

Comments on the draft national policy on community colleges

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The argument of this submission is that the draft policy is inadequate to its task (which it is presumed is to give detailed expansion of the proposal in the White Paper on Post Schooling to set up a new institutional form for youth and adult education).

It is understood that the Department of Higher Education is faced with two significant implementation challenges:

1. To effect the transfer of the current Public Adult Learning Centres previously managed by provincial departments of education into the national control of the DHET and manage them with degree of provincial regionalisation so that they: (a) continue to operate and (b) are over time transformed to a more effective means of operation where they are linked to district level community colleges.
2. Create an entirely new institutional form, “the community college”, which is not a TVET college and which is more closely linked to local and interest communities. This act of creation would initially take the form of a very limited pilot.

The transfer of the PALCs

Now it is clear that for the foreseeable future the PALCs will continue to operate (that is, if the basic delivery of some ABET and Senior certificate programmes are to continue).

The policy document signally fails to address the issue of how these existing PALCs are going to be managed in the next few years except through the mechanism of a single TVET College structure for each province into which all PALCs in the province are nominally merged. Such a structure is singularly **inappropriate** for this task, which is essentially an administrative one previously handled by the provincial departments of education and their Adult Education directorates or units. Indeed having to set up a new structure as if it was a TVET college would disable the current administrative tasks needed to run the current (admittedly semi-dysfunctional) PALC system

In reality what is needed is not a policy but a transfer implementation plan that also contains some modest steps for improving the standard of existing management and pedagogy of the PALCs.

Simply renaming the existing PALCs in a province as being part of a “Community College of KwaZulu-Natal” or whatever name is chosen will simply give the new concept of community education centres and community colleges a bad name. It will inevitably be a fiction and be criticised as that. This cannot be what the bold and imaginative White Paper anticipated.

Further, it does not address the issue of the (old) Senior Certificate (as distinct from the new National Senior Certificate) that would be a major burden of that these so-called community colleges would have to carry.

The institution of a new institutional form

The draft policy provides little of substance on what a new institutional form would be like. Simply replicating a TVET College model without substantive imaginative thought on the nature of a community college/community education centres seems pointless.

It would be far better to develop a genuine policy on community education alongside the development of some pilots with varied structures and with more detailed planning of the details of a comprehensive policy.

Conclusion

The draft policy should be replaced by a more substantive policy on Community Education and Training developed during 2015.

The State President should be asked to delay proclamation of the Further Education and Training Colleges Act, 2013 (Act No 1 of 2013) (insofar as it refers to PALCs being mechanically being re-labelled as community colleges).

A rapid development of a detailed implementation plan for the function shift of the PALCs from provincial education department to DHET administrative and directoral control should be undertaken.