

University of South Africa

Response to the Report of the Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres (Government Gazette, Volume 574, 'Call for comments on the Report of the Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres (CETCs)

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1 Background to the response

The post-schooling sector is diverse, and has not until very recently been conceptualized in a coherent and systematic manner. The difficulties of articulation and mobility between intermediate and high skills qualifications and institutional sites are increasingly under the spotlight and there has been extensive debate around appropriate institutional forms that could constitute the post-school system (Human Sciences Research Council 2012).

The *Green Paper on Higher Education and Training for post school education* released by DHET for public comment in 2012 suggested a massive expansion of post-school education opportunities for adults and youth by 2030 as envisaged in the National Development Plan for 2030.

With approximately 3 million NEETS or youth aged between 18 and 24 make it imperative for a post school system which might expand opportunities for the youth, and in particular, for those in disadvantaged rural areas and informal settlements. Other studies (Baatjes in DHET 2011) refer to approximately 12 million adults with less than Grade 9 education. Of these, nearly 3 million are young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years who are neither in education nor in employment or training (NEETs), and who are in need of education and training opportunities. These considerations alone are ample evidence of the need to address the challenges confronting the AET sector.

The Green Paper proposes a reconfiguration of a post-school system which would provide meaningful learning and refers to a range of institutional types which could provide formal and non-formal learning opportunities, vocational and occupational skills programmes including basic programmes. These institutional options, the Green Paper indicates, need to be explored in relation to their appropriateness and the institutional preparedness of the system for growth.

The *Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres* (TTCETC) was established to examine inter alia the institutional preparedness for this growth and to propose a model for expanded delivery to this target group. The report considers

- the current AET policy landscape,
- the existing institutions that should provide for the learning needs of youths and adults – from the literacy campaigns, the institutionalisation of ABET in the NQF and as delivered through the PALCs,
- the introduction of the new skills regime, and
- the transformation of higher education and further education institutions.

The TTCETC report identifies and explores the role of five main institutional types – PALCs, FET colleges, community learning centres, community colleges – that currently respond to the learning needs for a section of adults and youths.

However, as the Green Paper for post-school education and training notes, the system continues to reproduce inequalities and there remain challenges regarding a lack of articulation and access and outlines an institutional framework or model (or trajectory) which would further conceptualise delivery of community learning in an integrated system as envisaged in the *Green Paper on Higher Education and Training for post school education* and as responded to in an earlier submission by the University of South Africa (Unisa) to the DHET in January 2012 when the Green Paper was released for public consultation.

The Green Paper on Higher Education and Training offered a framework for the integration of higher education institutions, colleges and adult education institutions formerly with the Department of Education; as well as the skills levy institutions, formerly under the Department of Labour into a coherent system, and integrated system necessary to deliver post school education and training at the envisaged scale.

2 Unisa's position on the Green Paper

The University noted (Unisa, 2012) that the Green Paper on Higher Education and Training represented a fundamental shift of focus from the responsibilities of the universities to the growing importance of the roles and functions that the Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges would need to play in order to address the skills shortages and for addressing the need for education and training for the majority of school leavers.

The Unisa submission (2012) considered the policy framework and commented from the perspective of an ODL Higher Education institution and recognised the Green Paper as a visionary and comprehensive document that would have immense impact on the wider system of education in South Africa *but which required further elaboration on its institutional framework for delivery.*

3 The Report of the Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres

The TTCETC Report is an endeavour to provide this institutional framework for delivery and proposes a delivery model for community education and training.

The Report (2013:12) points out, the needs of adults and youths are diverse, whether disaggregated by age or learning requirements” hence the need for these to be met through a network of post-school programmes and institutions that are diverse, yet linked. Such a network of institutions and programmes the TTCETC Report states should offer an integrated core curriculum that includes communication and numeracy, to enable youth and adults to function in changing communities and a changing society and should combine formal learning opportunities, vocational and occupational electives, and non-formal and popular education programmes.

The model proposed by the TTCETC is a multi-tiered model - both institutionally and by way of its proposed qualifications framework that would provide multiple access and progression opportunities to adults and youths

The envisaged post-school sector would comprise three main institutional types - each with its own distinct mission but would have a large degree of differentiation:

- Universities
- Colleges (vocational, single-purpose and Community Colleges)
- Community Learning Centres.

As previously mentioned in the Green Paper, the proposed institutional form would rely on e-learning and distance education to enable the expansion of the post-school sector in order that the broad sector might double its size over the next two decades, in line with the White Paper and National Planning Commission proposals.

3.1 The proposed institutional model

The *Task Team on Community Education and training Centres* proposes the Community Learning Centres as part of three tiered post-school sector:

Higher Education Sector (NQF levels 4 – 6)

College Sector (NQF levels 1 – 3)

Community Learning Centres (though these would be linked to Community Colleges)

The report envisages the Community Learning Centres would be distinct and separate institutions focusing on offerings for adults and young people for literacy, first and second chance basic and secondary education, vocational and occupational programmes and various non-formal education programmes. They would be closely linked to Community Colleges within the differentiated Colleges and to a broadened expansion of the current *Kha Ri Gude* literacy campaign network of classes.

The Community Learning Centres (CLC) and Community Colleges would be strategically located geographically to provide easy access for youths and adults and should link to communities in their varied forms via NGOs, CBOs, local government, the local economy and labour markets. They would offer:

- a minimum suite of programme offerings (formal and non-formal), literacy, vocational and first and second chance secondary education) aimed at youths and adults
- basic facilities including classroom infrastructure appropriate for and accessible to adults and youths
- administrative facilities, small library, reading rooms and computer facilities
- core full-time staff complement, both educators and administrators, and
- would require a minimum number of learners.

4 General response

The report is of great interest to the University as it presents significant proposals to strengthen and recreate adult education provision through a system of community located learning centres. If implemented successfully these proposals would lead to enormous improvements to post-school resources and capacity, particularly for those most in need of them because of disadvantage in their previous access to quality education and training. The university would support the suggestions pertaining to the development of a more flexible and variegated system of adult education and training in the country that can operate at different levels, from study circles in homes to professional courses in community colleges.

An effective Community Learning Centre system should prioritise the effective education and training of the multitude of young people and adults who have exited primary and high schools with incomplete qualifications or low level passes and who cannot currently *access* or *cope* with FET College or Higher Education tuition.

We recognise that to make this system functional it will require major effort as current state provided ABET and second chance Senior Certificate tuition has so far proved singularly ineffective in quality and wasteful of the limited resources provided to it, as have many of the skills levy institutions.

We concur with the writers of the report that the envisaged Community Learning Centre system needs to be identifiable and separate to some extent from the current FET College system – and that without this degree of separation in funding, management and administration it would be unlikely to gain the momentum it requires (if it is to meet the ambitious targets of the Department of Higher Education and Training).

The detailed literature studies attached to the report signal that this policy development is and needs to be evidence based. Unisa is willing (through its Department of Adult Education and Youth Development and other relevant units) to participate in the research and practitioner training activities that would be required. Unisa has been a major influence in the curriculum, NQF and standards generation, materials and practitioner development in the adult education field for nearly two decades (notably in training over 100 000 ABET practitioners on its Higher Certificate and Advanced Diplomas for ABET practitioners). Unisa has also been instrumental in delivering the South African Literacy Initiative (SANLI) on behalf of the DoE in 2002 - 2003, and in establishing and staffing nationally the *Kha Ri Gude* National Literacy Campaign which is currently being delivered by the DBE and is being capacitated by the former Unisa ABET tutor network). Unisa's expertise in the area of AET could be utilised alongside that of other universities. Also, perhaps most obviously, Unisa's expertise in distance education will be a major resource for the expansion of educational opportunities.

5 Concerns that the university raises in respect of the report

While supportive of the proposed institutional model for expanding the reach of AET to meet the demands of the NEETs and for providing for more stable communities, there are nevertheless concerns that need to be mentioned.

4.1 The need for effective operational planning and piloting

Although the report does outline an institutional model that appears implementable, this hardly constitutes a plan. As with the Green Paper, there is a need for thorough planning built on the findings and recommendations of the TTCETC Report (2013). This raises the concern that the report's call for a follow-up operational planning is heeded and expedited as no university institutional planning can take place independently of an operational plan being tabled.

4.2 The role of universities and the funding of their work in adult education

All universities are subject to the problem of diminishing resources in real terms and often supporting adult education development targeted at people who are not the main target of university qualification offerings is seen within universities as at worst a luxury and at best a matter of voluntary community service.

If universities are expected to provide AET manager and practitioner development, policy and research, monitoring and evaluation and even oversight, then some new mechanism for supporting this work needs to be built into the state subsidy system. Funding mechanisms would also need to be put in place for the envisaged expansion of the FET sector with the necessary capacitation of FET lecturers.

The national trend across universities has been to diminish or close adult education units and centres because of funding constraints.

4.3 Genuine career paths for adult education practitioners

In the late 1990s it was anticipated that there would be a huge demand for ABET and general adult education practitioners and Unisa's then ABET Institute has since then trained approximately 100 000 practitioners who have a least a Higher Certificate in ABET practice. However, until 2008, few of these trainees gained permanent employment because state-funded ABET was embedded in the schooling system and conventional school teachers were given preference in a Public Adult Learning Centre system that was not well managed and not well resourced. From Unisa's perspective (of not wanting to offer professional qualifications that lead nowhere) it is essential that the planning for the employment of qualified adult educators is prioritised. Genuine career paths are also essential if the intellectual expertise to nourish such a system is not continually regenerated.

4.4 Use of existing expertise

We concur on the need for a National Agency as proposed in the TTCETC Report. While this would advance developments in AET we would be concerned that such an Agency should be built around the existing expertise and be located within an HEI.

As stated in the terms for this study – after a decade of institutional restructuring, policy shifts and mergers – it is not advisable to make changes that are not grounded in research. This paper hopes to provide a backdrop for understanding the nature and context of the “basic education” subsector of post-schooling in relation to the issues and challenges it faces.

5 In conclusion

Whilst the university is generally supportive of the TTCETC proposal, the role of the university would be more evident if the proposed TTCETC model was translated into a comprehensive operational plan.