The revised target arguably represents an acknowledgement of the high improbability of achieving an enrolment of one million learners in the FET college sector by 2014, especially if we juxtapose this target with the evidence of a 2010 enrolment figure of fewer than 350,000 learners. Even if the enrolment target is spread across the post-school sector, however, and even if the target achievement date is 2030, we have to ask, on the basis of past performance (a largely static enrolment profile over the past decade), whether the DHET goal is realistic.

In the absence of a clearly articulated argument in the Green Paper for how the figure of four million enrolments by 2030 was arrived at – an argument based on previous enrolment patterns, mathematical modelling, and a clear indication of the distribution of the proposed enrolments amongst different institutional types – the validity of the target is questionable.

On the demand side, if expansion occurs as proposed, what will become of those who have been trained: will there be jobs for them?

The need for a bold vision for the post-school landscape

The approach towards institutional expansion and diversification in the draft Green Paper on post-school education reads as follows:

The first step will be strengthening existing institutions, ensuring that the regulatory framework supports both emerging and established institutions and diversifying and increasing institutions where necessary. Ensuring substantial improvements in throughput will already expand the pool of qualified people leaving the post-school system. The next step will be phased expansion and diversification (DHET, 2012: 19).

At first glance this seems sensible. But what if the whole conceptualisation of what FET colleges are and what programmes they should be providing is misguided? Do we press on, hoping throughput will improve, in the face of:

- The amorphousness of FET college provision (and consequent lack of identity of the sector)
- The inappropriateness of the levels at which the NC(V) is offered; and
- The dilution of technical education (and consequent absence of a clear pathway to Universities of Technology)?

What if FET colleges are *not* the most appropriate platform for the proposed massive expansion of student enrolments?

These issues are either skirted or not addressed at all in the Green Paper, which stops short of presenting a clear vision of the size and shape of the post-school sector. Acknowledging the need for a diversified post-school sector, the Green Paper (2012: 30) proposes two options for “strengthening ... and rebuilding or reopening colleges, as part of a coherent post-school system”: improving co-ordination between the DHET and the departments responsible for nursing and agricultural colleges; ¹ and shifting responsibility for these colleges to the DHET – articulated as the preferred option. Departmental sensitivities aside, the latter option should arguably by now have been explored with the relevant departments *ahead of pronouncements about growing enrolments to four million students by 2030*.

Provision is made in the Green Paper for the possible establishment of Community Education and Training Centres to cater for the learning needs of adults and out-of-school youth. While adult learning opportunities are currently provided by Public Adult Learning Centres, albeit predominantly in the form of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), there is no institutional model catering for the diverse learning needs of those not in employment, education or training and not severely disabled. The proposal for a new institutional form smacks, on the face of it, of a bureaucratic response to a massive social problem that goes way beyond the lack of employment, education, and training captured in the NEET acronym.

These proposals address public provision, moreover. What of the possible contribution of private provision to expanding student enrolments in the post-school sector? As the Green Paper acknowledges, the diversity of institutional configurations in the private sector has made it difficult for the DHET and its predecessor the Department of Education adequately to regulate and oversee the quality assurance of private provision. But the possibilities of public-private partnerships, let alone of private provision as a complement to public provision, must be explored if the country is to make any serious dent in meeting the educational and employment needs not only of out-of-school youth and under-educated adults but of those presently in the formal education and training sectors.

Finally, we need to ask how the plans for expansion fit with the proposals for diversification. The argument made here is that consolidation, expansion and diversification cannot be undertaken sequentially, as proposed in the Green Paper: the size and nature of the problem of those NEET alone highlights the need for concerted action on all three fronts – action that cannot happen outside of a vision for the entire post-school sector and a plan that spells out the desired size and shape of the post-school landscape.

Implications for the establishment of CETCs

1. Size: What proportion of the 4 million should CETCs notionally be catering for?
2. Shape: What programmes should CETCs be offering?

For which target groups should CETCs be catering?

¹ Interestingly, there is no mention of reopening colleges of education, as mooted at the 2007 ANC conference at Polokwane.

At what levels should CETC provision be pitched?

Should CETCs absorb the current PALCs, should CETCs be built upon successful PALCs, or should an entirely new institutional form be developed which draws upon PALCs in a less formal way?

What will make CETCs distinctive?

In what ways and to what extent will CETC provision be expected to meet the unemployment needs of the country?