

**SECTION 4:
Lessons and case studies**

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12 Skills development for poverty reduction: Can FET colleges deliver?

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The importance of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in responding to the skills development needs of South Africa has been well documented (Akoojee et al. 2005; Cosser et al. 2003, McGrath 2003a; 2003b). Government has repeatedly emphasised the significance of the sector in providing the intermediate skills required in the country. At the time of writing, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, at a DoE/HSRC conference declared that:

...colleges are central to our agenda of developing skills...It is our intention to build and sustain a well-designed set of institutions, offering flexible programmes and ensuring that we have students qualified in critical skills. (Pandor 2006)

This commitment is an important one. Not only does it place colleges at the centre of the national skills agenda, it also establishes government commitment to its importance. As well designed institutions with flexible programmes (and delivery forms) presumably responsive to a target audience that goes beyond the traditional school-leaving youth component, the college sector is expected to appropriately respond to the critical skills agenda. An amount of R1.5 billion was made available in 2005 (DoE 2005a) and this was reportedly increased to R1.9 billion in 2007 (Pandor 2007). Funding of this kind gives substance to articulated commitments from the highest level of government.

Similarly the Ministry of Labour has, in its latest National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS II), argued for the central role of FET colleges in the delivery of sector-skills imperatives. Colleges have been earmarked to respond to these national skills development imperatives in creative ways, asserting their role as preferred providers for the delivery of skills between 2005 and 2010 (DoL 2005).

international neo-liberal context, which serves to reduce rather than expand the role of the state to deal with some of these challenges, makes the likelihood of success that much less likely. Despite the measures intended to deal with some of these challenges, the enormity of the task of engaging with some of them is not inconsiderable. Some of the macro socio-economic strategies are assessed in the next section.

The RDP agenda espoused by South Africa's first post-apartheid government in 1994 placed particular attention on responding to the socio-economic legacy. The change to the GEAR agenda in 1996 signaled a marked shift in government thinking about redistribution and placed considerable attention on the role of macro-economic stability in its pursuit for growth as a primary feature for development. This change had particularly serious impacts on government spending imperatives, social spending in particular, and on delivery of key services. Impacts on education included, *inter alia*, a reduction in absolute numbers of teaching personnel which were considered to be a significant element of education spending (Akoojee & McGrath 2004).

Assessments of both GEAR and the RDP have reviewed the role of both for macro-economic and social development. It has been suggested that, in retrospect, the RDP was neither so explicitly socialist nor GEAR so fundamentally capitalist as has been conventionally argued (Buhlungu et al. 2004; Gelb 2003; 2004). Indeed, in both these national strategies a commitment to both growth and equity as fundamental to social and economic transformation can be found. In an attempt to strike an appropriate balance between the two, there is an implicit understanding that the one is privileged over the other. The Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (AsgiSA) owes some of its genesis to the incomplete and partial success of the redistributive component of the previous RDP and GEAR initiatives. AsgiSA is clearly a significant feature of the current national developmental path. President Thabo Mbeki announced its launch in July 2005, ostensibly to assist in meeting the ANC's 2004 election pledges (ANC 2004); namely to: halve unemployment, halve poverty, accelerate employment equity, and improve broad-based black economic empowerment.

Particularly crucial to the AsgiSA was its espoused commitment to spending priorities, public infrastructure, private investment and skills development. While growth was crucial to the achievement of these goals, the centrality

government.

- Teacher training for mathematics, science and English.
- Skills for the priority sectors, especially in project management, general management and finance.
- Skills for local economic development. (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2006)

Jipsa acknowledges that it intends to build on more than a decade of policy and institutional development in education and training, which incorporates key supply features incorporating schooling, further and higher education.

For FET colleges, Jipsa has identified the role of key developments. In addition to the merging of apartheid institutions, the recapitalisation programme and curriculum reform (implemented in 2007), the sector saw an injection of R1.9 billion into the sector to achieve the reorientation of the sector. The sector also incorporates the new skills development system, driven by the two National Skills Development Strategies (DoL 2001; 2005) and featuring a new vocational qualification (the learnership), a levy-grant mechanism and new Sector Education and Training Authorities (Setas). Jipsa intends to incorporate an overarching human resources development strategy, as proposed by the departments of Education and Labour in 2001 (DoE & DoL 2001), which was designed to co-ordinate the work of the two departments and other national and provincial departments.

This overall policy framework and the action plan implied by AsgiSA and Jipsa suggest an important role is envisaged for skills development which places colleges at the critical edge of the country's national skills development trajectory.

FET colleges are, therefore, considered crucial to the success of the current South African national development agenda and there is at least some consensus about the role of a sector which has been so racialised and gendered in the past. Thus, while it is still very evident that 'South African development policies are still profoundly shaped by the twin legacies of colonialism and apartheid and their shaping of a model of uneven and skewed development' (McGrath & Akoojee 2007), there have been some very real attempts to engage skill priorities under Jipsa. In addition, the legacy of polarisation between high- and low-skill elements leads to serious underdevelopment of intermediate skilling, considered to be key to industrialisation and competitiveness (Kraak

Table 12.1: Post-school enrolment (1999–2002)

	Universities	Technikons	FET colleges	Total
1999	245 000	141 000	139 000	525 000
Proportion (%)	47	27	26	100
2002	295 000	151 000	144 000	590 000
Proportion (%)	50	26	24	100
% increase over period	9	3	2	6

Source: Adapted from Powell & Hall (2002; 2004)

technikons (3%). Colleges still comprise less than a quarter of all post-school education and training enrolment in the country.

Colleges have, however, been remarkably responsive to post-1994 learner demographics. The quite powerful demographic shift from 1992 to 2002 is evidenced by transformation of predominantly white enrolment to one that is now largely African. The African student component, which increased from 15% to 74% was replaced with a white proportional representation from 67% to 16% in 2002. This indicates that the 'second-class' status of colleges is being replaced with one in which there is a sense that they are an important avenue to secure skills which enable access to the formal labour market. There is an expectation that as more and more youth understand that the skills developed in these institutions can lead to employment (or self-employment), this can be improved.

Age profile

The FET sector in South Africa has traditionally responded to the post-school youth learner cohort. This is in contrast to some other countries which have been able to respond to the more mature adult learners as part of a response to globalisation's effect of encouraging re-skilling over the life course (DoE & DoL 2001). Furthermore, there is a realisation that little has been done with respect to adult education in the country (Mbeki 2007). As in some other countries (England, for instance) colleges have been considered an important avenue to provide opportunities for adults who have not been afforded skills under apartheid (Akoojee 2006).

these priorities could meaningfully be inserted as strategic priority focus areas. Since municipalities are key in the achievement of these activities, it is counter-intuitive that some colleges have not as yet identified this sector as a partner in their skills development efforts.

The level at which programmes are delivered provides an important area which could be developed. Most enrolments (40%) are pegged for courses between N1 to N3 (Levels 2 to 4 on the National Qualifications Framework) with the majority of learners registered in 'engineering' (Powell & Hall 2004). In this respect, while the engineering learner numbers at lower levels are not matched at the post-N3 level where there is an enrolment of fewer than half that of the previous level, the trend shows that there is nevertheless a base from which to build. Programmes in the 'business' arena, however, are characterised by an opposite trend, with the post-N3 level enrolment estimated at almost four times that of the lower levels. This suggests that the skills developed in this area could be effectively re-targeted for public service delivery.

Partnerships enable colleges to be in touch with their labour-market constituency. A study by the National Business Initiative (NBI) showed that in 2002 there was a total of 1 852 linkages or joint projects between colleges and industry (Powell & Hall 2004). Most of the partnerships were with business (51%) and there were only a small number with Setas (3%). This is significant for a sector only recently introduced to the importance of linking up with their learner destinations. More recent evidence suggests that this is steadily improving (Danida 2006). There is, nevertheless, potential for development.

Indeed, evidence points to a robust 'learner placement' component of the partnership structure. More than 50% of partnerships with industry were directed at learner placements and 'training provision'. Another 50% of partnerships with government were related to community training, provision of training and work placement (DoE 2004). While this is encouraging, there is clearly a case for building on these and expanding current linkages by structural means.

There is, in addition, considerable space for partnerships to be developed in light of the skills development imperatives identified in the NSDS which has as its vision the development of 'skills for sustainable growth, development and equity' (DoL 2005). This will enable FET colleges to respond to the skills development needs of various groups, especially those considered to be

Historical evidence of the funding of colleges suggests that it is far too underfunded to merit serious consideration. Table 12.2 shows spending at the various education levels. While some increased spending is noted in the period 1999/2000 through to 2002/2003 (from R827 million to R979 million), and a proportional spend of 1.48 to 1.75% of total education spend, respectively, the low aggregate-level expenditure suggests very little attention to the sector.

Table 12.2: National education spending (1999–2003)

Spending	1999/2000	2001/2002	2002/2003
GDP*	809	958	1 036
Education*	48	54	56.5
GET inc college*	40.5	45.5	48
% of education	84.38%	84.26%	84.96%
HET*	6.2	7	7.3
% of GDP	0.82%	0.78%	0.71%
% of education	12.92%	12.96%	12.92%
College sector**	827	869	979
% of education expenditure	1.48%	1.55%	1.75%
% of provincial expenditure		18% of provincial budgets	

Figures given in billions of rands

Source: * DoE (2006b)

** RSA National Treasury (2005a)

The low college spending is also reinforced by the provincial average of 1.8% of all provincial education budgets. The discrepancy in spending is reinforced by the various provinces. For instance, of the R869 million allocated to colleges in 2001/2002, Gauteng made up 32%, while the Northern Cape only made up 2% (DoE 2005b).

Conclusion

The political space has been opened for FET colleges to take their place in national skills development. The AsgiSA initiative led by the deputy president in its 2007 annual report makes the following point about education and the role of FET colleges:

Note

1. IOL, Drive to address skills shortage – Pandor. Accessed March 2008, http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=105&art_id=nw20070213125810855C223037>

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Edited by Simeon Maile

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