

Student and community support initiatives

This paper elaborates on what kinds of student and community support initiatives are necessary to support the work of the Community Colleges so that they embody the full vision of this new system. The Department of Higher Education and Training's 2013 *White Paper for Post School Education and Training: "Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System"* argued strongly that there should be action to ensure that (DHET, 2016, p. 24):

As community colleges develop, it is essential that they establish learner support services focusing on areas such as career and programme advice, counselling and guidance, orientation, extra-curricular activities, financial aid, labour market information, community information and links with placement agencies. The DHET will collaborate with the National Youth Development Agency and other relevant agencies to ensure the establishment of Youth Advisory Centres and contact points at community colleges.

These initiatives must also address the issue of what core support is necessary to ensure the delivery of programmes and the effective administration of the Community College and its Community Learning Centres as well as other services, including those to the disabled and those with special needs.

Initially, these initiatives must be able to supply an answer to the question of what minimum package of support services can feasibly be implemented for the non-traditional students coming into these institutions so that they succeed .

The socio-economic situation

The overall socio-economic situation in South Africa has been exhaustively analysed and commented on. It is common knowledge that a high percentage of the population is young, that on the whole it is inadequately educated and, because of this and the growing scarcity of jobs doable by the undereducated, youth form a high percentage of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (the NEETs). This youth population is increasingly urbanised and, provincially speaking, showing evidence of migrating to the major metropolises in Gauteng and the Western Cape. One of the interesting developments consequent of girls having equal access to formal schooling is that women are outstripping the number of men gaining Senior Certificates and university degrees.

The schooling system provides very limited support to young people by way of information about jobs and work, career guidance, and other forms of support. The recent wave of demands by some students for universities be available as some sort of free welfare system for those who get into them is an indication of what may well be a build up of demands for a better post-school support system. The potential for a negative reaction from youth who are alienated (partly because of unrealistically high expectations of youth) is high.

Compared to higher education students the majority of the students in Community Colleges and Community Learning Centres will be really poor coming from households where the total annual income will be less than the South African median household income of about R72 000 a year.

The vision of the future Community College and support capacity

The vision of a future Community College, developed during the Design Evaluation of the Community College Policy, *inter alia* foresaw the following:

- It would be a community orientated institution for adults and especially the NEETs, linked to the local community and its challenges.
- On offer would be a variety of programmes for the local community and the college would also use community members as teachers.
- It would be open week days from morning till night (10 pm) and at weekends.
- It would have accessible, supportive, responsive spaces, including recreational and catering facilities.
- All in all it was a centre that was vibrant, engaging, learning, enabling, and happy with many young people around.

Clearly such imagined institution has some scale – in terms of numbers of people attending and in available infrastructure and staffing. Such an institution would have the potential to carry various forms of community and student support and career guidance. Indicators could be developed to reveal whether such support capacity existed and was functioning.

The recent ***National Policy for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Education and Training Colleges*** states the following on the need for Student and Community Support (DHET, 2016c, p. 17-18):

- a) An ideal CET college must be a confluence of community support services such as dealing with enquiries relating to student financial aid, applications for identity documents, applications for and training for driver's license, career development services, the use of internet facilities, access to TVET Colleges, universities and SETAs, access to different government services, etc. It is the expectation that a CET college must meet these community needs, in addition to training and development, which is its primary mandate.
- b) The diversity of students to be served by CET colleges requires a great deal of support with regard to registration, admission and information about the nature of the services the college offers. Further support during the course of the training for each student to succeed cannot be emphasised. The college must have the capacity to manage students' transition into the college and out of the college at the end of a programme. It is important to understand and accept students' choices of destinations (what motivates a student to enrol for a particular programme), and provide advice, mentoring and support in line with students' and/or community preferences.

Currently, of course, there is no such “ideal CET college”. The existing reality is that the previous system of provincially overseen Public Adult Learning Centres (now nominally renamed the Community Learning Centres of the nine Community College Administrative Centres) exists more or less unchanged (though the district level of support that previously came from the Provincial Education Department may well have collapsed or at least been reduced) and these centres, housed after hours in schools, run only academic ABET (GETCA) and AFET (Senior Certificate programmes). Clearly enhancing student support in the current situation would have to be on a somewhat interim nature.

Moving towards such an imagined reality where substantial Community Colleges would have significant career guidance and community and student support capacity will therefore be very much a developmental work in progress. It would be important not to initially overload the developing system with unrealistic support burdens.

Community support

In considering this vibrant Community College goal of “community support” it is first necessary to distinguish between two understandings of “community education”.

Community education is, in popular discourse, generally taken to be a very positive form of education that is, as Nitzberg (2010) puts it:

about providing the knowledge and skills for people to not only be self-sufficient and independent, but to create and utilize the interdependencies that must also exist in civil society. It is about creating a participatory learning culture that incorporates principles and practices of respect, mutual aid, inclusiveness, lifelong learning, skill building, self appreciation, entrepreneurship, and leadership development – the puzzle pieces that make up community life and learning.

However, the idea of community education is very variable and complicated by the diverse meanings attributed to the notions of community and education in different societies and contexts, though the diversity is somewhat bimodal depending on whether community education is seen as being education **in** and **of** the community or education **provided for**, or **made easily accessible to**, people in the community.

The first set of understandings is that community education is about **the community itself learning to work together to identify and solve developmental problems** (personal, social, economic and political) – it is education **for** the community **within** the community for the purpose of **building or animating that community**, a process that stresses participation, shared decision making, and use of community resources. The Canadian Association for Community Education (1987) states that community education “is characterized by the integrated involvement of people of all ages, use of community learning resources and research to bring about community change and recognition that people can learn through, with and from each other to create a better world.” It is sometimes seen as a pre-requisite for community development and empowerment. Within this understanding, actual education provision, whether formal or non-formal, such as adult literacy or adult basic education, continuing education, skills training, extra-mural classes or cultural activities, is seen as

subsidiary and instrumental to the broader community problem solving and development goals. Broad definitions of community education and **popular education** tend to be closer to this set of understandings.

The second set of understandings is that needed education can be **provided to** a community or in a community in **appropriate** and easily **accessible** ways. In this sense community education is more about approaches and methods of provision. It is not, *per se*, about education to build community, though that may be an outcome. The particular educational purpose, whether literacy or health education or skills training, etc., retains its primacy. Here it is **the special form of delivery**, community education, that is **instrumental to the goal of providing the needed education and training** (the ‘need’ often largely being determined by government or experts outside of the local community).

Now, though the vision of Community College development in South Africa could be seen as encompassing both of these understandings, the current state adult education system (the ex-public adult learning centres) and the new Community College legislation much closer to the second understanding.

Some questions therefore arise about what can happen in the future:

- Are the Community Colleges and their Community Learning Centres about delivery of education **to** a community or are they about the empowerment of learning **within** and **for** the community?
- Is the Community College primarily aimed at advancing **community** (rather than just individual) **learning**?
- Is the specific education or training content directly related to the **local community’s own expressed needs**?
- What is instrumental? Is it the College provision that is instrumental to the main goal of the community’s own learning and empowerment? Or is it the community ambience that is instrumental to the effectiveness of particular educational courses chosen by the state or College for delivery?
- Are the College and Community Learning centres open to the whole community (or are there entrance or selection rules (which may be related to educational qualifications))?
- Is the Community College and its Community Learning Centres **intergenerational**?
- Does the local community have any direct power over the **governance and provision of the College and Learning centre**?

There is no easy answer to these questions but the answers to them will influence the particular form that student and community support will take.

Indicators of community support capacity

- At least some staff capacity dedicated to community support and engagement
- Appointment of teaching staff who have qualifications that include courses related to adult education and community engagement or community development
- Some steps towards community engagement, even at the Community Learning Centre level
- Attempts to run some non-formal education courses or events
- Engagement with education and development NGOs in the locality.

Curriculum support services

Developing curriculum is no easy task and historically one of the strengths of the adult education and adult basic education providers in the 1980s and 1990s was their, often home grown, expertise in developing innovative programmes, courses and materials for local use, and often done in real connection with learners and participants. Conventional school education tends to rely on a few highly specialised academics and professionals and/or publishers to centrally develop curriculums, courses and materials. Rebuilding curriculum expertise in youth and adult education will take time, given the decimation in adult education capacity in universities and NGOs since the mid 1990s.

Curriculum development in skills training is in a better state but though usually funded by SETAs, is in practice largely done by commercial training providers.

In theory the South African Institute for Vocational and Community Education and Training (SAIVCET) proposed in the *White Paper* and supposed to be established in April 2015, would assist in curriculum development together with university adult education departments and contracted NGOs (DHET, 2013, p. 24):

SAIVCET will provide support to the colleges by researching the challenges facing their sector; it will also advise on important issues including curriculum and teaching methodologies. Research and expert policy support, as a rule, will be contracted to university adult education units and to NGO- and community-linked research and development organisations.

As far as is known, the SAIVCET is not yet operational.

Indicators of curriculum development capacity and resources

- Rebuilding of adult education departments and centres at universities
- SAIVCET is operational and dedicates resources to adult education curriculum and materials development
- Funding for open access curriculum resources and course materials
- Design of courses in curriculum and course development in TVET and ACET practitioner qualifications
- Practical system for grants and subsidies to Non-Profit Organisations for formal and non-formal course development
- Curriculum development includes attention to life skills and foundational competencies
- Major materials development initiative for ABET and AFET courses (GETCA, Amended National Senior Certificate and NASCA).
- Providers are revising, adapting, re-purposing and reusing courses
- Curriculum development tends to be done via partnerships.

Administrative support services

Building up the capacity of the administrative services in Community Colleges has to be done to address the needs of three constituencies – teaching staff, central and monitoring and evaluations bureaucracies, and learners (including community members in general).

Historically Public Adult Learning Centres had few if any support to help the teachers (except to some extent in Gauteng where there was an advanced PALC system (now unfortunately being dismantled), the collection of accurate data for bureaucratic authorities was pitifully inadequate, and services to the learners and communities were dependent on the heroic goodwill of a few individual teachers.

The painful difficulty is that there was never much funding for administrative support and both national provincial directorates of adult education were not renowned for their administrative or data collecting accomplishments.

The function shift that merged all the PALCs in a province into one Community College (administrative centre) was not accompanied by a coherent plan for the this administrative change and the staff in the original provincial directorates were not moved, as one might have imagined they would be, into the Community College Administrative Centre with the result that the new Community Colleges had no startup administrative capacity at all, and indeed, currently the financial matters relating to Community Colleges are now subcontracted to a

TVET college in the province (presumably for an interim period until administrative capacitation has been implemented).

Indicators of administrative support services capacity and resources

- A budget for administrative support at College and Community Learning Centre levels
- An implementation plan for the setting up the administrations of Community Colleges
- Administrative training courses designed and run

Academic support

Academic support for students can mean several things ranging from general orientation to a new, higher level of study, through special attention or courses of instruction given to students who are struggling with that level of study, to full scale bridging programmes to remediate a lack of sufficient grounding for the level of study.

It is common cause that the candidates for formal programmes in Community Colleges will generally have a very weak grounding in the fundamentals of reading writing and numeracy. Indeed, it is precisely this weaknesses (aided of course by financial and family factors) that ended their school careers through drop-out or examination failures, and led to them seeing the Community College/Community Learning Centre as their only chance to progress.

Community Colleges will undoubtedly need all three types of “academic support”:

- Orientation programmes (a good example of which is the one used in Catholic Institute of Education vocational skills programmes), which may include quick study skills programmes
- Catch up and remedial programmes for weak students
- Bridging programmes (particularly in English, mathematics and science) which in many cases will need to virtually replicate basic education.

There are major logistical problems in attempting to achieve such academic support. Currently most Community Learning Centres are relatively small and the numbers of students engaged in ABET and AFET (Senior Certificate) in each of them are too small to justify dedicated academic support staff. Once there are Community Colleges that are of some scale, it becomes more possible to run such programmes alongside the normal ones.

This is not to say that efforts to develop orientation programmes, study skills courses and bridging programmes should not begin, they are essential. Trying to build further on an

underprepared base is an exercise in futility. Tests should be designed and used to identify underprepared students.

Indicators of academic support programmes and resources

- A budget for academic support programme development
- Curriculum and materials designs for study skills courses and bridging programmes in languages, mathematics and sciences
- Appropriate placement testing and tests for underpreparedness at all levels
- Language support
- Foundational programme to teach people how to study at this level
- Library use training
- ICT use training
- Tutorial programmes including peer tutoring, extra lessons, small classes
- Early warning procedures for students at risk

Career guidance

Career guidance is given a high priority in the international literature on post-school education and training. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study *Skills beyond School* (2014, 18-20) lists “effective, accessible, independent, proactive career guidance, backed by solid career information” among the supporting conditions that assist strong and effective vocational education and training delivery systems. The same report notes that, whilst there may be expanding access and opportunities for post-school education and training, there is a bewildering complexity of choices that learners have to make. Good career guidance and information is needed both before entering and during vocational education programmes.

In another document a detailed set of *Pointers for policy development* in career guidance were developed (OECD, 2011a, pp. 11-12). The recommendations are summed up thus (OECD, 2011a, p. 5):

- Develop a coherent career guidance profession, independent from psychological counselling and well-informed by labour market information.
- Provide adequate resources for career guidance and its pro-active delivery.
- Ensure an independent base to support objective career guidance.
- Provide good sources of information about careers and courses.
- Build a comprehensive framework of guidance through partnership with employers.
- Ensure that career guidance initiatives are properly evaluated.

It also argued that there should be (p. 34) be a single government agency for career guidance.

Collapse of school and NGO career guidance provision

In the 1980s, amidst the proliferation of anti-apartheid service organisations and NGOs, there were a number of excellent Career Information Centres. Unfortunately, these all went to the wall when local and foreign funders ceased to support them and rather deployed aid to the new government. Notable among them were the Careers Information Centre (CIC) in Durban, the Careers Research and Information Centre (CRIC) in Cape Town (1977 to 2005), and the Education Information Centre (Braamfontein) and there was in the mid-1990s an association, the South African Vocational Guidance and Educational Association (SAVGEA).

School based career guidance went into a similar decline with lack of policy support and the end of much training in career guidance by universities.

A commercial provider PACE Career Centre was started in 1991 and has been a provider of services to various government departments and agencies and universities.

(<http://www.pacecareers.com/index.html>)

The lack of work knowledge

Given the poor quality of, indeed largely non-existence of, career guidance in under-resourced schools (and the demise of Career Guidance as a (albeit non-examined) school subject), there is a real problem of giving adequate guidance to the students who would be accommodated by Community Colleges. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many of the jobs now, in post-apartheid South Africa, open to all black South Africans, were not previously so, so that the tacit knowledge young people get from parents about the job market and of the nature of the competencies required for jobs was not available. The same applied to role models in particular careers.

There have been some limited attempts to provide such work knowledge. For example, the NGO called School Leavers Opportunity Training was started in the Natal Midlands in 1990 and which has expanded to Durban (1993), Grahamstown (1994), Newcastle (1997) and Upington (1997). It aims “To guide educationally deprived and unemployed out-of-school youth, in order to improve their opportunities for gainful employment or self-employment” and it offers Life Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Vocational Skills Training, Job placement, and “gap year” for orphans. The Catholic Institute for Education also has a range of centres which offer orientation and vocational courses.

Clearly, whether by orientation programmes or work placements and linked to career guidance support, Community Colleges will need to build up the capacity to orientate learners to the world of work.

Building up of resources in SAQA and the DHET

In 2010 the South African Qualifications Authority held a conference on Career Guidance and published a report, *Career guidance: challenges and opportunities*, in which Flederman, made the point that (pp. 35-36):

Support is needed in helping the learner access, make sense of and integrate information into plans. But as those who actually work with learners through community organisations know, the range of support actually needed by most learners to help bridge from school to further study or work is often complex, time- and resource-consuming and extends beyond the bounds of a traditional model of Careers Guidance and tools. This form of assistance requires a personnel infrastructure, which exists least where it is most needed. Without this support, information is not accessible in any useful way to the majority of learners.

Flederman (2008, pp. 26-27) made a number of recommendations about the need to create a **forum of partner**, provide **national strategic policy leadership** in the careers development field, a **cellphone/telephone helpline** and an **independent and comprehensive information source** (with a centralised information **database** (which the phone centre would use) that would be accessible to all.

These recommendations did lead to some positive outcomes. A ***Framework for Cooperation in the provision of Career Development (Information, Advice and Guidance) Services in South Africa*** was developed in October 2012 by the DHET and SAQA in cooperation with a number of other Departments and post-schooling bodies.

With support from SAQA, the DHET established “Ketha” (“Choose”), the National Career Development Service with a website (<http://www.careerhelp.org.za/>) backed up by radio programmes and career exhibitions. It was claimed that the Khetha radio programmes attract about 2.3 million listeners a week. A Helpline was launched in September 2010 and has been managed by SAQA. SAQA has claimed that between April 2013 and March 2014 over 3.2 million people received information and/or advice from the Helpline through the telephone, e-mail, publications such as brochures, face-to-face contact at exhibitions and information sessions as well as at the SAQA walk-in centre, through digital and social media platforms, and also through radio programmes on the SABC African Language Stations. Given this, it seems surprising that so few people seem to have heard of this facility, a confirmation of international evidence that career guidance support has to be well marketed.

Career Development Services



SMS Services: Send an SMS to 072 204 5056 with your question or send a "Please Call Me" and one of the Career Advisors will call you back.

Phone: 086 999 0123 (Mon-Fri: 08:00-16:30)

E-mail: careerhelp@dhet.gov.za

Website: www.careerhelp.org.za

Facebook: www.facebook.com/careerhelp

Twitter: www.twitter.com/rsacareerhelp

Mobile Site: mobi.careerhelp.org.za

National Career Advice Portal: <http://ncap.careerhelp.org.za>

Walk-In Service: 123 Francis Baard Street, Pretoria
(Mon-Fri: 08:00-16:30)

In 2016 the DHET published a ***Draft Policy: “Building an effective and integrated career development services system for South Africa”*** and a ***Competency Framework for Career Development Practitioners in South Africa*** (DHET, 2016a, 2016b).

A new professional body for career development practitioners, the South African Career Development Association (SACDA) (<http://www.sacda.org.za/>) has been instituted.

These developments mean that Flederman’s 2008 recommendations have now, at least in principle been implemented and the provision of career guidance in Community Colleges has a national policy and information base on which to build.

Indicators of career guidance capacity

- Appointment of a career guidance professional at each Community College (the nine administrative centres, pilot colleges, and actual colleges)
- Implementation plans for interim mobile career guidance servicing at every Community Learning Centre
- Marketing of the Ketha services to the whole Community College system.
- Interaction with National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) career centres and mobile services.
- Effective use of social media for communicating with students about careers.
- Participation in Career Expositions

Students and participants with disability and special needs

Experience from the Kha Ri Gude adult literacy campaign showed that, using the expertise of the relevant public or non-profit agencies, it was possible to provide education and training facilities to blind and hearing disabled people. For practical reasons such provision would require the use of specialised Community Learning Centres and regular liaison with the Associations or Councils dealing with the particular category of disablement.

The same provision would apply to correctional service institutions which could house special Community Learning Centres.

Indicators of support services for participants with disabilities and special needs

- A budget for support at College and Community Learning Centre levels for disabled people
- An implementation plan for the setting up the special Community Learning Centres
- Arrangements for the production of special materials (e.g. Braille books)
- Partnerships with agencies catering for people with disabilities, e.g. the National Institute for the Deaf College.

Child-care

If young mothers are to be enabled to study they may well require crèche facilities. Ideally, in “ideal CET college” such facilities should be paired with programmes educating educate practitioners (studying for Higher certificates in Educare) that would provide a work Integrated Learning environment for the practitioners in training as well as reducing the costs of the service.

Indicators of child care support

- Child care is included amongst the development plans for each community college
- The DHET has held discussions about Educare qualifications
- Building plans for new Community College hubs include child care facilities

Health services

Apart from the expectation that curriculums will include relevant and necessary health care information, particularly with respect to HIV/AIDS education, larger facilities might well include provision of a mini-clinic staffed by a nurse, as is the case with most universities and TVET colleges. Such facilities should include provision for giving counselling services, psycho-social support and mental health care for students.

Indicators of health support services

- Larger facilities have plans for a small clinic
- Each College has a clear HIV/AIDS education programme
- Building plans for new Community College hubs include basic clinic facilities
- First Aid training by the Red Cross and St John’s Ambulance should be provided.

Nutritional services

It is a truism that hungry people find it difficult to learn. Though in the long term one anticipates the larger College hubs having cafeteria, as do all TVET colleges, in the short term it should be expected that all College facilities above a certain size provide subsidised or free tea and bread in a simply facility.

Maybe colleges should also have food gardens of their own, or some aspect of their community education should cater for this.

Indicators of nutritional support services for participants

- A budget for simple nutritional support at all facilities above a certain size
- All new College facilities to include space for a simple cafeteria

Recreational, sport, library and cultural services

It is common cause that youth alienation is ameliorated through engagement in recreational, sport and religious activities (See Aitchison 1997). Though, obviously, Church, youth and sporting structures have a vital role to play in this, there is no reason why community colleges should not, where there are facilities for such, support such activities. For example there are a number of Community Learning Centres based in closed down schools who have sports fields. Currently few if any Community Learning Centre have even a box library of readers for ABET learners. This all needs to change. Community Colleges should also have effective liaison with bodies providing such facilities in the environment – municipal library services, provincial library services, YMCA sports facilities, etc.

Indicators of recreational, sport, library and cultural services for participants

- College plans should have items relating to support, however limited, for such services
- Every Community Learning Centre has a library, even if only a box one.

Youth development

Youth development is clearly a priority in South Africa, particularly given that there are so many youth who are NEETs – Not in Education, Employment or Training – and only 27% of young people under the age of 24 have a Senior Certificate, a qualification that is increasingly the necessary to get the most basic of jobs.

Given the magnitude of the youth crisis, youth development has not been given sufficient attention in South Africa and the *White Paper* states that (DHET, 2013, p. 24):

The DHET will collaborate with the National Youth Development Agency and other relevant agencies to ensure the establishment of Youth Advisory Centres and contact points at community colleges.

Some of these youth needs may well be partly met by Career information Centres at Community Colleges. Support for youth projects in the community will also need to be supported.

One issue that will have to be addressed is the possible conflict between addressing the needs and expectations and likes of young people at the same time as addressing the needs and sensitivities of poorly educated older and old adults. Indeed, some of the international literature argues for the consideration of separate institutions for youth and older adults.

Indicators of support services for youth development

- Issues related to youth development and the effective catering to youth needs are present in Community College plans including the liaison with National Youth Development Agency and other stakeholders
- Plans show an awareness of potential problems in addressing youth and older adult needs simultaneously.

Towards an integrated package of student support services

There is clearly a need for an integrated minimum package of student support services which every functioning community college should be able to offer/participate in. We suggest a minimum package as though there should be progressive movement towards the “imagined reality where substantial Community Colleges would have significant career guidance and community and student support capacity”, initially it may need to be modest.

Such a package would include:

- Some form of learner profiling (e.g. via placement and ongoing tests) to enable learners to study at the appropriate level and pace and be given early warning and support when they come up against barriers to learning
- Basic library and computer instruction and facilities
- Subsidised or free meal support
- Basic career guidance (including, where necessary via mobile units)

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