

Email from Shirley Walters to Sandra Land re draft report

25 June 2017

Dear Sandra

I was sorry not to be able to attend the 29 May meeting as I was out of the country. I therefore appreciated attending the meeting with the National Forum of Community Colleges last Friday. I recognise that what we have is a draft report and, as you mentioned, several things have already changed following the consultation on 29th May and elsewhere. I would ask the Chair and DHET officials to ensure that before the report is submitted to the DG all members of the committee have an opportunity to give their opinions. A Skype call of as many as possible would ensure that 'voices are heard' and that there is as much support for the document as possible.

As there was not the opportunity to make these comments in the meeting on Friday, I submit these now for consideration. I will give high-level comments as opposed to worrying about micro details:

1. You have done a wonderful job at bringing together much of the more recent history of the debates and discussions on community colleges – you draw on the 2012 and 2015 task group reports substantially. This is important so that continuities with the multiple, worthy processes over the years are reinforced.
2. You set out the various historical/current threats and opportunities well.
3. The major conundrum that our task group faces is working with the rather depressing current realities while imagining alternative paradigms for the colleges – I think, that towards the end of the report you are inclined to be captured by the current pragmatic realities, rather than leaving the reader with an alternative, hopeful vision of possibility – the report does need to end on a note which lays out visionary but doable steps going forward. This points to the need for a section which addresses some of the issues relating to the systemic and organisational changes that will be required to build colleges within an alternative paradigm that is being offered. For example, all leadership involved with the colleges presently would need to go through processes to buy into the alternative vision; they would need, for example, to be trained/educated in how to build partnerships (or be RPL'd if they demonstrate competence!); key issues as small as the naming of portfolios e.g. do you have lecturers, rather than facilitators; what are the job descriptions of the various employees etc, to the issues about quality assurance, criteria for judging success etc, will need to be rethought e.g. if the college is to be responsive to community needs, judging 'feet through the door' (virtually and physically) may be more important than 'bums on seats'; these link to the crucial issue of funding and what formula is used – it can't be students in a classroom only. So the vision is one thing, but to make it possible, the mechanisms for ensuring that it moves from the PALC paradigm are crucial – we need to suggest what these are. Your suggestion of 'silver

bullets' is a good one (although another metaphor may be better!) – I liked the idea of ensuring free wi-fi as a starting point to ensure that community members have free access and an incentive to use new technologies.

4. I don't think we emphasise sufficiently the four stages of adult development which are well articulated in the NIACE lifelong learning report of a few years ago – while we know that the political pressure is to bring in the youth, we do need to be careful not to forget the points of transition of each phase in life, which a college needs to respond to e.g. in northern Mozambique there is a movement for literacy for older people – it has little to do with jobs, but with inter-generational learning, personal development etc. It is at transition points that learning opportunities are most needed. The point about inter-generational learning should, I think, also be emphasised more in the report. You will recall community colleges in the UK back in the 70s and 80s which were built to ensure that this was happening in systematic ways, with great results. Of course, family literacy is a case in point. (I wrote a bit about this relating to HIV and AIDS where the Gogos needed sex education as they are parenting the young.)

5. You usefully point to how accelerated climate change is making it necessary for us all, across generations, to learn about how to conserve resources, live more sustainably etc. In a world where the 'growth paradigm' is being seriously questioned, an argument could be made to re-educate ourselves for an 'economy of well-being' as some are calling for. This is illustrative of the point that people across all ages and stages will need to be seen as possible 'learners' or 'participants' in a local community college,

6. You do argue importantly for alternative flexible modes of teaching/learning – there is important work that has been done in different sectors which could be usefully accessed – there is a lot for example in higher education/SAIDE that could be harvested. (At UWC, for example, we did a 4 year action research project with SAQA looking at how to shift the institution to embrace different modes). Along the same lines, the work done in higher education around RPL can be drawn on with, for example, Linda Cooper and Alan Ralphs recent book on 'RPL as a specialised pedagogy', HSRC Press.

7. The popular education tradition in South Africa is very relevant to an alternative paradigm for community colleges – in the report we should point to resources like those coming out of NMMU and UWC; pointing for example to the www.populareducation.co.za website gives people/educators immediate access to many resources for the kind of college which the task team is promoting.

8. Relating to some of the points above, you do point to the global context where the SDGs are an attempt to shift thinking world wide – while they may be seen as 'too little too late' they do focus collective minds on the fact that it cannot be 'business as usual' if we care about sustaining the planet. I would suggest highlighting this point more than is presently the case in the report.

It was useful to learn more about the National Forum for Community Colleges – having them able to work across civil society, government, including colleges, is to be welcomed. Thanks for all your great efforts. Once the report is final, I request that the Task Group can see it before it is submitted.

Best wishes, Shirley