

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PUBLIC FET COLLEGES

**Paper prepared for the project:**  
**Towards credible institutional mechanisms for skills  
planning**



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& training**  
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## Preface

One of the gravest economic challenges facing South Africa is high unemployment, but at the same time, a skills mismatch. The market demand for skilled labour is greater than the number of individuals completing post-school education and training. Prospective employers often complain that the education system does not give individuals the necessary skills to be productive in the workplace, or to start their own enterprises.

Government acknowledges that the unemployment crisis is a systematic problem and cannot be addressed by ad hoc interventions scattered across line departments. With this 'big picture' thinking in mind, DHET aims to create broad and equitable access to a full spectrum of post-school opportunities and lifelong learning encompassing adult education and training, workplace training, the FET college system, artisan and technical training, higher education and innovation.

DHET's ability to create these learning opportunities requires a network of partners to gather and maintain a labour market intelligence system. Such a system can provide analytical insights to support policies and intervention programmes.

In February 2012, therefore, DHET commissioned a HSRC led research consortium to support its capacity to create and maintain a labour market information and intelligence system, guided by the national Delivery Agreement 5. The primary focus is the development of a 'strategic intelligence capability' towards the establishment of 'a credible institutional mechanism for skills planning'. The HSRC coordinated research project is organised in terms of six interlocking research themes, two which focus on labour market information and four which focus on labour market intelligence:

- Theme 1. Establishing a foundation for labour market information systems in South Africa
- Theme 2. Skills forecasting: the supply and demand model (*a Wits EPU projects*)
- Theme 3. Studies of selected priority sectors
- Theme 4. Reconfiguring the post-schooling sector
- Theme 5. Pathways through education and training and into the workplace
- Theme 6. Understanding changing artisanal occupational milieus and identities

The consortium made a strategic decision that their research must not duplicate or repeat existing research about the challenges facing South Africa's education and training system and labour markets. Their research must address gaps, promote synergies and explore complementarities.

Hence, as a first step, working papers were commissioned to inform the research agenda for each theme. Although the working papers cover different issues, each has four common dimensions: policy challenges to institutionalise and build a post-school education and training system in South Africa, lessons from seminal national and international research, conceptual frameworks, methodological issues and data challenges raised by this research, and potential research gaps.

One of the HSRC led consortium's goals is to create a living community of practice that researches and debates education, skills and labour market issues. These working papers were presented at a conference in May 2012 to start building such a research network.

The dissemination of these working papers is intended to encourage more individuals to join the research community. We look forward to individuals' comments. They can be emailed to [agoldstuck@hsrc.za.za](mailto:agoldstuck@hsrc.za.za). Welcome to the research community!

Theme 1:	Theme 3:	Theme 4:	Theme 5:	Theme 6:
<b>Establishing a foundation for labour market information system in South Africa</b>	<b>Studies of selected priority sectors</b>	<b>Reconfiguring the post-schooling sector</b>	<b>Pathways through education and training into the workplace</b>	<b>Understanding changing artisanal occupational milieus and identities</b>
<b>Simon McGrath</b> Some international reflections on developing VET indicators	<b>Haroon Bhorat and Morne Oosthuizen</b> Studies of Selected Priority Sectors in the South African Labour Market: A Proposed Research Programme	<b>Andre Kraak</b> Private post-school education in South Africa	<b>Michael Cosser</b> Pathways through education and training and into the labour market	<b>Angelique Wildschut</b> Conceptualising the study of artisans
<b>Phil Toner</b> Establishing a foundation for labour market information systems in South Africa	<b>Peter Jacobs and Tim Hart</b> A critical review of the research on skills development in rural areas	<b>Andre Kraak</b> Differentiation in the post-school sector	<b>Pundy Pillay</b> Pathways through education and training and into the workplace: a concept paper	<b>Jeanne Gamble</b> Models and pathways to institutionalise apprenticeships
<b>Anthony Gewer</b> Developing a framework for institutional planning and monitoring in FET Colleges	<b>Shirin Motala</b> A critical review of research on skills development and labour market demand in the early childhood development sector	<b>Joy Papier et al</b> Contemporary issues in public FET colleges	<b>Sharlene Swartz</b> Navigational capacities for youth employment: A review of research, policies, frameworks and methodologies	
<b>Carmel Marock</b> Developing a framework for understanding SETA performance: Monitoring and evaluating their role in skills planning, steering and enabling a supply within their sector	<b>Thembinkosi Twalo</b> A comparative review of skills development in cooperatives	<b>Veronica McKay</b> A critical review on Adult Basic Education (ABET) in South Africa	<b>Fiona Lewis</b> Traffic jams or trees – how are South African youth progressing through the higher education sector? And what lessons can we learn from current studies?	
<b>Bongiwe Mncwango</b> Towards a demand side firm level survey of labour information in South Africa	<b>Margaret Chitiga and Stewart</b> Development of a national skills forecasting model	<b>Thenjiwe Meyiwa and Nolutho Diko</b> The state of graduate teacher transitions to the labour market	<b>Stephanie Alais</b> Jobs? What jobs? Skills? What skills? An overview of studies examining relationships between education and training and labour markets	

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<b>Michael Cosser and Fabian Arendse</b> Education and labour market indicators	<b>Imraan Valodia</b> Conceptualising skills development in the informal sector	<b>Felix Maringe</b> An overview of studies exploring systemic issues related to the South African post-school sector		
<b>Joan Roodt</b> National database sets and research on labour market demand		<b>Peliwe Lolwana</b> Is post-school education adult education and training? The shape and size of post-school education		
<b>Mariette Visser</b> National database sets available for post school sector (supply side)		<b>Michelle Buchler</b> A critical review of research on skills development qualifications structures		
<b>Michael Gastrow</b> Innovation, skills development and South African labour market intelligence		<b>Volker Wedekind</b> Towards responsiveness and employability in the post-school sector		

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This concept paper provides a snapshot view of salient contemporary issues in public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges arising out of successive policy interventions since 1998. The paper does not dwell on early concomitant developments in education and training more generally, for example in higher education, skills development, schooling, SAQA and the National Qualifications Framework, as the current reconfiguration of the Post-Schooling sector is more relevant to the future of FET colleges and vocational education.

Within the broader context of recent legislation affecting FET Colleges, reside a host of unresolved matters including staffing, curriculum and quality assurance, and college identity related to purpose, target audience and range of programmes. These matters will require urgent attention, not least for the impact they will have on related labour market theorising, but they cannot be hastily addressed – they will require proper debate and the judicious use of reliable data. An indication of the broader conceptual debates in established international systems of vocational education and training is provided to show that the questions we are grappling with in South Africa are not unique, and will find traction within external discourses which are often polarized and strongly bifurcated.

Against the background of unresolved policy issues in colleges and relevant broader conceptual debates we introduce themes distilled from some of the extant research produced within South Africa, in the form of policy monographs, commissioned research and postgraduate studies. However our local knowledge base is tiny compared with that of established vocational systems on these issues. We will have to begin the arduous task of building our research and knowledge base by drawing on lessons learned further afield, and growing our research capacity to provide the robust empirical data that is so critically needed for establishing a dynamic, viable vocational education and training system which meets the needs of our most marginalized learners.

Finally, the issues summarised in each of the main areas of the document from the various unresolved matters, the conceptual debates, and the themes in current literature, are taken together into a possible future research agenda that is reflective of the highlighted issues in each sector.

# 1 INTRODUCTION: SUCCESSIVE CHANGE INITIATIVES SINCE 1994

FET Colleges have traversed a long way on the road to shedding their inglorious past, from their time as technical colleges for the training of White workers in a former exclusionary, apartheid- driven employment dispensation. Post-democracy in 1994 the slow journey to reconstruction of this inequitable and neglected education and training sector began. Initial attempts at levelling the playing fields were legislative and structural: the FET Act in 1998 was followed by the mergers of Colleges across the country, new governing Councils and a recapitalization project to modernize infrastructure. In 2006 a new FET Colleges Act was gazetted, changing employment relations and resulting in staff employed by the Department of Education being transferred to the employ of College Councils while Principals and their Deputies remained in the employ of the Provincial Head of Education. A new 'programme funding' regime took a while to be implemented, and in 2007 a new, state-funded official curriculum, the National Certificates Vocational (NCV) was introduced to replace the out-dated Nated (National education) programmes.<sup>1</sup> A National Plan for FET in 2008 set out inter alia, targets for enrolment and outputs at FET colleges, and 2009 saw the first draft of a national framework of lecturer qualifications setting out formal teaching qualifications for college lecturers (still not finalized), in an attempt to professionalise that sector. A major re-conceptualisation of FET colleges and vocational education took place at the first FET Round Table and Summit in 2010, which problematized and made proposals on a host of systemic challenges, which in 2011 had to be taken forward by a new Ministry for Higher Education and Training that brought Universities, FET Colleges, adult education and skills-levy organisations into the same government department, the DHET. The discussions of the FET Summit laid a foundation for the DHET's Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training issued for public comment in February 2012. FET colleges have therefore been in the throes of a changing landscape and successive policy interventions since 1995 when the SAQA Act was passed ushering in a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for South Africa, a 17 year period of uncertainty and instability with huge staff turnover and increasing student diversity, and in some provinces the collapse of College administrations.

In spite of the bleakness of this picture, FET colleges in South Africa have been in the spotlight as never before, and have received major capital investments. Along with a highly subsidized set of offerings that includes both NCV and the now re-instated Nated programmes, further education is within reach of all who seek it: the state funds FET colleges up to 80% of the programme costs of its official curricula, while student fees are required to cover the remaining 20%. The 20% student portion in turn may be covered by NSFAS bursaries extended to FET college students since 2010. However other factors may still impose barriers to access, for example the need for accommodation and transport subsidies for students who cannot afford these costs. In some cases Colleges have

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<sup>1</sup> The Nated programmes were in the process of being phased out by Minister Pandor in the then DoE, but were reinstated by the new Minister Nzimande after representations made by roleplayers in the College sector who argued that these qualifications were known and accepted by employers, and were in demand by learners and their parents.



been able to subsidise transport costs but accommodation remains a problem especially for rural students studying at colleges far from home. As with most policy reform, unintended consequences arise as a result of factors that cannot be controlled for by policymakers. In the case of FET colleges too, new policies had a ripple effect and impacted on matters outside the immediate control of the DHET, necessitating further legislative and other interventions. The following section sets out issues in the FET college sector which are still unresolved. These issues are not unique to South Africa – the trajectory of development in our vocational college sector can be seen particularly in the UK due to South Africa's colonial heritage, but also in other developing systems. The scope of this paper however precludes examining the comparative dimension in some depth.

## **2 UNRESOLVED ISSUES AFFECTING PUBLIC FET COLLEGES**

### **2.1. STAFFING MATTERS**

FET colleges have since their inception been a provincial competence under the Provincial MEC and managed by the Provincial Department of Education (PDE) in each of the nine provinces. However, across the 9 provinces the capacity and resources allocated to colleges have varied markedly, with some provincial departments having specialized directorates and staff to attend to the needs of colleges while others have had limited capacity with integrated portfolios responsible for both schools and colleges. Thus the implementation of college policy dictates has rolled out unevenly across provinces and there is very little uniformity.

The FET Colleges Act of 2006 transferred provincial Department of Education appointed college staff into the employ of College Councils which caused a huge administrative burden on Councils. Staff members who chose to remain in the employ of the provincial DoEs were allowed to do so, though they were subject to redeployment in schools or in the PDE administration in this event. Though colleges were not in a position to administer the payroll for transferred staff members, and the PDE continued to provide this administrative service on the basis of an MoU with colleges, Councils were required to carry out the appointment process and conduct other matters associated with the employer-employee relationship. Many college staff members were organized into one or other labour union at a national level. Councils saw the need to organize themselves into an employer body for purposes of negotiations and labour action together with the national DoE who had conducted negotiations in the relevant bargaining forums previously, hence the FETCEO (Further Education and Training Colleges Employer Organisation) was formed and registered with the Department of Labour. However, this organization remained a token organization at times recognized by the DoE as an employer body and at others not. A vast amount of administration went into the formation of the structure and its representation in the bargaining forum of the ELRC. Given that Councils are voluntary structures and that the FETCEO had no formal standing, obtaining buy-in from all councils was difficult and the organization found itself beset by a host of logistical problems, not least of which was funding to operate effectively. Some college members saw the FETCEO as an

oppositional body to the older SACPO (South African College Principals Organisation) and this sentiment tended to polarize the two organisations.

Furthermore, many of the larger colleges had historically employed out of College funds additional staff almost equal in number to state supported staff, and in the transfer of staff to Councils had to deal with the fact that Colleges would have two sets of staff members employed under different conditions of service. This matter occupied much of the attention of the bargaining Council in attempts to bring about parity of remuneration and benefits for state-and council-appointed staff, as well as parity for College staff generally with teachers in schools who were higher paid and where teachers were being paid a new Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) at the time. Unhappiness also arose from the fact that College Principals and their Deputies remained in the employ of the provincial Head of Education in terms of performance contracts, resulting in the top management of Colleges not being accountable to Councils while all other staff were in their employ, a situation some Councils found untenable.

Discussions on the proper remuneration of College staff included the unfolding understanding in national forums like the FET Colleges Summit, of the vocational college sector as distinct and different to traditional schooling, with a distinctly different target audience who ought to be provided for differently from schools. For instance, there were ideas that colleges should cater for a wide ranging target audience: youth, adults, employed and unemployed and so on - therefore provision should be flexible and diverse, with colleges offering after-hours programmes, open weekends and holidays, and staff time being used flexibly to accommodate this model. Accompanying a shift in thinking about the role, function, purpose and operations of FET colleges, and the increased demands on staff to cope with new curricula, would have to be a change in the conditions of service of college educators. The former Department of Education had in August 2009 issued for public comment a draft framework of college lecturer qualifications setting out envisaged initial and continuing qualifications for college educators, but to date this document has undergone several changes and is still under discussion with labour unions in view of the impact it will have on employment conditions of service and implications for an improved remuneration dispensation. From the foregoing it is apparent that staffing matters have been fraught since 2006 and have required huge investments of the time and energy of Councils, managements and staff in the College sector.

Staff insecurities and the uneven rollout of policy across the provinces resulted in persistent representations to the newly formed DHET to return college staff to State employment. The DHET also announced its intention in 2010 to make FET Colleges a national competence together with universities, and in 2011 the national DHET was able to secure the agreement of Provinces for this. However transfer has not yet occurred in practice and Colleges have a dual accountability to Provinces and to the national DHET. The Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2012) states the intention of the DHET to transfer staff on its former staff establishment to the employ of the national DHET, which will no doubt incur a fresh round of negotiations and concomitant instability as role-players who have argued strongly for state-appointed and council-appointed staff to be treated alike, find the former grouping separated again for purposes of transfer.

In summary then, staffing issues likely to surface in the immediate future are:

- The transfer of the former State staff establishment back from College Councils to the DHET;
- The implications of a new framework of college lecturer qualifications and its impact on a new remuneration dispensation and conditions of service;
- The transfer of top management contracts from PDEs to the DHET
- The status of the FETCEO as an employer body in the national bargaining forum

## **2.2. CURRICULUM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE MATTERS**

In 2007 a new official curriculum, the National Certificates vocational was introduced in 11 fields, mostly representing those fields in which there had historically been high enrolment in the former technical colleges. These new programmes consisted of 7 subjects including three compulsory subjects (Language, Maths/Math Literacy, Life Orientation), and four 'core' subjects associated with the specific programme (e.g. Office Administration, Electrical Engineering, ICT). NCVs are full-time three year programmes at year-long NCV Levels 2, 3 and 4. The curriculum and assessment regime are closely specified by Umalusi with assessments and external examinations set by the National Examinations Department. The design and underpinning philosophy of the NCV can be traced to debates on the kind of knowledge and skills required in a 'modern knowledge economy', a conceptual framing which will be referred to later in this paper. The NCVs were intended to replace the Nated 191 programmes which were to be phased out progressively as the NCVs took their place. However, this did not proceed as planned. First, students in the NCV programmes experienced huge drop-out and failure rates for a variety of reasons which included the unexpectedly high (on the side of students and lecturers alike) cognitive and assessment demands of the NCV programmes.

Second, lecturers were ill-prepared for the many younger learners pushed into NCV programmes by schools when these learners were judged not able to cope with the academic syllabus in schools, as well as older learners who had been out of school for a while and had diverse academic support needs. Third, Colleges complained that the Nated certificates were known and accepted in industry and that employers were confused and unsure of the new NCVs and what learners could do in terms of them, since three years of NCV training did not make the learners eligible for a trade test. Furthermore, working students or those needing to work and study could not afford to stay in College for three years to obtain the NCV4 exit level qualification.

Under pressure, the incoming Minister in 2010 allowed the Nated programmes to continue to operate on the basis that industry should pay for learners undertaking these qualifications, but in 2011 this limitation had to be revoked. The DHET agreed to fund the Nated programmes and allow all eligible students to receive the NSFAS bursary. There is increasing recognition, evident from various public documents such as those emanating from the FET Round Table and the Colleges Summit that the former DoE erred in trying to replace the Nated programmes with the NCVs, as the two types of qualification have different target audiences and serve different purposes (or should, it

is argued). Also arising from the Summit was a strong call for the NCV curricula to be reviewed, particularly those programmes in which the pass and retention rates have been abysmal. Indications are that this review is in process at the level of the construction of the qualification, but there would still need to be an urgent review of the content of specific subject areas in which there have been high failure rates.

Colleges now have three kinds of offerings: NCV full-time, 1 year programmes (now in 15 fields) at Levels 2,3 and 4; theoretical Nated N1-N6 programmes (N1-N3 being trimester programmes (of which N2 and a workplace is needed to do a trade test), and N4-N6 being semester programmes after which 18 months of workplace training is required for a Diploma to be achieved); and occupational programmes of varying duration linked to SETA priorities, learnerships or skills programmes, or offered at the request of an employer or other agency. The immediate issue facing this diversity of offerings is that of quality assurance. Umalusi has and continues to quality assure and certificate the NCVs and Nated N1-N3, however it argues that post-Level 4 qualifications (N4-N6 which it previously quality assured and certificated) are no longer within its remit and falls within the scope of higher education. The HEQF does not have N4-N6 within its mandate, since the structure of these programmes are not catered for on its framework, neither have the N4-N6 programmes been systemically recognized by HEIs except in terms of ad-hoc articulation arrangements. As they stand therefore, there is no certificating authority for N4-N6. While examinations continue to be administered by the National Exams Department, students may only be issued a Statement of Results on the basis of their achievement, a matter which is causing ripples of dissatisfaction among students and parents who argue that employers and other institutions demand to see a Certificate of completion.

Presently in draft form (the public comment period has just closed) is a proposed set of Qualifications Sub-Frameworks for General and Further Education and Training (under Umalusi), Higher Education (under the HEQC) and Trades and Occupations (under the QCTO). The QCTO proposes that College qualifications linked to the workplace (N1-N6) should fall within its domain, however the structure is not yet in place and there is no capacity as yet for this proposal to be operationalized. Umalusi is proposing a Level 5 qualification to fall within its domain (ostensibly a NCV5) but initial responses are that this could cause confusion in the public if it is perceived to be a Higher Certificate at Level 5, which if so should fall within the HEQC's mandate. The HEQC presently has responsibility for Levels 5-10 on its framework. If the proposed NCV5 is a parallel Level 5 qualification the status of it would be questionable, with old problems of articulation and parity of esteem becoming salient.

In sum then, current curriculum and quality assurance issues are:

- The urgent need for a review of the NCV programmes within the context of their perceived relevance and purpose in the spectrum of College offerings;
- The urgent need for N4-N6 quality assurance responsibility to be assigned and certificates to be issued;
- The proposed sub-framework of qualifications to be finalized so that quality assurance domains can be clarified;
- Clarity around the status of Level 5 and quality assurance responsibility for the qualification at this level;
- QCTO to come on-stream and begin to manage its quality assurance mandate.

### **2.3. IDENTITY AND PURPOSE OF FET COLLEGES MATTERS**

Discussions in the FET Round Table and Summit (2010) were particularly robust about the purpose and nature of FET colleges, who colleges should serve, and what they should offer. The point being made in these forums was that FET Colleges should be identified more strongly with a vocational and skills development mandate, as opposed to being identified with general education, which the present NCV qualification seemed to typify. Examples were given of international developing and mature systems of vocational education where skills development and employment were seen as definite outcomes of a vocational education system. Even the name Further Education and Training was suggested to be too weak a signifier, and nomenclature closer to that of other models were proposed, for example, TVET or VET. It was felt that a clearer specified purpose of FET Colleges would signify how they should be named, and would also impact on the kind of staff and staff development needed in such institutions.

The Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2012) picks up on these debates and considers the kind of provision, as well as the target audience of FET Colleges within a newly defined post-school dispensation. Targets for FET college enrolment (which includes adult education centres) are suggested in the Green Paper to be 4 million by 2030. This is a tall order when one considers that presently in 50 colleges across 9 provinces there are under 400 000 learners. It is clear that colleges are going to have to expand massively, but there are no clear indications as yet on what the current capacity of colleges across the country might be, and in which programmes expansion is possible and likely. The urgency of this massification is reinforced by the growing number of NEETs – 2.8 million in 2007, who ought to be engaged in learning or employment of some kind. Challenges faced by colleges at present include the range of programmes that can be offered depending on equipment, learner choices that may entail learners need to travel distances or be accommodated, and possible opportunities for workplace experience or future employment, challenges which are magnified for students in rural areas.

The question of institutional differentiation in the College sector is also raised in the Green Paper, suggesting that colleges may be allowed more or less autonomy depending on how 'strong' or how 'weak' they are, which may impact on the kind of programmes that they deliver. For instance, stronger colleges as defined by the DHET, could offer higher education programmes (Level 5/6) in partnership with a university if they have the physical and human resources required to do so.

However, questions on the nature and purpose of FET college education are yet to be resolved, and may be informed by the public comment received on the Green Paper, the closing date for which is 30 April 2012.

In sum, identity issues likely to need attention are:

- Stating a clear purpose of FET colleges and who they should serve
- Defining the range of college offerings (its programme qualifications mix)
- Setting criteria for differentiation in the college sector
- Considering the appropriateness of the 'naming' of FET college education

If FET colleges are not identified closely with labour market training/re-training, whether wholly or through differentiated programme offerings, the potential of colleges to impact significantly on reducing the number of 'NEET's as envisaged in the Green Paper would be questionable and probably unlikely.

## **2.4. EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM MATTERS**

South Africa's FET college sector lacks a reliable, centralized data management system. At any given time it is difficult to locate accurate statistics on learner enrolment in all college programmes, on learner success, throughput or destinations upon completion. Our 50 FET colleges do not appear to have a uniform system for uploading of statistics to a national repository and the state of information varies depending on who Colleges are required to report to. The National Examinations Department of the DHET holds data relating to national college curricula quality assured and certificated by Umalusi. In the case of the NCV and Nated programmes, subject pass rates are reported, but there is complexity in determining how many candidates of a particular cohort actually were certificated, or exited at the end of their programme of study. Other data necessary for planning is also hard to come by, for example, data on lecturers and their qualifications. Large scale systems monitoring which is considered to be routine in well-developed international contexts, is not ordinarily done in the South African college sector – the last official system-wide report released publicly was done by the NBI-DoE in 2004, based on 2002 data. The HSRC in 2010/11 conducted a detailed audit of the capacity of FET colleges which has just been released into the public domain, but by all accounts the data collection in this exercise proved a daunting task.

It is increasingly becoming a feature of dynamic vocational education systems that planning and development is based on and informed by reliable, credible data. Accurate data systems which all colleges can access and feed into is a critical gap in our FET college sector.

In sum then, EMIS requires:

- A uniform system of data reporting and uploading from individual colleges
- A national EMIS for FET colleges that is able to provide the range of reports necessary for planning and forecasting
- A monitoring and evaluation plan that includes appropriate indicators against which to report progress
- EMIS that includes both public and private college provision

The foregoing presented an analysis of current realities in South African FET colleges that will inform the focus of interventions whether in theory or in practice. The next section highlights macro-economic underpinnings and broader epistemological issues in vocational education and training that have impacted on developments in the College sector.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING DOMAIN**

The following section focuses on conceptual frameworks in a post-apartheid South African vocational sector and ways in which they reflect economic framework developments of the time. This is followed by outlining some of the methodological challenges affecting studies in the vocational domain.

#### **3.1. ECONOMIC POLICY IMPERATIVES IN FET COLLEGE POLICYMAKING**

Conceptual frameworks for vocational training in post-apartheid South Africa have close correlations with South Africa's economic framework development and successive government imperatives regarding skills training. In the early 1990s, key economic debates focused on the Reconstruction and Development Programme as a community based economic transformation intervention that was rapidly replaced by GEAR in 1996 and a move to opening South Africa's economy to global capitalism. Subsequent economic frameworks such as ASGISA (2005) centred on high skills debates and importation of skills. These frameworks were in turn replaced by South Africa's current economic policies such as the Industrial Policy Action Plans (2010-2011) and the National Development Plan 2030, which emphasise an increased role of the state in generating economic development and skills training.

Broad conceptual frameworks within FET college policies were initially developed by the National Institute for Community Education (NICE), drawing on ANC visions for education and the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) processes. This informed the National Commission for Further Education and the Green Paper for Further Education and Training (1996), which outlined a vision for community based education and training that had close parallels with community colleges in the USA, and were in line with the overall vision of the RDP programme. White Paper 4 showed a significant deviation from this approach, reflecting the changed economic GEAR landscape and emphasising an institutional focus and the formalization of education and training pathways to address local and global economic needs. Modernisation of FET college programmes was intended to reflect stronger disciplinary knowledge based qualifications in line with the new knowledge economy, although subsequent difficulties with the design of the NCV qualification have resulted in sharp critique.

From a macro policy perspective, conceptual frameworks have largely positioned FET Colleges to drive skills training for successive economic policy imperatives, though this has not been reflected in official curricula and programmes according to those who believe curricula should reflect a stronger occupational orientation. The FET Round Table and Summit (2010) marked a move away from institutional autonomy as envisaged by the FET Act 2006, and a re-centralisation of FET Colleges under national government with an emphasis on state steering and control as outlined in the Green



paper for Post School Education and Training (2012). The re-centralisation of FET Colleges within the DHET enables FET Colleges to become a key instrument towards achieving national goals of economic development linked to skills formation within a formal economy. This is in contrast with international debates for example ILO/Unesco where informal economy options are also being promoted for purposes of poverty alleviation. The International Labour Office (ILO, 2011) notes a key difference between formal apprenticeships governed by formal policies and legislation (as in the case of SA) and informal apprenticeships where agreements “are embedded in local culture and traditions, with the incentives to participate on both sides rooted in the society’s norms and customs.” The ILO Skills for Employment Policy Brief (2011) cites examples in Africa (Benin, Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania) that aim to improve the quality of informal apprenticeships and combine them as part of a national training system, although legislative difficulties in reconciling informal and formal apprenticeship systems remain. Benin, Burkino Faso, Mali, Niger and Togo are currently piloting dual apprenticeship interventions, whereby theory and modern technologies are introduced into informal apprenticeship schemes (p. 4-6). The ILO policy brief advocates an incremental approach to upgrading traditional informal apprenticeships and the building of capacity within informal business sectors. (see ILO, Skills for Employment Policy Brief, Upgrading Informal Apprenticeship Systems, 2011).

### **3.2. DEBATES ON THE NATURE OF VOCATIONAL CURRICULA AND KNOWLEDGE REQUIREMENTS**

Conceptual debates on appropriate curricula for the vocational sector have tended to reflect differing economic viewpoints. From a demand-driven perspective, key conceptual debates have focused on the nature of South Africa’s skills formation. Kraak (2006) characterises South African skills formation as:

A small high skills enclave, weak internal labour markets catering to low to intermediately –skilled and highly unionised workers, primarily located in the mineral extraction and semi-Fordist manufacturing sector. [A] large peripheral economy for the poor, unskilled and unemployed with little education and training (p.12-13).

Kraak argues that South African skills formation does not fit neatly into high skills debates (Ashton, 2004; Brown, 2001), nor low skills debates and calls for a hybridised approach. Underpinning these debates are arguments as to whether education and training in South Africa should be based on knowledge economy or human capital theory. On the supply side, Allais (2007) and Young (2006) argue that the FET sector needs to provide skills for the new knowledge economy, with a strong foundational learning component. This viewpoint has been challenged by Mukora (2007), who questions whether South Africa can be said to be a ‘new knowledge economy’. He argues that the South African economy can be more accurately defined as high technology Fordism within a globalizing environment, and asserts that the need to distinguish between vocational and academic streams remains critical. The Green Paper on Post School Education and Training in indicating the need for high level technology skills is thus in line with Mukora’s argument.

The emergence in South Africa of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupation (QCTO) as a sub-qualification framework promotes a demand-driven approach to education through mapping professional and work based qualifications onto a National Occupational Pathway Framework. Proponents of the Organizing Framework for Occupations draw on demand-driven workplace training needs incorporating both theory and structured learning in the workplace (De Jager, Vorwerk, & Elliot, 2006). Much of the literature in this regard has detailed what an Organizing Framework for Occupations could look like for South Africa and its alignment with internationally recognised occupational awards and designations. A critical focus here is on the integration of education and training with workplace training needs as opposed to formal institutional delivery via a disciplinary base. Equally, this training approach elevates learning in the workplace to be on par with formal theoretical learning.

These conceptual differences find expression in debates on the 'flagship' curricula that FET colleges should provide, and proponents of both camps draw on theoretical positions to support their arguments, for example, the UK's Wolf Report (2011) has found purchase in support of FET college programmes putting in place strong disciplinary foundations that enable college graduates to progress academically.

### **3.3. DEBATES ON NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

Allais (2007) draws on Beck and Young's (2005) and Gamble's (2004) arguments against outcomes based qualification frameworks for vocational education, holding that the specification of outcomes is only appropriate for low level skills training. Allais instead argues for sequenced study within educational institutions in order to achieve specialized knowledge necessary for a global knowledge economy. She concludes that outcome-based qualifications reforms are not an adequate base for educational reform in South Africa, and that more emphasis should be placed on building public educational institutional capacity to deliver codified, discipline based knowledge. Allais' theoretical focus is strongly underpinned by Basil Bernstein's (1999) work on pedagogic theory and discourses.

Allais (2007) also critiques South Africa's outcomes-led qualifications framework as "a neo-liberal public sector reform based on an implicit, and crudified, social constructionist view of knowledge" (p.13) which devalues specialized educational institutions with a strong disciplinary basis. She critiques the specification of standards and outcomes within the NQF and cites Young (1996, p.28) within a UK context that, "the experience of NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) in England and other outcomes-based systems indicates that attempts to increase the precision of outcomes can only lead to them becoming trivialized". The central argument here is that education is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and that specifying outcomes outside of a knowledge context (for example in unit standards based qualifications offered by Colleges) "undermines and marginalizes educational knowledge" (p. 11).

Conceptual debates have polarised demand-driven and supply-side perspectives and have resulted in curriculum confusion within FET Colleges. The emphasis on a new knowledge economy and disciplinary knowledge debates (Allais S. , 2007; Young, 2006)) is evident in the structure of the

subject based NCV qualification and the view that NATED (N1-N6) programmes were outdated and obsolete. More recently however, there has been a recognition that employers still value the more familiar NATED courses and that these still serve as a critical route for trade testing and the training of artisans necessary for state supported economic development.

There is an increasing international emergence of combined conceptual approaches to formal education and workplace based training which argue that vocational education ought to 'look both ways' (Barnett, 2006), also see (Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Billett & Seddon, 2004). From this perspective, vocational training has a responsibility to provide both the basis for further learning (e.g. towards higher education) as well as workplace preparation. However, it may be that this kind of integrated approach is easier said than done - in the South African situation the NCV has tended to come short on the side of practical training while the theoretical components have been emphasised, some would say to the detriment of the qualification value in the workplace.

### **3.4. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING RESEARCH**

Within South Africa, large-scale and longitudinal vocational and occupational research has been sparse. A key study conducted by the National Business Institute in 2004 that used FET College data from 2002 served as the major source of public FET College information until 2010. An extensive audit of all 50 public colleges was recently conducted by the HSRC and a report released in 2012 which updates this information, although significant data capture problems were encountered during this research. Despite these large scale surveys, centralised official data on pass and throughput rates within DHET funded provision are still largely unavailable and/or dated. In addition, there is minimal research on SETA funded occupational provision and throughput rates, with the exception of several individual SETA research reports. Research on private FET College provision is equally low. Akoojee (2005) and Umalusi (2010) have published information on private FET provision but the scope of this provision is difficult to ascertain. More research is needed to obtain an accurate picture of private provision.

Much of the donor (e.g. Danida, Ford Foundation, SSACI and USAID) commissioned research on vocational education and training in South Africa has remained 'grey' literature and is often not publicly available. This research has tended to focus on critical policy flashpoints rather than longitudinal research studies. With the exception of the NBI study (Powell & Hall, 2004) and the HSRC Audit (Cosser, Kraak, & Winaar, 2012), most of the commissioned research is located in a few provinces and in selected FET Colleges, and does not provide comprehensive insights into the FET College sector.

While there has been an increase in the number of Masters and some PhD studies undertaken in FET Colleges these are largely unpublished and have to be sought in university archives. Within the body of this concept paper some of the themes in these postgraduate studies have been highlighted - suffice to say at this point that they consist largely of case studies and qualitative enquiry. There has to date been a lack of centrally coordinated research on the FET college sector with a few exceptions, for instance, SAQA recently commissioned joint research projects at universities in South

Africa through focused postgraduate studies. The National Research Foundation does not provide significant funding for research in the FET College sector/vocational education as this is not a current research priority.

Any potential quantitative study faces the problem of a lack of current, reliable data held at a national, provincial and institutional level. At a national level, NCV and NATED programme data is available but enrolment, pass and throughput rates for these programmes have not been publicly released for 2010 and 2011. Data is often collected per subject and does not reflect throughput of particular NCV programmes and the risk of double counting of students carrying subjects from NCV 2 into NCV 3 and NCV4 exists. There is national data on FET College lecturers and students aggregated in terms of race and gender, but only for DHET funded programmes. Umalusi's reporting on national examinations is a key data source in this regard. At a provincial level, data is available but this information varies as pass rates have been set different criteria within provinces. Success and progression rates in occupational programmes offered by colleges and funded by SETAs are not reflected at national and provincial levels. The lack of access to a reliable database makes quantitative research in the FET college sector almost impossible and undermines the credibility of planning in this sector.

FET Colleges use a range of MIS systems including Coltech, DB 2000, ITS and Thusanong that have different programming requirements and make uniform collection or uploading of data difficult. The recent HSRC audit of FET Colleges encountered significant data capture problems within FET Colleges, especially when information requested fell outside of FET Colleges' normal reporting to provincial and national departments.

The section which follows attempts to contribute more directly towards a repository of local research in the college sector by setting out themes emanating from studies undertaken since those reviewed by Wedekind (2008).

## 4. CURRENT THEMES IN LOCAL RESEARCH ON FET COLLEGES – A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

This literature survey builds on Wedekind's (2008) review of local research on FET colleges up to 2007, and updates it to include more recent studies. The survey is limited to studies focussed specifically on FET colleges in South Africa, but also draws on related research in skills development and the labour market, and relevant international debates that have impacted locally.

The intention of this section is to provide an overview of what is already known - the 'state of the field' as it were. However what is known is often partial and tentative, which is often at odds with the final and definitive knowledge required by policy makers. The survey considers findings to date as well as the methodologies and conceptual frameworks used in particular studies. The extent of the literature survey however was limited by the tight time frame available and was largely informed by our institutional knowledge of the field.

Wedekind (2008) provided a useful starting point for this survey. According to his review the bulk of research on FET colleges had been funding driven, giving the body of research a particular character and mainly within the policy domain. Notably this research was driven by a small group of individuals located within a few agencies that were funding dependent, like the HSRC, JET and NBI. More recently universities such as UWC, Wits, UKZN, NMMU, UFS and CPUT to name a few, have begun to focus specifically on developing research capacity on FET colleges, particularly through Masters and Doctoral studies.

Wedekind (2008) noted that policy studies dominate the field in commissioned research, where the research agenda is driven by the funding agenda. Articles of this nature continue to be necessary, particularly when policy remains theoretically uninformed. Other popular methodologies have included analyses of existing quantitative data sets, surveys, desk top reviews, policy monographs, and qualitative focus groups and interviews for case studies.

The sections that follow set forth contemporary themes gleaned from research and reflections on vocational education and training beyond those set out in Wedekind's (2008) review. Only publicly available research documents with reference to SA vocational education or the South African college sector are profiled within the themes below. We are aware of Masters and Doctoral theses in university archives that deal with case studies on a range of vocational/college related matters. Postgraduate research will need to be dealt with separately as it would be impossible to evaluate quality and relevance at this stage. A bibliography of the documents able to be accessed at this stage follows at the end of this concept paper.

### 4.1. SKILLS THEME

*Understandings of Skill* (Badroodien, McGrath, Kraak, & Unwin, 2004) provided theoretical insight into the emerging debates around skills development initiated by the Green Paper on Skills Development. Essentially there were a number of works in this collection which attached themselves

to emerging critiques in the UK and elsewhere of Human Capital Theory and provided alternatives under broad skills formation theory and political economy of skill when discussing issues of the high skills thesis and other constructs such as skills mismatch, employability, skills development, responsiveness, competitiveness and the like. Whilst some of the central arguments – for instance around mid-level skills - were taken on board practically, the theoretical underpinnings of this work were largely lost on policy discussions. The strand on ‘joined up government’ (Kraak, Lauder, Brown, & Ashton, 2006) however remains prominent in policy, particularly with the formation of the DHET, and requires revisiting. The theoretical frameworks employed continue to underpin and inform a number of current policy critiques pointing to two sets of disjunctures: within the policies themselves, and between policy and implementation.

These South African debates resulted in two special issues of the UK *Journal of Education and Work* around NQF’s, debating the high skills thesis with a focus on South Africa (Lauder, 2005). It has also produced visits to South Africa by UK VET academics like Unwin, McGrath, Lauder and Young, situating local debates internationally.

#### **4.2. COLLEGE RESPONSIVENESS THEME**

An important collection under this theme was *Technical College Responsiveness* (Cosser, McGrath, Badroodien, & Maja, 2003) which responded to the emerging discussions around FET centred on the college sector, notably the notion of responsiveness. The works in this collection also had a strong empirical base (mainly quantitative), buttressed by theoretical insights (still largely within the political economy of skills framework) and this and other work by Cosser and associates (Cosser & Sehlola, 2009; Letseka, Cosser, Breier, & Visser, 2010; Cosser & du Toit, 2002; Cosser, 2009) remains one of the few student surveys conducted. In addition to surveying student destinations, the collection includes an employer satisfaction survey and labour market case studies, and begins to problematize the notion of responsiveness by looking at it through various lenses. The series of studies provides some data on student aspirations prior to and during FET college enrolment, and destinations thereafter.

#### **4.3. DEVELOPMENT THEME**

In the light of extensive international policy borrowing by South Africa, the HSRC produced *VET in Southern Africa* (Akoojee, Gewer, & McGrath, 2005) which provided descriptive accounts of other African countries for comparative purposes. This has since been followed by the UNESCO funded SADC country study (2010) on the status of TVET in the SADC countries in an attempt to establish a set of indicators for vocational reform, in which study the FET Institute UWC collaborated together with external academics Simon McGrath and Rosemary Lugg. This report proposes country descriptors and baseline criteria for monitoring and development. The HSRC also produced a number of other relevant publications in development studies (Padayachee, 2006), labour market analysis (Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Kraak & Press, 2008), skills development and learnerships (Visser &

Kruss, 2009; Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe, & Letseka, 2008; Wildshcut, Kruss, Janse van Rensburg, Haupt, & Visser, 2011; Kruss, Wildschut, Janse van Rensburg, Visser, Haupt, & Roodt, 2011). Whilst these are not directly the focus of this review on public FET colleges research, and may be covered by other reviews, they are integral to an understanding of the FET college sector and its broader mandate in relation to government goals of population up-skilling and poverty alleviation. The HSRC also produced the HRD Review series of collections (Fisher, Jaff, Powell, & Hall, 2003; Kraak & Press, 2008) which were insightful on a range of skills development issues, and locating FET Colleges within a broader discussion of skills development, higher education, the economy and the labour market.

A series of articles have begun to theorise the nature of policy, the state and development with respect to skills (McGrath & Akoojee, 2008; McGrath, 2010; McGrath & Lugg, 2012; Akoojee, 2012)

#### **4.4. WORK AND LEARNING THEME**

The HSRC has published the collection *Turning Work and Learning Inside-Out* (Cooper & Walters, 2009) emerging out of the Researching Work and Learning conference held in 2006. This collection begins to theorise (and problematize) the connections between work and learning with important implications for how FET college programmes are conceptualised. Also of interest is the collection on *Skills Shortages in South Africa* (Erasmus & Breier, 2009) particularly the chapter by Jeffrey Mukora (2009) on artisans, which introduces questions on not only the size, but also the nature of skills shortages.

Smaller qualitative studies into college practices in the implementation of work based programmes provides insight into how colleges make work-based education policy work (Needham, 2008). In a similar vein the FET Institute conducted a study into employability which began to show emerging practices at colleges from a 'supply side' perspective and to showcase good practice (McGrath, Needham, & Wedekind, 2010).

#### **4.5. POST-SCHOOLING THEME**

Literature prior to the formation of the DHET pointed to the lack of policy co-ordination and coherence between sections of the system, which seriously hampered FET colleges inter alia. Whilst the movement towards a 'post-school system' was originated under the DoE (DoE, 2008), it received priority under the DHET, which has culminated in the Green Paper on Post School Education and Training in 2012. The need for systems realignment was highlighted in the CHET-FETI report on the NEETs (Cloete, 2009b) and in Kraak (2011).

The Green Paper envisages a diverse, comprehensive and differentiated post school sector which has to service the demands of access, whilst providing skills for an inclusive growth path and being responsive to the community. Notably the Minister recognises that an important part of building such as a system would be evidence based information, particularly to inform the skills planning component. (DHET; DHET, 2010).

Critical to the discussion of a reconfigured post school system is building coherent pathways through education and work. The NEETs publication highlights the level of non-participation by youths between the ages of 18-24. Through an analysis of existing databases, Sheppard & Cloete (2009) show that 2.8 million youths are not involved in education, employment or training, and conclude that there is a need for a differentiated post school system that can cater for out of school youth (Cloete, Synthesis, 2009a). The NEETs report shows further through a longitudinal study of youth that there is racial differential of access to higher education, with black students more likely to attend college, and white students 3 times more likely to attend university than their black counterparts (Cloete, 2009a; Branson, Leibrandt, & Zuze, 2009).

The college system appears not to be attracting the kinds of students that had been intended. The NCV programme for example had been attracting substantial numbers of matriculants onto diagonally downward pathways (Cosser, 2011; Gewer, 2010a). Thus not only is the education and training system not attracting or catering for youth in sufficient numbers, but it does not necessarily provide appropriate programmes. This research stream is still in its infancy however and a broader conceptualisation of the issues is required. For example the data is differentiated, so that whilst the system does not cater for a number of students both in and out of the system, there are a number for whom it does cater, and there is a need to conceptualise the zig-zag stepping stones manner (Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe, & Letseka, 2008; Powell, 2012) whereby post school youth navigate the system as well as to understand non-participation more clearly. Qualitative descriptions of youth participation and non-participation are also beginning to emerge. Papier and Needham (FET Institute, 2010) provide qualitative data on students in Grade 10 at school and students currently studying at college. This study provides insight not only into what choices students make, but why and how they make these choices. Drawing on capabilities theory, Powell (2012) is conducting research on a group of students in a student-centred approach towards understanding links between post school systems and students' life narratives.

The long-standing data difficulties have limited the amount of research into the size, shape and capacity of the sector within the post schooling system. The recently released FET Colleges Audit (Cosser, Kraak, & Winaar, 2012) enables renewed informed discussion around the issues. Other attempts have been made to collate existing data (Sheppard & Sheppard, In progress) to assess college capacity to offer NQF 5 Certificate programmes (Stumpf, Papier, Needham, & Nel, 2009; Stumpf, Papier, McBride, & Needham, 2011).

Central to this entire debate is the question of curriculum, how it is conceived, enacted and how the college curriculum interacts with other parts of the system. Some studies have been conducted to map curriculum content (for example to academic studies) (Umalusi, 2010; Church, Paxton, & Pottas, 2011). Akoojee (2012) suggests that articulation may be more than a technical exercise and points to activity theory. 'There is no tracking of the performance of college students in higher education institutions, nor is there anything outside of the masters and doctoral theses that speak to the enactment of the curriculum and to college and classroom practice.'



#### 4.6. LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES THEME

Whilst the data has been mainly anecdotal, some graduate tracer studies have been conducted confirming poor labour market outcomes for the NCV programmes (Gewe, 2009; Gewe, 2010b). Cosser (2011) has suggested that this is also indicative of a collapse of pre-existing pathways to work (Gewe, 2010a; 2010b; Kraak, 2008).

However, the literature to date suggests that, as in other countries, the matter of labour markets outcomes may be considerably more complex than a skills matching exercise, involving a range of dimensions (McGrath, Needham, & Wedekind, 2010) including the particular ‘capital’ that students hold (Gewe, 2009), and different training practices for different labour market segments (Kraak, 2008). The skills mismatch thesis may prove inadequate to conceptualise the outcomes involved, and the dynamics of the “supply-demand” and “skills shortage” discourses may require further conceptual and empirical interrogation.

Work based programmes however seem to have had more labour market success. A series of studies (Kruss, Wildschut, Janse van Rensburg, Visser, Haupt, & Roodt, 2011; Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe, & Letseka, 2008; Visser & Kruss, 2009; Wildshcut, Kruss, Janse van Rensburg, Haupt, & Visser, 2011) have shown far more positive labour market outcomes in the private sector (though less so in the public sector labour market). This may support some of the preliminary conclusions in college based studies that argue that the relationship of the college to workplaces may enhance students’ prospects (Gewe, 2011; McGrath, Needham, & Wedekind, 2010). But it may relate more strongly to findings elsewhere that employers value work experience (Wolf, 2011; Akoojee, 2010). Moreover, traditional programmes such as time-based apprenticeships and CBMT prepared trade tests appear to have superior labour market outcomes to even the learnerships (Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe, & Letseka, 2008), suggesting ‘brand recognition’ for these qualifications play a significant role in employment practices vis a vis qualifications. Merseta’s online of employers survey (Akoojee, 2010) showed that by and large South African employers hired people who had previously been employed elsewhere.

There has been growing interest in college-industry partnerships. An initial NBI survey (2003) of college partnerships and a follow up series of case studies by JET (Taylor & Parrera, 2004) provided some early information. The SESD ‘showcased’ all 50 colleges, including their partnerships with information supplied by the colleges (SESD, 2007). More recently funded projects through SSACI and the NBI aimed at promoting college-industry partnerships has produced a fairly extensive quantitative survey (33 colleges responded) (Marock, 2011) as well as qualitative data (Marock, 2006; 2011)

#### 4.7. RELIABLE DATA THEME

The HSRC has recently published its FET Audit (Cosser, Kraak, & Winaar, 2012), which updates colleges data since the NBI funded surveys conducted in 2002 (Powell & Hall, 2004) soon after the college mergers. The challenges encountered in this audit points to a key methodological challenge

in the availability of – and access to - reliable data. Other large data gathering exercises (excluding those reviewed by Wedekind) had been conducted previously on focused issues including college-industry partnerships (Marock, 2011), college partnerships and programmes (SESD, 2007), graduate tracer studies (Gewe, 2009; 2010b), surveys of student aspirations (Cosser, 2009; Cosser & Sehlola, 2009) provincial lecturer surveys underway by UKZN/SAQA and completed (McBride, 2009a; Bantwini, Reinhart, & McBride, in progress), private FET colleges (Blom, 2011), industry take up and recruitment practices (Mukora, 2009; Akoojee, 2010) and students (Sheppard & Sheppard, In progress). The Department of Education has also published some of its data notably the Education at a Glance series and the 2009 examination results. The most significant of this large scale work to date since the Powell and Hall quantitative overviews (2004) is the HSRC's FET Colleges Audit.

#### **4.8. COLLEGE LECTURERS THEME**

Two studies on Vocational Teacher Education (Bronden, Papier, & Gamble, 2007; Papier & McGrath, 2008) based on interviews and programme reviews showed how small and weak the South African vocational teacher education system is, and the need for policy on lecturer development. These papers led to a broader project to develop frameworks and policies to embed college lecturer development at universities culminating in a VTE symposium in 2009 and a collaborative process to engage interested universities to develop vocational teacher education in terms of emerging policy on professional lecturer qualifications (DHET in progress), as well as conceptualising a vocational pedagogy for the training of college lecturers (Papier, 2010; 2011; 2009) .

McBride, Needham, & Papier (2008) provided an international and national review of vocational education, vocational teachers and vocational teacher education in an attempt to understand the field. This was followed by a survey of college lecturers in the Western Cape (McBride, 2009a) which was subsequently replicated and extended in Gauteng and KZN (by UKZN and SAQA) and the Eastern Cape by ECSECC (Bantwini, Reinhart, & McBride, in progress). A similar study is being planned in the Free State. Northwest Province had also conducted its own research on college lecturer profiles. The data gathered in these exercises could perhaps be compared with the HSRC audit on these items.

#### **4.9. LEARNER PERFORMANCE THEME**

The report on the NCV in the Western Cape *Getting the Right Learners into the Right Programmes* provides qualitative data from student view research, where focus groups were held with 450 students and 100 lecturers across programmes and campuses in the Western Cape in an attempt to understand the reasons for poor performance in the NCV in 2007-2009 (FET Institute, 2010). Parker (UWC DLL seminar: 2009) also interrogated NCV data and reasons for poor student performance.

#### **4.10. LEARNERSHIPS THEME**

Recently the HSRC completed commissioned research on learnerships (Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe, & Letseka, 2008; Powell, 2007) and found that there was a significant lack of data on the scale, number and career progression of employed learnership candidates and on the future employment of new entrants. Two problems surfaced: the predominance of NQF 1 and NQF 2 learnerships and the disjuncture with the DoE, notably the manner in which the NCV was introduced. Visser & Kruss (2009) stated that there was tension within the learnership programme as to whether it served a demand function by meeting critical and scarce skills, or an employment creation function, and found by analysis of existing data sets that the shift had emphasised the employment creation function for African youths at NQF 4 level or below.

It is evident from the recent local literature that FET colleges and vocational education have attracted increasing research interest in the last five years, especially since the introduction of a new curriculum in 2007 and events leading up to the FET Colleges Summit in 2010. Recent national policy documents continue to emphasise the urgency for skills development particularly in FET colleges, but additionally within a joined-up system of post-school education and training. In the conclusion which follows, there are suggestions for research that will no doubt strengthen and support coordinated skills development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The FET college sector lies at the intersection of a number of national policies regarding country growth paths, human resource development, labour market policy, poverty reduction and community upliftment, and industrial policy to name but a few. Critical to an inclusive growth path agenda would be the ability of FET colleges to create accessible, viable work and learning pathways for a range of potential students that speak to students' needs and to broader societal needs. The foregoing sections on contemporary issues in FET colleges, conceptual/theoretical debates and the scope of research already undertaken, amply suggests areas for future research.

A possible future research agenda could consider the following topical areas which arise out of the debates and contestations referred to in earlier sections of this document. While all of these areas are important, the HSRC in its labour market intelligence research will select aspects most relevant to its task, for focused attention.

### RESEARCH ON VOCATIONAL STAFFING

- Comparative models of college staff employment, including recruitment, conditions of service, retention, remuneration, continuing professional development.
- Comparative vocational teacher qualifications, expectations, roles and responsibilities.
- Research into private and public sector vocational teachers/trainers
- Qualitative research into vocational teaching communities of practice.
- Curriculum development for the training of vocational staff including teaching and learning, management and leadership, administration etc.

### RESEARCH ON CURRICULA AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- A review of the content depth and breadth of subjects in the NCV programmes, particularly those subjects which have had exceptionally poor pass rates, and how these subjects map onto corresponding higher education programmes;
- Scholarship on the nature of knowledge required for uplifting the skills and knowledge base and the impact of these views on college curricula/offering
- Review, modernization and mapping of the Nated programmes in relation to workplace needs and further/higher education;
- The effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements among the three quality assurance sub-frameworks and the impact of this on public FET college and private providers;

- The relationship between labour training needs (as far as these may be ascertained) and FET college programmes/curricula;
- The capacity of FET Colleges to offer Level 5/6 HEQF programmes and the quality assurance and articulation relationship between HEIs and Colleges in this regard;
- The transitions of FET college graduates from QCTO programmes to employment/workplace
- Further research is warranted for articulation and progression routes between general further and higher education institutions and their intersection with the world of work.
- The capacity of FET Colleges to offer expanded post-school qualifications in the informal economy is a critical research gap.
- The voices of students and staff are largely absent in existing research on the FET sector. Fine grained qualitative studies on attitudes, perceptions, expectations, learning and teaching experiences and so on, would build our knowledge base in this regard.
- Research on rural-urban challenges for student access to work and study
- Research on college engagement with and servicing of local labour market stakeholders and networks.

#### **RESEARCH ON 'IDENTITY' AND PURPOSE OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- Scholarship on the conceptual base that informs vocational education and training provision and the impact of this on the perceived identity of FET colleges
- Comparative research on provision for NEETs and target groupings identified as priorities by government
- Appropriate programme-qualifications mix (PQM) for FET colleges
- Role of private training providers in the vocational education and training landscape
- Models of differentiation in the college sector

#### **RESEARCH RELATED TO AN EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM**

- Research and development of a uniform system of data reporting and uploading from individual colleges
- Research and development of a national EMIS for public and private provision that is able to provide the range of reports necessary for planning and forecasting

- Monitoring and evaluation against selected indicators for reporting progress
- The relationship between supply and demand-led training provision
- Learner access, success, retention, throughput, employment rates and the disaggregation of data associated with these statistics, in public and private providers
- Longitudinal tracer studies of student absorption into the world of work or further study.
- Building a database of Masters and Doctoral theses on vocational education held in university archives and meta-analysis of these.

This concept paper has focused on key issues for deliberation within existing FET College provision and mandate, conceptual debates and discourses, the current state of research on FET and suggestions for a research agenda on the FET College sector and vocational education more broadly.

Unresolved issues in the college sector include: staffing, curriculum and quality assurance, identity of FET Colleges and FET College management information issues, all of which provide a basis for further research. The paucity of research on the FET College sector and associated topics, especially by university academics in the form of accredited publications is evident, but this could probably be attributed to a lack of incentives for research in this sector and a general lack of understanding in higher education about the further/vocational education domain.

While reliable source data has been a central reason for the lack of quantitative analyses and accurate forecasting within the FET College sector, the potential for secondary analyses of the data delivered in the HSRC audit now exists and could serve as a baseline from which to move forward. Large-scale, multi-level and longitudinal research will need to be undertaken to inform planning and evaluate outcomes in a future post-school dispensation which includes university education and training, FET college education and training, adult education and training, and skills training in private or workplace institutions . A broader mapping of the outputs and inter-faces of all these levels in a post-school system will have to be done in order to plan effectively and cost-efficiently, thereby avoiding costly duplication and wastage.

Compared with international research in the field, there is still much work to be done by South African scholars towards achieving a knowledge base that has theoretical depth and breadth, and builds a culture of rigorous enquiry in the vocational sector. The proposed agenda for research in the FET College sector reflects the scale of work needed to develop FET College/vocational education as a vital component of skills formation in South Africa.

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