

Report of the Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres: Response to the report by Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, April 2013

General comment

The broad proposal to strengthen adult education provision and recognize the value of community-led, community located learning centres that include, but go beyond purely vocational skills provision, is applauded. There is substantial evidence in other countries that adults choose to take part in adult education for a variety of reasons with a variety of beneficial outcomes (health, sustainable living, social networking etc) and that accessibility and flexibility are key to engaging new adult learners. Equally participation choices and paths are rarely linear, so that adults may choose to attend one course which may act as a springboard for either vocational progression or general personal development.

While there are specific concerns that this response would like to address, there is a more general one, which is this. The current international trend is towards looking at the kind of education and learning that is needed beyond the 2015 Millennium Development Goals target date. (see for example: <http://www.beyond2015.org/sites/default/files/Beyond%202015-Education.pdf>). These considerations are being framed within the concept of the **Education We Need for the World We Want** (www.icae.org.uy). Located within those discussions is the notion of education and lifelong learning for **well-being**. This concept relates closely to the fourth pillar of the seminal De Lours report of 1996 for lifelong learning which asks that we address: learning ‘to do’, ‘to know’, ‘to learn’, and ‘**to live together**’.

In other words, it is important to develop a value-base for this initiative that recognizes the South African, and its regional, context and its connectivity to global interests of security, governance, democracy and citizenship, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and growth. As one respondent articulated:

The problems we face in terms of conflict, violence, xenophobia, diversity, unresolved trauma etc are growing and pose a threat to our young democracy. The CETC system should become a vehicle for promoting social cohesion, peace-building and nation-building.

Other specific comments are as follows:

Age range and limits:

Whilst it is recognized that South Africa has a relatively young population, it is also recognized globally that retraining is required throughout one’s life and this does not stop at age 55. People are living longer. It is in the national interest to retain people within the productive workforce for as long as possible; people who continue to learn live happier and healthier lives. In the South African context, as is mentioned in the report, many grandparents play substantial family support roles, as financial contributors as well as contributing to the educational needs of school-going members. It is necessary, therefore, to include people over the age of 55 in the target population for learning.

Conversely one person also commented that it is not necessarily appropriate to keep young people in education till age 24 years simply to reduce the number of unemployed youth in the country.

Training:

Although the report recognizes the need to train educators and facilitators of post school education provision it is important to underline this point and emphasise that the training should be equivalent to the training of other professions. Unlike schooling, community education operates at two levels – the development of community based leaders and the development of professional community educators

who have the skills, knowledge and understanding to mediate with and promote the development needs of communities. Educators need professional training in the nature of adult learning and facilitation skills that can nurture lifelong learning, community education and development. Those who provide the training need adequate resources to ensure quality training programmes for pre and post degree levels. Universities have a key role to play in this area and the state funding formula should ensure ring fenced funding in universities to protect the range of training required at each level. Furthermore, ongoing training and skills updating are as equally important for this sector as for other education sectors.

Management of CETCs:

It is important that CETCs are community owned, rather than politically controlled. Management structures should reflect local representation of diverse issues and needs that can be addressed through appropriate learning opportunities. A related question from one respondent is ‘what is the role of ABET NPOs and CBOs in this process?’ Equally CETCs require adequate funding and appropriately trained staff if they are to be effective.

Planning, Development and roll out of CETCs:

It is important that this initiative is properly planned. There should be time, BEFORE centres are operational, for the core curriculum to be developed, there should be appropriate mechanisms put in place to enable identification of viable centres, assessing local needs and interests, training an initial cohort of coordinators and educators, promoting, piloting, monitoring and evaluating initial implementation and resource allocation for such centres. Previous institutional and curriculum change initiatives have been marred by poor planning and resourcing, which have in turn undermined implementation.

There is some concern that a CETC model that simply attaches itself to FET colleges will not create the appropriate community-needs-led environment for a grass-roots, community education resource.

One suggestion is that a small pilot phase, involving a tender application to existing institutions (voluntary and others) is advertised, so that institutions can demonstrate their capacity to address the above concerns.

Curriculum relevance:

The community learning curriculum should not be confined to an instrumental skills-based formula. There should be provision for community led, often issue based or socially defined programmes that serve needs of specific groups of people. Such courses are often the stepping stone to further study and development. They facilitate community ownership of the centres and the learning opportunities therein.

In association with the general comment (above) concerning a values base for the CETC system, its curriculum should be developing responsible citizens of all ages who consider the needs of the planet for future generations. Similarly vocational skills curricula should be market-led and relate to the real employment needs of potential employers.

Citing of Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign as a successful example:

The citing of the above literacy campaign as a model of good practice was viewed with skepticism, unless there is empirical evidence to support this claim.