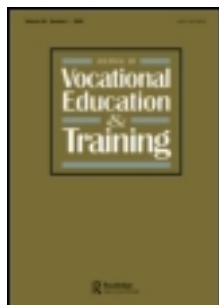


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FET college lecturers: the 'devolving' link in the South African skills development equation

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FET college lecturers: the ‘devolving’ link in the South African skills development equation

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National attention on the role of skills development has focused on the role of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in providing intermediate-level education and training necessary to meet the South African national development challenge. In particular, attention has been focused on reorganisation and rationalisation of college structures: through infrastructural development using recapitalisation funds; by curriculum renewal; and by proposing to boost learner enrolment to more than a million learners by 2014. The changes presuppose that college lecturers, as key strategic players, are a well-motivated and an effective component of the college system ready to take on these challenges. This paper considers that this may not necessarily be the case. Some attention has been paid to them in passing in the South African literature on FET colleges, and a report on ‘staffing challenges’ commissioned by the national department provided important information as to their form and composition. Very little consideration has, however, been paid to the implications of the latest legislation on FET colleges. This paper examines the origins and impacts of these latest policy proposals on college lecturers. It examines the legislation in light of the international evidence and proposes that the latest devolution of employment responsibility to governing bodies, although in line with international trends, is less likely to be a positive development.

Keywords: South African education and training; technical colleges; Further Education and Training; technical and vocational education and training; education policy; FET policy

Introduction

In the Republic of South Africa, national attention on skills provisioning has focused on the role of public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges¹ in providing intermediate-level skills necessary to meet the South African national development challenge. In particular, attention has focused on reorganising the landscape of provisioning by reducing 150 colleges to 50 merged entities; by attending to infrastructural development (by recapitalisation funding), and by re-curricularisation (i.e. curriculum renewal measures), in an attempt to ensure that colleges provide quality provision to more than a million learners by 2014. The measure provided for in the latest legislation (RSA 2006) reduces state liability by handing over responsibility of lecturer employment to governing bodies. The move is designed to ensure some measure of autonomy at institutional level so that colleges become more responsive to their local environments. These changes presuppose that college lecturers are

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a well-motivated and effective component of the FET college system ready to take on, and succeed, in these challenges. Some attention to elements of their form and nature has been paid in the South African literature (Powell and Hall 2000, 2002, 2004; Akojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008; DoE 2004). Very little consideration has, however, been paid to the origins and impact of the latest legislation (RSA 2006) on college staff in what seems to be a concerted push to decentralise and devolve responsibility without considering carefully its impacts on systemic and institutional factors.

Recent analysis of the South African FET policy debate displays a tension between a neo-liberal discourse of college transformation into autonomous, efficient and market-led institutions serving the needs of industry, and a continuing espousal of a broader set of educational values around learning, personal development and citizenship (King and McGrath 2002; McGrath 2003, 2005). Whether this is best served by a decentralised institutional structure has not been identified.

By situating the latest development in international and national context, the paper draws important lessons for the likely impact on college staff in particular and the sector in general. Removing state responsibility for staffing and placing it in the hands of College Councils (RSA 2006) suggests that an over-zealous attempt is being made to reduce state responsibility without regard to national circumstances or lessons learned from international experience. It is argued that without concerted support and development, the impacts of this move is likely to result in considerable upheaval in an already beleaguered sector.

The first section of this paper explores the impact of the international TVET context and locates the South African College sector within this context of the national development trajectory. This is followed by an elaboration of recent legislation and likely factors that had spawned its development. The third section provides an overview of the likely impact of the current legislation, and using the UK experience, recommends possible consideration for responding to its more deleterious consequences.

International context of FET Colleges

The international context of TVET provides the basis for less, as opposed to more, state intervention in skills development provision (Atchoarena and Delluc 2002; Johanson and Adams 2004). This is particularly striking given its second-class status and its perception as a sector in decline, partly as a result of its historical association with the colonial administration (Oketch 2007) and its less significant positioning within the perceived dominance of the new global, service-oriented economy considered to be a key job-creation lever. Moreover, the lack of a concerted response in dealing with the needs of the new knowledge economy must also rank as a major contributory feature in the current context.

In the face of what is considered by some as the near-dysfunctionality of the system, and in light of the competing demands by other sectors on scarce state resources, the call for decentralisation and devolution has been seen as the panacea for revitalising the system. The joint UNESCO/ILO policy paper makes this redefinition of the role of the state evident:

[A]ll of the guidelines laid down by international organisations and African countries (that) aim at breathing new life into technical and vocational education... have to do with redefining the role of the state... by developing procedures to decentralize TVE and by providing incentives and a framework working to set up new partnerships between institutions and business. (Atchoarena and Delluc 2002, 57)

'Decentralisation' has thus introduced a new discourse of TVET governance associated with partnerships, synergy with local stakeholders, and business responsiveness, within a

‘fit for (immediate) purpose’ logic. It has also shifted the debate from ‘pure’ to ‘diluted’ privatisation of the sector, as implied by the need ‘to create incentive mechanisms to encourage the emergence and/or growth of the private training sector’ (Atchoarena and Delluc 2002, 57). Thus, while it promises more responsiveness to economic interests, it also carries with it the lucrative and much-vaunted reduction of state responsibility.

It is not surprising, therefore, that latest perspectives speak of providing more institutional autonomy:

Rigid, centralized public training systems have become more responsive where individual training institutes have been given the freedom to set fees, adapt training to local needs, hire appropriate staff, and choose methods of instruction. The shift from financing inputs for training to financing performance and outcomes has helped change incentives for improvements. (Johanson and Adams 2004, 4)

Decentralisation, therefore, offers the promise of a dynamic, flexible system that ideally will lead to greater institutional efficiency and effectiveness, and one that is capable of an efficient response to local circumstances. What these policy proposals have identified is the advantage of devolution in context of a ‘state-steering’ model, with details of the nature, and impacts of the ‘steering’ still to be assessed.

The shift to decentralisation, which might well suggest an opening-up of the system, does, nevertheless, mark a shift from previous policy proposals that have touted privatisation as a response to the decline of the sector. These proposals, principally espoused by the World Bank study into TVET in the early 1990s (World Bank 1991) provided the rationale for the privatisation of the sector in an attempt to increase responsiveness and make the sector more efficient. TVET work commissioned in the early part of this decade, however reflects a distinct change (Johanson and Adams 2004). The current discourse, while representing a reversal of state control, provides space for both private and public forms and a concerted shift to managed autonomy. In this regard, decentralisation and devolution represent a mid-way response between privatisation, on the one hand, and a largely centrist (and presumably inefficient) state control, on the other hand.

It did not take long for the challenges associated with decentralisation and devolution to be identified. Even the World Bank at the outset was wary, pointing out that ‘Autonomy is not a panacea; it can be fraught with problems’ (Johanson and Adams 2004, 79). In particular, the possibilities for mismanagement at the local institutional level have been posited, especially when national systems of audit and accountability have been considered to be weak.

Decentralisation and devolution has been also been found to be associated with increasing ‘managerialist’ patterns of control in the public sector generally (Pollitt 1993; Clarke and Newman 1997) and institutions of further education in the UK in particular (Elliott and Hall 1994; Simkins 2000). For this reason, it has been associated, in this context, with a form of post-Thatcherite neo-liberal reform, and one that is less-responsive to the needs of particular social sectors. While it was evident that some form of reform was necessary, some care is necessary to set the stage to ensure slavish adherence to particular positions and an assessment of likely impacts.

For this reason, the call for ‘carefully planned’ implementation of institutional autonomy has been made which, it is argued, needs to be accompanied by the development of appropriate management capacity, with particular regard to the dangers associated with having freedom to ‘borrow funds’ and ‘pledge assets’ (Johanson and Adams 2004, 79).

There are, however, quite promising rewards if decentralisation is carefully managed; both from the perspective of the state, in its reduction of responsibility, and from the perspective of institutions, who are able to ensure some carefully considered responses to local and

national priorities. Clearly the allure of a short-term solution occasioned by reduced funding responsibility should be balanced by the need to ensure that, in a developing context, the crisis in TVET requires the input of considerable resources, financial, physical and human. Thus in understanding, and resolving, the crisis faced by the TVET sector, there is a need to ensure that its national importance is not undermined by a response that focuses on 'short-termism', as is the allure in devolution of cost reduction. Transformation, it has been argued, is necessarily costly and resource-intensive (Jansen 2004, 3), and there are no short-cuts to ensuring that equity impacts of particular policy decisions are paramount and carefully evaluated. In ensuring that institutions become less dependent on the state, access is likely to be negatively impacted.

Institutions may well need to supplement their functioning by increasing already high user-driven fees. In the best-case scenario, business interests may be favoured in provisioning if more funding is sought from this source, with possible impacts on the articulation of programmes in other contexts. Both of these considerations are likely to negatively affect national development priorities. In addition, it has been contended that decentralisation also involves the risk of local elites 'capturing' power and resources, worsening access for poorer groups, and local government falling short in terms of technical or managerial capacity (Robinson 2007). The power dynamics evident in the functioning of some governing bodies (Adams, Mabunda, and McGrath 2006) lend credence to this in the FET college sector. The negative effects of decentralisation clearly need to be guarded against.

For developing countries, where the market has been considered far too powerful a factor, patterned as it is within a 'survival of the fittest' discourse, devolution can undermine national prerogatives. The deleterious effect of the state losing an overseeing role and being unable to respond to those most vulnerable cannot be underestimated.

The changing context of the South African FET college sector

The importance of skills development in the post-colonial South African national development context is ever-present. Calls for more education and training provision as a result of the skills shortage are also associated with an agenda for a more inclusive system. South African public FET colleges, as technical and vocational skills development entities, therefore represent a crucial component of the success of education and training endeavours.

The incoming democratic government was faced with a college sector that was not fit for its purpose (Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008; Kraak and Hall 1999; DoE 2001). In addition to the duplication of facilities, significant resource discrepancies resulted in a considerable difference in capacity between the various racial entities. In particular, some institutions were located disingenuously far from centres of economic activity and discrepancies between programme offerings and the demands of industry have been particularly targeted as issues needing urgent attention (McGrath 2004, Badroodien and Kallaway 2003). Many colleges in particular were considered to be of poor quality, and the sector in general conformed to the low-status label that was accorded to those not responding to white students, as a result of the resource deficiencies pertaining in the sector (Kraak and Hall 1999). The South African FET college system, therefore, is subject to the legacy of a skewed racial system.

The late 1990s saw a process of policy development for the then technical college sector, which resulted in the Further Education and Training Act (No. 98 of 1998) (RSA 1998). The vision for transformation espoused by this Act led to the development of a New Institutional Landscape (DoE 2001) that merged the 150 colleges into 50 new public FET college entities. The FET College Act (RSA 2006) amends key recommendations of this Act.

FET colleges in South Africa are expected not only to provide skills that respond to the economic development prerogatives of the country, but also to expand access by inclusion. Economic development is intimately tied to social equity by ensuring that those excluded in the past are incorporated in the new democratic order. Thus the *New Institutional Landscape for Public Further Education and Training Colleges* (DoE 2001), which led to the establishment of 50 new institutions, was charged at the outset to become more responsive to development goals and to the labour market. In keeping with this dual agenda, it is therefore not surprising that the sector has received unprecedented attention from the highest level of government. The current Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, from the outset made clear the vital importance of public FET colleges in improving national competitiveness, as well as inclusiveness; a message was reinforced in the first State of the Nation address of the new Parliament (Mbeki 2004) and in the subsequent Programme of Action for this five-year term of office (RSA 2004a). Similarly the Ministry of Labour has also, in its National Skills Development Strategy, argued for the central role of FET colleges in delivery of sectoral skills (DoL 2005).

The skills development agenda in general, and the role of colleges within these, has also been given a significant boost by the introduction of the new socio-economic vision in 2006 – the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). In this regard, the key skills development component of AsgiSA, the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), establishes the basis for the importance of skills development and the role of colleges to respond to key skills deficits (McGrath and Akoojee 2007a).

Official policy pronouncements have been accompanied by some significant FET sectoral developments. In addition to mergers, the injection of funds (of R1.9 billion) to revive the sector has been accompanied by an overhaul of the curriculum in 2007. Thus the intention to expand enrolment by more than a million learners by 2015 is premised on the need for inclusion as much as it is on development. These developments are invariably designed to translate into the need to make colleges respond to the new order associated with widening participation, and lifelong learning, and which contributes to intermediate knowledge and skills for national human resource development. Importantly, it also provides the basis for urban and rural renewal and the creation of a new citizenry (Young 2006; McGrath 2004).

Clearly, this ‘necessary’ faith in TVET as crucial to national development is reinforced by the legacy of uneven development. The attempt to respond to high levels of unemployment, poverty and crime, and the immediate needs of infrastructure development occasioned, *inter alia*, by the hosting of the Soccer World Cup in 2010, makes the sector a crucial feature of South Africa’s economic and social development (McGrath and Akoojee 2007a). In many respects the quite alarming instance of xenophobic violence endemic at the time this paper was written (May 2008) has been attributed to the failure of social and economic policy. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the low skills base of South Africans is considered an important reason for the upheaval, as the country has to rely more and more on imported skills as a result of the poor skills base (Mapenzauswa 2008).

The changing legislation: from FET teacher to lecturer

The current legislation is associated with a more deliberate devolution trend than has hitherto been experienced. The FET Act of 2006 provides for colleges to expand council functions by making them responsible for employment of staff. In terms of *Chapter 4, clauses 19–21*, the college council is responsible for the appointment and funding of all staff, referred to as lecturers, except for management (defined as the principal and vice principal).

While college councils are expected to report to the Department on their post establishment, the actual responsibility and the manner in which the estimated costs are expected to be met has effectively been devolved to institutions.

This change marks a decisive shift from the 1998 FET College Act (RSA 1998, 14.1), which determined that college staff were to be appointed from the provincial educator post establishment created and funded by the Member of Executive Council (MEC)² at provincial level. While this legislation laid the basis for college appointments by allowing what was referred to as 'college-funded appointments', considerable attention was paid to ensuring that there was some degree of uniformity in their appointment. The expressed proviso that the salary of college appointments was 'not [to] be less than [a state paid educator] ... who performs the same or equivalent work' (RSA 1998, 14.4b) ensured that some system-wide uniformity prevailed.

The new legislation, by ensuring that all appointments are made at institutional level, allows for considerably divergent practices to exist and marks a concerted change from previous legislation.

Genesis of staffing devolution in South Africa

Changes in staffing need to be understood as more than a response to calls made by international organisations for devolution. Peculiar historical features, together with circumstances preceding the 2006 legislation, have clearly contributed to the development.

Historical antecedents

The impetus for decentralisation has important continuities with some elements of the sector in the apartheid past. In 1994, the newly elected democratic government inherited two types of technical colleges: state and state-aided. This dichotomy, which rested on the pre-1994 imbalance of historically advantaged versus historically disadvantaged colleges, was distinguished on the basis of governance, legal status and financial management. State technical colleges, associated with disadvantage, were almost completely controlled by the government, with the governing body exercising only advisory powers. Operating costs for these institutions were paid by the state. Tuition fees that were paid into the state revenue fund were tightly controlled. Formerly 'white' state-aided colleges, on the other hand, were self-governing entities, funded by subsidy according to full-time equivalents (FTEs). Tuition fees were determined by council, with the college at liberty to raise additional funds and disburse as it saw fit. Almost half (46%) of all colleges were state-aided up to the time of the declaration of technical colleges as FET colleges by the Minister of Education in September 2001. This precursor of a devolved structure, however, stopped short of staffing appointments. While this model might well be considered to be effectively revived in the new era, the reality of a mass democratic system and intake on basis of a less exclusionary student selection mechanism in the new era needs to be considered. Importantly, the human resource capacity and the networks that existed in the past that were crucial to its success have, by and large, exited the system.

On the basis of this model, policy proposals after 1994 made clear that devolution was not only required, but necessary. Unsurprisingly, the first comprehensive report on FET policy in the post-apartheid era, *Framework for the Transformation of Further Education and Training in South Africa* (DoE 1997) makes a compelling case for a future devolved FET college sector (see, for instance, p. 71/2 of the report). The very tangible constitutional imperative for education access, boldly identified in the back cover of the document,³

appeared to have won the day, albeit inadvertently and in the face of the obvious support for it in some quarters. The Committee favoured a more state-centred policy, and devolution was not carried through in the subsequent FET Act (1998).

That report also makes a compelling case for a very different staffing structure than the state appointment of personnel, pointing to an 'inevitable ... growth in part-time or short contract work', as a necessary component of the responsiveness agenda (DoE 1997, 153). The fact that it was not carried through reflects concerns with capacity in the inherited structure. Nevertheless, the most important impetus for the devolution of staff lay in the in the period immediately prior to the 2006 legislation and the very real challenges to which it was subject.

Immediate precursor to calls for staffing devolution

The most vital element in the trend that resulted in a devolved structure is the staffing trends and the very real decline in staffing in the sector in the aftermath of the 1998 legislation.

Table 1 shows staff trends in the aftermath of the 1998 legislation and the build-up to the 2006 legislation.

It shows an overall increase in student headcount enrolments by 39% and an associated decline in staff of 9%. This disproportional decline in staffing, leading to an overall staff–student ratio decline from 1:38.6 in 1999 to 1:58.9 in 2005, represents considerable stress in the sector. This proportional increase of almost 51% in learner–educator ratio in the six-year period resulted in considerable stress and calls for a changed staffing structure.

While it could be argued that reducing staff was necessary in order to eliminate inefficiencies in the sector, the stark decline in educators was likely to have a detrimental impact on workloads and quality. This was especially stressful in a period of intense uncertainty associated with the implementation of institutional mergers in that period. Thus despite a decline in student numbers from 2003 onwards, the staff reduction was considerable. In

Table 1. Staffing (establishment and non-establishment) and headcount learner enrolment trends 1999–2005.

Year	Learners		Educators		L/E Ratio
	Headcounts	% change over previous year	Total Numbers	% change over previous year	Ratio
1999*	271900		7038		38.6
2000	337300	24%	6756	–4%	49.9
2001**	356049	6%	7233	7%	49.2
2002	406145	14%	7088	–2%	57.3
2003***	406145	0%	7088	0%	57.3
2004	394027	–3%	6477	–9%	60.8
2005	377584	–4%	6407	–1%	58.9
Total % change from 1999 to 2005		39%		–9%	

Sources: Cited from DoE 2004b, 2005a, b, c, 2006a 'Education Statistics in South Africa at a Glance (various years)'; except for 1999 figures* determined from Powell and Hall (2002).

* DoE 2002, 23 (figure quoted for 1999 for colleges).

** Rationalisation of colleges (leading to data recorded for the 50 merged entities).

*** Figure repeated in terms of DoE data (DoE 2004).

Table 2. Staffing 2000–2002 (establishment versus non-establishment posts).

	2000	2002	% increase
Establishment posts	5659	5903	4.3
Non-Establishment posts	1097	1185	8
Ratio: Establishment – Non-	0.19	0.20	
Total	6756	7088	4.9

Source: Figures cited from Powell and Hall 2004, 2002.

the period 2003/4, a learner decline of 3% was complemented by a reduction of 9% of educators. These trends make understandable the plea by stakeholders within the sector for a more effective staffing configuration that would respond to their eroding staff base (DoE 2004; McGrath 2004).

Not unsurprisingly, the severe understaffing led to colleges increasing the college-funded non-establishment component (DoE 2004, 52). Table 2 shows that in the period 2000–2002, although establishment posts increased by only 4.3% (from 5659 to 5903 official staff), the non-establishment component experienced an 8% increase (from 1097 to 1185).

Interestingly, as Table 1 shows, student enrolments far outstripped both increases by 20%, which led to increasing staff–student ratios.

Another mechanism to resolve staffing shortages in the period was the increasing resort to acting appointments. It has been estimated that around 15% of staff nationally, and 22% of staff at post-Level 2,⁴ were acting in their post, suggesting that while they held them, no permanent appointments could be made (DoE 2004, 47). The negative impact on morale of these personnel was considerable, and was intimately related to the slowness of getting new staff establishments agreed and funded by provinces and/or delays in the appointment process. However, the situation required some response, and was indeed considered an important reason for calls for a changed staffing situation (see also HSRC 2006; McGrath and Akoojee 2007b, 315).

Immediate precursor: The DoE report. The recommendation for staffing devolution was contained in a national Department of Education report on staffing responsiveness (DoE 2004), which provides for two possible scenarios and makes reference to the international dimension of this situation:

Two possible scenarios are suggested. The first provides for provincial departments to begin to phase in transfer payments to individual colleges so that College Councils can make their own decisions regarding appointments. In the second scenario, a longer-term option, colleges become the employers of all their staff. While this second scenario raises questions about current college capacity to act as employer, *this approach would bring South African FET Colleges in line with those in the UK, Australia and elsewhere*. Both scenarios place colleges in a better position to employ the staff they require and to develop their own conditions of service. (DoE 2004, 14–15, emphasis added)

While both options defer staff responsibility to colleges, they differ regarding the source of funding for these appointments. The first assumes a state-funded structure, while the second, a ‘more sustainable’ [sic] self-funded recommendation. Clearly the cautionary note about college council capacity appears to be dismissed amidst the eagerness to respond to international (read: developed) antecedents, despite limited evidence of the success of this strategy in other contexts.

The advantage of institutional accountability and its impact on the ‘responsiveness’ agenda appears to be the paramount advantage of a devolved staffing structure. The need to

‘optimise college operations’ by institutionalising staffing practices (DoE 2004, 15) provides the rationality for devolution. In addition to providing ‘recognition’, rewards and incentives for staff, the advantages of an alternative staffing arrangement to enable flexible work hours have been identified. Demand-led provisioning clearly requires flexible hours of operation, multiple delivery modes on- and off- campus and in industrial sites, and staff conditions of service that enable them to respond (DoE 2004, 20). Notwithstanding the need for changing conditions of service of staff, it needs to be asked whether such drastic contractual changes were necessary.

Clearly, these changes have been designed to ensure institutional accountability and shift from the current centrally steered funding structure, based on a mix of programme and learner enrolment, to one that is institutionally determined. Steady decentralisation pre-empted a period of a vastly reduced state funding liability.

Implications of devolved staffing structure

The likely impact of the new legislation on the sector can be surmised from the current situation pertaining to the sector. Recommendations to avert the most deleterious effects of the legislation are, on the basis of this evidence, used to warn against the pitfalls of the latest policy proposals. The issues of student enrolment, their impact on staff equity in terms of both race and gender, and the track record of current councils in terms of staff working conditions and funding (and equity) are assessed.

Student enrolment

To what extent does the new devolved staffing structure enhance medium- to long term plans regarding expansion of the sector? Latest publicly available learner estimates assert that the system had 377,584 learners in 2005 (DoE 2006c). This number is vastly lower than the one million envisaged in ministerial speeches, and considerably below the 737,472 learners in the higher education sector. It has been argued that the FET sector needs to have a larger intake than higher education if South Africa’s intermediate-level skills development human resource prerogatives are to be achieved.

Some promising trends were evident in the analysis of student composition of the sector in the period 2000–2002. In the quest to expand enrolment by diversifying the existing student cohort, the sector saw an increased ‘non-traditional adult learner’ cohort, evidenced by considerable growth in non-traditional programmes. This required an increased part-time lecturer component to respond to the increased provision of short, non-NATED⁵ (National Technical Education) courses at times suitable to the new client (Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008). Clearly, this makes it necessary for a new type of staff employment practice to ensure that the necessary staffing requirements will be met to keep pace with these. The new staffing structure will, therefore, suit the flexibility required for such a new order if this objective is to be pursued.

More recent trends directed at expanding the learner enrolment through inclusion of school-level Grade 10 learners, by offering an alternative school-leaving certificate National Curriculum (Vocational) (NCV),⁶ appear to be counter-intuitive to the objective of developing a vibrant post-school, pre-employment sector. While this measure is likely to increase numbers, it is also likely to negatively impact on the college mission of responding to the national skills deficit, as the mechanics of employment trade testing has not been finalised. If this is indeed the future direction that colleges are expected to take, it would

render more flexible staffing provisioning unnecessary, as school-level provisioning does not require flexible staffing.

The benefit of a devolved staffing structure is undermined by current school-based intake. While much will depend on the nature and extent of the overall programme-based funding structure, the direct student funding already evident in the 2008 year for the intake of school-based learners might well result in a steady income stream which, while it would provide the basis for sustaining the new devolved college staffing structure, will make it unnecessary.

Staff equity and diversity

In the South African context, the capacity for changes to respond to equity and diversity criteria is crucial in light of our fractured past. The current nature of the race and gender profile and the capacity of the devolved staffing structure in responding to these requirements need to be understood.

Race profile

When considered in tandem with student figures, the racial profile of the staff shows that the predominantly African student population in 2002 (at 74%) had still to be accompanied by a parallel staffing trend. Since students struggle to perform optimally in an environment that is not ‘culturally responsive’ (DoE 2004, 48), the basis for increased diversity has been identified. Recent evidence of increasing diversity of the staffing demographics in the sector provides optimism of success in the state-controlled system. A decline in white staff in the period 2000–2002, from 51% to 46%, and an associated increased African component, from 39% to 41% (Powell and Hall 2004, 2002), provided the basis for optimism. This trend is also evident in the management profile. Although black staff remained under-represented in managerial grades, at 40% at middle management and 41% at senior management level in 2002, there has been an associated improvement in this respect (Powell and Hall 2004).

Table 3 identifies the racial profile of the staff in the period 2000 and 2002, pointing to the increasing diversity in this two-year period.

While the recent past has noted some promising demographic changes in the sector, the cause of further transformation is unlikely to be served by a devolved staffing structure. The capacity of changing demographics is more likely to be served by a centralised structure.

Staffing and gender

Gender representivity of college staff has always been of concern, particularly at the more senior levels of the college hierarchy. The relatively small overall staff gender parity (53%

Table 3. Racial profile of staff by occupational level.

Post Level Grouping	2000		2002	
	Black	White	Black	White
Lecturing staff	49%	51%	54%	46%
Middle management	37%	63%	40%	60%
Senior management	38%	62%	41%	59%

Source: cited in Powell and Hall 2004, 2002.

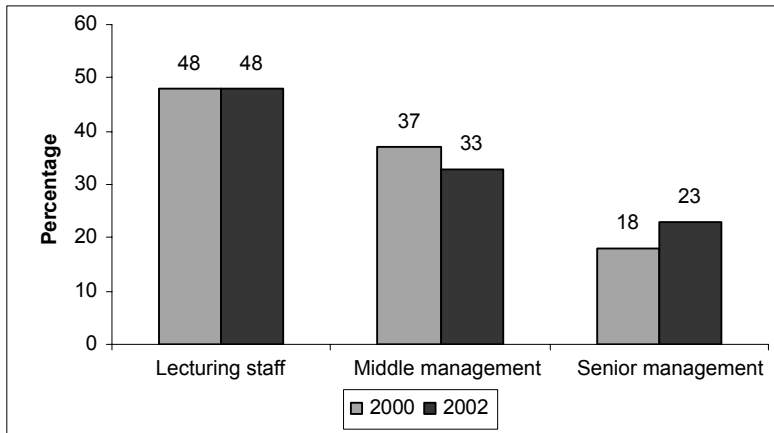


Figure 1. Female staff composition as percentages of total staff complement by occupational level: 2000–2002.

Source: Powell and Hall 2004, 2002.

male and 47% female in 2002), though consistent with programme trends,⁷ masks the very real lack of female representation at upper management level. Figure 1, which depicts changes of female staff at the various occupational levels in the period 2000 and 2002, shows a markedly lower female representation at senior (23%) and middle management levels (33%) in 2002.

Although the comparison with the previous period shows that there were proportionately more females in management structures than in 2000, the proportion of females at lecturer level, the level that is likely to feed other levels, has remained stable at 48%, showing the limited potential of improvement on this equity indicator.

Gender segmentation with respect to enrolments in vocational fields and progress on promoting female staff into management positions remain a serious concern, as has been noted elsewhere (Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008). It is not, however, clear how a devolved staffing structure might respond to these national challenges.

College councils

The role of college councils is critical to the success or otherwise of the devolved staffing arrangement. An International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) report into governance of FET colleges in South Africa (IIEP 2006) provides important insight into the current functioning of governing bodies at merged FET colleges and their capacity to undertake this function. The document laments the lack of capacity as one in which there is 'widespread problem ... particularly for community, student and worker representatives and for rural colleges' (ibid., 39). There was concern also that council members were not sufficiently well-informed about their responsibilities. In particular, they are seen as rarely knowing much about the details of how the FET sector does and should operate. Indeed, many informants felt that council members were largely ignorant of the relevant legislation, '...except where they have received training, and sometimes even then' (IIEP 2006, 36).

Importantly, there was also a limited sense of the implications of the financial management expectations of college councils, in spite of the guidelines provided by a leading auditing firm tasked to provide these.⁸ The experiences of the UK colleges⁹ in the late 1990s provide

more than adequate lessons for South Africa in this respect: colleges were investigated for financial irregularities, which even precipitated a House of Commons Select Committee of Enquiry into Standards of Probity in the Sector (Hodge 1998). In this case, those exposed were considered to be simply the tip of the iceberg, indicating that there were likely to be widespread malpractices that had not been exposed (Gleeson 2001).

In this respect, with regard to the South African case, the indication in the 2006 report that some council members were seen as following their own business interests in their participation in college councils suggests some cause for concern, although the practice was not widespread, as the report points out.

More importantly, the ability of councils to appoint non-establishment personnel in the era prior to the new legislation was limited. The IIP report notes that 'Councils are struggling with the issue of making appointments themselves, which remains problematic' (IIEP 2006, 43). While the reasons for this have not been identified, the fact that there was some difficulty with appointments is cause for concern. Clearly, less well-resourced colleges might well find the process difficult to implement.

Providing emerging councils with such a significant responsibility as staffing might well be problematic in light of the 'power imbalances' that are still evident. In view of questions regarding current conduct, the readiness of current councils to undertake the 'employer' responsibility appears naïve. There is therefore a need for some concerted training, development and oversight that needs to be undertaken at institutional level if the more deleterious consequences of staff devolution are to be avoided.

Staff working conditions

In a quest to make the FET college system more responsive and demand-led, devolution and decentralisation have been considered inevitable (see earlier section on international context). Indeed, an earlier policy document (DoE 1997) suggested that casualisation and temporary staff were considered to be an inevitable by-product of responsiveness. In this regard, the UK experience of devolution has been described as resulting in 'the worst industrial relations record in the public sector since the miners' strike in the early 1980s' (Gleeson 2001, 181, quoting Burchill 1998). Clearly, the initial impact of devolution needs to be accommodated and some concerted attention needs to be paid to the initial crisis likely to be provoked in the immediate aftermath of the new arrangement. The impact of demoralisation resulting from feelings of displacement means that some concerted attention needs to be paid to ensure that staff expertise is retained. Long-term initiatives are also necessary to ensure that the anticipated casualisation and negative managerialism, as identified in the UK context (see Avis 2005; Simkins 2000; Gleeson, Davies, and Wheeler 2005; Lucas 2004), do not materialise.

Indeed, if the experience of college-level appointments is to be heeded, that of non-establishment staff in the period 1999–2005 is not a positive one to go by. College-level appointments were in any event marked by worse pay and poorer conditions of service, which contributed to the lack of attractiveness of these positions, which is why many staff on establishment posts do not opt for them (Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008).

The experiences of the UK college sector in the immediate aftermath of devolution and the experiences of non-establishment college staff in South Africa indicate that mechanisms should be put in place to cushion its detrimental effects. This is not to minimise the possibility that a college-level devolved staffing structure might hold in enabling greater flexibility of working hours. There is, therefore, need for some deliberate support and development in this new function provided to councils.

Funding and impacts on systemic equity

The new college staff employment practice is likely to have adverse impacts on systemic equity. If the experience of schooling is to be heeded, the move to a more devolved post-apartheid governance has resulted in quite negative equity impacts, and increased fee structures in particular (see Fiske and Ladd 2004; Crouch 2005).

As Chisholm (2004, 11) argues with regard to the schooling system and education system in general, 'Despite the best will and policies in the world, an education system has unintentionally emerged that privileges a deracialised middle class'.

In higher education, while the system has been traditionally devolved, concerns about its equity have been raised in a post-apartheid era. It has been argued that although universities and universities of technology have allowed entry to those traditionally excluded, this has resulted in increased failure rates and inequity (see, for instance, latest work on the issue by Letseka and Maile 2008). This 'revolving door' has resulted in 'access as participation', rather than 'access with success' (Akoojee and Nkomo 2007).

In the FET college sector, the result of devolution is likely to be more pronounced in light of the differentiated nature of the sector. Some colleges have remained small, while others have been found to have experienced 'growing pains' as a result of their attempt to rapidly expand (Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser 2008, 276). Current funding arrangements reinforce this pattern. Table 4 shows in comparative terms the funding dispersed to the FET college sector, as compared to other sectors, and as a proportion of total education expenditure. The average provincial expenditure of 1.75% of education budget is disbursed for FET colleges through provinces in the 2002–2003 financial year appears relatively minimal by any standards.

Although evidence indicates that this spending has subsequently been enhanced (see Vinjevold 2006), the additional funds have not been exclusively obtained from government. In this regard, the additional one-off government recapitalisation of R1.9 billion (about £150 million) has assisted in developing the sector. However, continued sustained sources of funding remain elusive if the advantage of this initial injection is to be meaningful.

The differential attention at provincial level is, nevertheless, positively correlated with funding and support. The way in which college funding has been structured ensures that

Table 4. Funding of FET colleges.

Spending	1999/2000	*2001/2	*2002/3	
*GDP	809	958	1036	Billions
*Education	48	54	56.5	Billion
	5.9%	5.6%	5.4%	
*GET inc college	40.5	45.5	48	Billion
% of Education	84.38%	84.26%	84.96%	
*HET	6.2	7	7.3	Billion
% of GDP	0.82%	0.78%	0.71%	
% of Education	12.92%	12.96%	12.92%	
**College Sector	827	869	979	Million
% of Ed. Exp.	1.48%	1.55%	1.75%	
% of Provincial Exp		1.8% of Provincial Budgets		

Sources: * DoE 2006: Table 1: GDP, Total State Finance and State Finance of Education <http://www.education.gov.za/mainDocuments.asp?src=dvie&xsrc=165>

** RSA 2004b, Table 4.5 Provincial education expenditure by programme 2000/1 to 2006/7, p. 44.

colleges get the least attention in the overall education and training system. While funds for colleges come from provinces rather than the national government, provinces have the right to spend their budgets (allocated to them by National Treasury) in ways that they see fit. The implication of this for FET colleges is that the national department cannot prescribe how much is spent on colleges. This is potentially very serious, as most provincial FET college directorates, in keeping with that of the national department, fall under more senior officials who are primarily judged on the province's performance in the secondary school examinations.

While national government needs to ensure that some parity is to be achieved, a longer-term solution needs to be found to ensure national uniformity and consistency for the sector as whole in the country; especially if the new legislation is to be accompanied by a steady funding stream, necessary for sustaining college funding.

Decentralisation is associated with less, rather than more, funding. Indeed, governments have been notorious in attempting to fund decentralised sectors less than those directly under their control. Evidence suggests that this is a mistake. Indeed, it has been found that there is an increased need for support and development to ensure that the intentions are not subverted and institutions destroyed (Robinson 2007). The requirement of responsiveness means that considerably more, rather than fewer, resources are necessary, at least in the short to medium term, especially in light of the systemic redress that is necessary for the sector in particular and in light of the historical deficits that pertain to the sector. Some colleges require less support than others, and targeted funds should be allocated for priority areas to ensure the success of decentralisation efforts.

The lack of attention to funding will simply exacerbate, rather than reduce, disparities in the sector and are more than likely to impact negatively on the redress and equity imperative evident in policy pronouncements. While devolution of responsibility to institutional level has succeeded in removing a significant layer of governance that was arguably less responsive than necessary, whether the proposals represent a concerted shift in a positive direction is debatable. They are likely to be disastrous if not accompanied by concerted support and development, which might well require additional resources.

Conclusion

FET college lecturers represent a crucial component of the skills development challenge in South Africa. Increasing student numbers and diversifying (and making more responsive) programme offerings need to be matched by improvements in the quantity and quality of teaching staff. In this regard, the issue of employment status is particularly relevant for overall sector development. The current legislation, which is directed at providing more responsibility to college councils for staffing, comes at a time when the sector least needs this devolved responsibility.

The paper has explored the reasons for this movement towards more devolution. In addition to international directives for devolution, the origins of this development is rooted in the situation pertaining to some pre-1994 colonial college models, as well as the staffing deficit identified in the period 1999–2005. This complex set of features makes devolution almost acceptable, except for the staff involved. The positive impact of the decentralised staffing appointment structure is council capacity to determine staff requirements based on requirement needs. However, dangers lurk. Primary amongst these is that college council capacity has been found to be 'uneven' at best (Adams, Mabunda, and McGrath 2006). Without a dynamic and sustained programme of support, the likelihood of success is limited.

Devolution also has in-built risks that are likely to unseat the national equity project in South Africa. Colleges that have already been advantaged in the old order are likely to be empowered to succeed with the new initiative, whereas those disadvantaged are likely to be hampered by their capacity deficits. Without concerted support and development, historical legacies are likely to become entrenched, subverting national policy in this regard.

The changing nature of the expertise required by FET college staff means that significant initial preparation (of incoming staff) and some quite urgent re-skilling needs to take place amongst new staff if the impact of the new curriculum, the NCV, is to be realised. The issue of who is to fund these initiatives is especially significant given the reluctance by provinces to fund FET colleges. If colleges are responsible for this aspect, the capacity of less-resourced colleges to undertake this responsibility is likely to be undermined.

Notes

1. Further Education and Training Colleges (FET) colleges are the equivalent of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. The sector is referred to as Further Education (FE) college sector in the UK.
2. MEC (Member of Executive Council) represents the highest political authority for education at provincial level.
3. Chapter 2.29 (1) of the Constitution states the following with regard to further education: 'Everyone has a right to ... further education, which the state, through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible' (RSA 1996).
4. This post level refers to those staff above the rank of 'educator'. They may include departmental heads and other personnel holding particular specialised positions based at institutional head offices.
5. NATED refers to the National Technical Education courses offered as part of the official curriculum prescribed by the Department prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum (Vocational) (NCV), first introduced in 2007.
6. This programme, introduced in 2007, is currently delivered at levels 2–4 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
7. Lecturer specialisation is, of course, reflective of the still-genderised occupational patterns, with female staff represented in business-related programmes, and considerably under-staffed in typically male vocational areas, such as engineering.
8. A leading auditing multinational, KPMG, was tasked to provide extensive guidelines regarding the financial responsibility of college councils.
9. Colleges in the UK responded to devolution under a framework established by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992. Under this legislation, colleges were granted full legal autonomy as corporations, with responsibility for staff, assets and financial management, with their core funding provided on a formula basis (Simkins 2000).

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