After School, What?
Opening wider and more flexible learning pathways for youth

Ministerial Committee
Final Report
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Post-compulsory and post-schooling provision in South Africa
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Dr Peliwe Lolwana
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At the beginning of the twenty first century, it is becoming very clear that South African education is lagging behind developed and other developing countries in the provision and availability of a range of educational opportunities to those who exit the school system. The problem of youth who do not complete their school education; who fail or pass poorly in the Senior Certificate examinations; who are not in training and not in employment; and who have no access to some form of post-secondary education has recently become more and more significant and many stakeholders are grappling with the question of youth education and employability (Altman, 2008; National Youth Commission, 2008; Bernstein, 2008; Burns, 2008; Altman & Hemson, 2008; Cosser & Du Toit, 2002; Cosser et al., 2004; Simkins, 2004; Du Toit, 2005).

Because of its ‘excluding’ policies, participation in the South African education system remains relatively limited, especially at the upper levels, despite the growing numbers in the system (Bunting & Cloete, 2008). The smallness of the post-school education sector has not only dwarfed South Africa’s educational outputs, but has also been singled out as one of the most important contributing factors to the sluggishness of its economic and political development (Teferra & Altbach, 2003; Saint et al., 2003; Ng’ethe et al., 2008; Fehnel, 2003). While knowledge that is produced at the higher levels of education has become the most important factor concerning economic development in the 21st century, South Africa may have to pay a high price because of its small post-school education system. Saint et al. (2003) points us to the connection between higher levels of education and development by comparing the research and development investments in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries with those in developing countries like China, India, Brazil, etc. as well as the rest of the world. There seems to be a proportionate relationship between research and development investments and economic development. Therefore, for South Africa to catch up, it has to grow its knowledge outputs and, consequently, its post-school education size by increasing equity and opening access to all forms of post-school education to a larger population.

There is evidence that post-school education is in high demand among the 16-year to 24-year age group (Blank, 2007; Bregman, 2008; Cosser et al., 2002; Lolwana, 2008; Odora-Hoppers, 2000). The
Demand for post-school education is a result of two important factors in the South African education system, namely (a) the growth in the primary and secondary education systems, and (b) the global labour market changes that have not left South Africa untouched. Research shows an interrelationship between post-school education systems and primary and secondary education systems and the fact that the most single determinant for higher education is the number of graduates from the secondary education systems (Kim et al., 2007). In turn, the demand for secondary education places depends on the number of primary education graduates. The South African primary and secondary education systems have grown phenomenally in the past 10 years.

Despite the growth in secondary education, many young people do not complete high school in South Africa. Furthermore, even more of the young people who complete high school cannot proceed with their studies because of the poor quality of their achievements or a lack of opportunities to accommodate their particular circumstances. In other words, although enrolment numbers have grown at all levels of the system, real participation rates are still very low, particularly among black African students. The problem of the relatively small number of individuals who complete high school education is compounded when it is seen against the labour market changes that have occurred since the introduction of technology in industry. Levy and Murnane (2004), for example, point us to the phenomenon of disappearing blue-collar and clerical jobs that used to be open to people with a high-school education. These jobs have been replaced by computers, which can process large amounts of information. Yet, the computerisation of work has necessitated another range of skills and knowledge. These skills, which can be performed by human beings, e.g. recognising patterns and making judgments, are best performed by individuals with education levels beyond high school. This change further supports the need for secondary school interventions and post-secondary education targeting a wider range of individuals than the current select few.
To provide for effective interventions to deal with the looming youth crisis, education must take the lead and re-arrange its systems so that young people may be contained in the education system for longer, thus providing an extended opportunity for developing additional skills and acquiring further knowledge. In its current form, education forces this most vulnerable group prematurely into the harsh realities of a life of inactivity.

Broadly, the following propositions are advanced in this report:

- As a first prize, we need to find ways of retaining young people in various forms of learning programmes until they are closer to the age of 24 by providing for an achievable secondary education system, followed by a comprehensive post-secondary education and/or focused skills development.
- Although the aim of provision should be to move toward a comprehensive first-chance system for most young people, second-chance programmes should also be provided for in the design and implementation of a revised education system.
- The education system should aim at providing for a wide range of and flexible learning pathways to ensure that a wide range of young people can find home institutions, programmes of interests and delivery mechanisms that would suit them.
- The further education and training (FET) college system has the best potential for developing the capacity to offer a wide range of learning opportunities to young people. This capability must be developed with immediate effect before the problem becomes a crisis.

This study makes the following, specific proposals:

1. Institutions

After completion of compulsory education, learners should be obliged to attend an educational institution or to participate in a form of learning that would enable most young adults to complete at least 12 years of education. This requires a review of the institutions that could expand secondary education provision options for youth, including technical high schools, comprehensive and special schools, etc. FET colleges should be seen as logical institutions that could expand their provision to enable young adults to complete their senior secondary schooling or to provide flexible ways of learning that would support working youth who would like to further their education. In addition, the private education provider system should be included incrementally in the building of a coherent and expanded system.
2. Qualifications and curriculum

The curriculum provided in ordinary schools should be diversified incrementally to include more practical subjects. Specifically designed programmes for 15-year-olds to 16-year-olds should be available in the college system for youth who opt out of school. The pegging of the current National Certificate (Vocational) (NC[V]) curriculum at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) 2 level could be serving as a deterrent for attracting the right kind of students to the programme. The range of NC(V) programmes should be extended to include areas where growth is reflected in other countries, e.g. health; social care; art and design, etc. Providing alternative, work-based and flexible NC(V) routes would not only increase the uptake, but would help to raise the standards of programmes like learnerships.

3. Public admission policies

Post-secondary education admission policies remain restrictive and are an important cause of the lack of access to post-secondary education provision. Second-chance secondary education, access courses provided by FET institutions in collaboration with neighbourhood universities and foundation or transfer courses at FET institutions should go a long way towards improving the current congestion caused by the limited school-to-university route and restrictive university admission policies.

4. Quality assurance

A flexible and more open system would rely on vigorous quality assurance of the institutions and the programmes provided, rather than depending on examinations only. This means that both the private and public education system should be held accountable and that the three quality councils should work together more closely concerning further education provision, since it intersects with higher education and skills development.

5. Funding

An expanded system would require expanded funding to, for example, provide for expanded infrastructure; the development of the capacity of FET colleges concerning teaching, leadership and student support; an expanded curriculum; and incentives to encourage certain behaviours at these institutions.
6. **Raising the aspirations of youth**

An intentional and directed support effort concerning learners exiting the school system should be established, focusing on information about opportunities for further study, as well as on employment opportunities and requirements.

7. **Support services**

In order for FET colleges to succeed in being open and flexible providers of education to a wide range of learners, they should provide the most comprehensive support service in the entire education system. These services should include strategies for the retention of under-represented groups; counselling and guidance; orientation; extra-curricular activities; financial aid; academic support; and the establishment of links with employment placement agencies.

8. **Coordination**

There are many departments, organisations and institutions grappling with the education and skills needs of youth in the country. It is suggested that the Department of Higher Education and Training take the lead to bridge the gap by championing a multi-sectoral research and policy agenda related to the link between education and youth employment.

9. **Governance**

Firstly, governance issues to be considered have to do with the building of institutional capacity in the system to ensure that institutions can drive an open and differentiated system. Secondly, it has to do with how Government administers the system. The target groups and not programme levels seem to be the logical organising elements in this regard. Therefore, the following administration units make sense: school education; further and adult education; and higher education.

10. **Skills and vocational education research**

Research in vocational and further education is fundamental to building both FET institutions and skills development in the country. Therefore, investment in research that would interrogate skills needs and the labour market, tracer studies on student destinations and theorising the vocational education curriculum and delivery, are needed.
Where are South African young people supposed to go after they have completed their basic and compulsory education? If they do, indeed, complete the 12 grades of school education, what are they supposed to do next? In other words, after school what? How is it possible that South Africa can be regarded as one of the countries in the world ambitiously close to achieving universal basic education enrolment for 7-year-olds to 15-year-olds (UNESCO, 2005; OECD, 2008; Crouch, 2005) while four out of every ten learners are not able to complete the 12-grade general school education? How come that South Africa’s educational attainments are considered to be in the highest quadrant by global standards and yet the contribution of that education to the economy remains in the lowest global quadrant (Altman & Marock, 2008)? Why is it that, despite increased public spending on young people by way of social grants by many government departments, the youth remain so vulnerable in society? Why is the problem of youth unemployment so acute among young people despite the Skills Development Levy that is supposed to connect young people with work by providing training and work experience opportunities? Why is it that, in an affirming-policy environment for Blacks, most of the young and unemployed is still black youth (Altman & Marock, 2008; Altman, 2008)? How is it possible that, despite the rapid enrolment growth experienced in the higher education sector over the past years, participation rates still remain at 16%, which is far below the targeted 20% of the National Plan (Bunting & Cloete; Ministry of Education, 2001)? What is to be done to achieve and exceed this target soon if it is true that the capacity of current higher education institutions has already reached its ceiling?

The problem of youth who do not complete their school education, who fail or pass poorly in the Senior Certificate examinations, who are not in training and not in employment, who have no access to some or other form of post-secondary education, has recently become more and more significant and many stakeholders are grappling with the question of youth education and employability (Altman, 2008; National Youth Commission, 2008; Bernstein, 2008; Burns, 2008; Altman & Hemson, 2008; Bunting & Cloete, 2008; Cosser & du Toit, 2002; Cosser et al., 2004; Simkins, 2004; Du Toit, 2005). According to studies carried out by Altman and others at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), a particular group of young people seems to be the most vulnerable, namely 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds. According to the researchers, at least half of all young
school leavers are unlikely to find work before the age of 24, while their employability seems to suddenly improve slightly once they move past 24 years old. That the market definitely favours older workers has also been confirmed by Walker (2008), who found that recruitment and placement agencies are biased towards more educated university graduates.

This study will concentrate on the 16-year-old to 24-year-old age group as the most vulnerable in the system. The rationale for selecting this group is provided by studies that have looked at school drop-outs and retention (Crouch, 2005; Ministerial Committee, 2008[a]; WHO, 2006); HSRC studies on vulnerable groups and unemployment (Altman, 2008; Altman & Marock, 2008); studies on labour market interventions like learnerships and Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWP) (Altman & Hemson, 2002; Walker, 2008) and studies that are looking at access to higher education (Bunting & Cloete, 2008). All these studies point to the fact that this cohort is the most vulnerable in South African society. However, it is also hoped that this study will be helpful in developing interventions for the 25-year-old to 35-year-old cohort that is also regarded as youth.

If we consider that not all students who qualify for higher education end up in either higher education or FET colleges, the system is losing large numbers of young people who disappear from the system. Some of them become part of unemployment statistics, while some do not, since we know that it takes between one and three years before young people get discouraged and stop looking for work (Altman, 2008). However, according to 2006 data of Statistics South Africa, 50.2% of South Africans aged 15–24 were unemployed.¹ Studies on youth unemployment all concur with Altman and Marock (2008) that the one sure answer to this problem ultimately lies in economic growth that will make the problem disappear once it reaches a 6% or 7% growth rate. But if we consider the current global economic crisis and its potentially long-term impact on the South

African economy, it is reasonable to accept projections that youth unemployment will be getting worse.² Within this context, it is all the more critical to make clear linkages between education and youth employability in South Africa.

It is against the above background that this study argues for an expanded educational intervention for youth to be given priority rather than relying on the economy and the fixing of labour scenarios, which are more complex and variable issues. This does not mean that education must isolate itself from what is happening in the economy and the labour market. What is proposed here is that a directed educational intervention has much better prospects of helping young people getting prepared, even for an unreliable labour market, while also offering better insurance options to the youth.

While there are dangers in international comparisons because of differences in the histories and resources of different countries, we can, nonetheless, through such comparisons learn some important lessons that are instructive when considering the youth problem at hand in our country. Countries that have higher levels of participation in education, especially at post-secondary education level, have lower levels of inequality and youth unemployment tends to be marginal, since most young people participate actively in education for extended periods (Kim et al., 2007; Altman & Marock, 2008).

² Beyond the scope of this paper, a deeper analysis of the impact of the current global economic crisis on specific sectors of the South African economy and its relationship with youth employability is required. A related note on this point: According to Burns, p. 13, “real wages for youth and unskilled workers, the two groups that have borne the brunt of unemployment, have been falling”.
3. The Brief

The Ministerial Committee on Post-compulsory and post-school provision was established to investigate and make policy recommendations on providing for a greater diversity of post school education and training options for South Africa. This study's purpose was to address two aspects of this situation: (a) the provision of realistic and well supported alternative opportunities for learners who exit the system after the compulsory phase of schooling; and (b) consider second chance and alternative provision of opportunities for learners at the post Grade 12 level. These may include learners who have achieved a pass in Grade 12 but have not gone on to Higher Education, as well as learners who have not achieved a pass at Grade 12.

Scope of Work

1. The Ministerial committee was required to undertake the following work:
   
   a. Develop a policy framework for the Post Compulsory and Post Grade 12 youth population through which the following would be outlined;
   b. Explore changes necessary to broaden educational opportunities for the out-of-school population;
   c. Establish ways of increasing equity, access and participation through varied post-secondary options for young people.

2. This perspective was to be informed by:
   
   a. A quantitative analysis of the nature of the problem-looking at the supply side of education (current institutional provision and developments that have already been initiated) and comparing this with the demand side for these outputs
   b. A desk top international comparison with what other countries are doing
   c. A qualitative analysis of the existing institutional landscape
   d. A review of past policy and institutional options and pilots of institutional forms.
3. The outcomes of this activity would inform a policy framework that addresses the following:
   
a. Rationale for a redesigned system that will address the problem as stated;
   b. Shape and size of new components of the system;
   c. Governance and financing of the new components of the system;
   d. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of these new components;
   e. Proposals for ensuring diversity, flexibility and differentiation;
   f. Possibilities and constraints in existing relevant legislation

4. Follow up steps
   
a. Establish the state of system readiness for the proposals
   b. Develop a more detailed and nuanced implementation plan for the policy framework.

Structure

Dr Peliwe Lolwana was the one-person in this Ministerial Committee, seconded on a half time basis from her position as CEO of Umalusi. Liaison and support from the Ministry were provided by Mr Martin Mulcahy.

Reference group

A Reference Group met two times during the work of the Ministerial Committee. This should include the Deputy DDGs of Branches H (Higher Education), F (Further Education and Training) and S (Social and School Enrichment) as well as experts.
The post-1994 period saw a renewed focus on youth issues and needs. From the onset, the new government tried to place policies that would respond to the changing conditions of young people in the new democratic society at the centre of the country’s growth and development strategies. The establishment of the National Youth Commission (NYC) is a telling example of this commitment. The NYC has been particularly instrumental in establishing policies aimed at addressing gaps in strategies aimed at the development of young people in the country. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that advocated widely for youth development in the country, for example, the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP), made particular contributions to earlier versions of NYC policies. A former Minister in the Presidency, Mr Essop Pahad, acknowledged that economical and skills development among youth required that all government departments, state entities, the private sector and communities at large had to be involved in spearheading developmental initiatives geared at youth (NYC, 2008).

The Education Department is the executive within Government dealing with the majority of youth issues. Even though there appears to be a schism between what comes from youth advocates and education and training policies, a major part of education provision targets youth. It stands to reason that other government departments are also focusing directly or indirectly on areas that impact on youth development, for example, the Department of Labour, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Health. In what follows, a selection of the most cogent policies in the youth development arena will be reviewed.

4.1 The Joint Enrichment Project (JEP)

The work of JEP was and remains decisive concerning youth work, policy and practices in South Africa. It serves as a point of departure for most work on youth issues in the country and more time will, therefore, be spent on describing the thoughts and activities of this pioneer NGO in youth work.⁴

⁴ The description of JEP’s work is entirely credited to Penny Foley, who was one of the last workers to leave JEP when it closed in 2006.
Overview

In the early 90s, the discourse on youth development changed significantly. Policy discussions began to anticipate the need for an agenda of re-integrating alienated young people back into the formal structures of society, which they had been excluded from as a result of their participation in the struggle against apartheid.

Initially, young people who had “lost out” on education and employment opportunities either because of active engagement in political activity that resulted in exile, imprisonment or other forms of “dislocation”, or because of the general way in which apartheid limited the access of children and youth to school and employment, were described as the “lost generation”.

However, over the past eighteen years, the national youth development agenda experienced three to four significant shifts, both within the recognised youth sector and within society in general. A brief description of key elements in the thinking and activities over the past eighteen years follows to assist in developing a strategy for the provision of education to young, out-of-school people.


In early 1991, JEP led an initiative to develop a policy agenda for youth development in the new, democratic South Africa. During this period, there was a sustained effort to refer to “marginalised young people” rather than the “lost generation”. JEP developed a set of 12 indices to identify the extent to which young people were at risk of being “marginalised”. Young people were placed in four broad categories:

- Category one comprised young people who were “fine”: they were in school, college or at work; they were engaged socially and/or politically; they had a
positive view of their future; they had access to secure accommodation and did not go to bed hungry regularly; they were aware of what was happening around them; if they were to find themselves in trouble, they were confident that they would find someone to help them, etc. Approximately 25% of young people fell into this category.

- **Category two** comprised young people “at risk” of not making a healthy transition to either adulthood or democracy. They were showing areas of stress on the 12 indicators of concern. This could have been about school and education; ambivalence about their role and place in the future; exposure to violence, and so on. The implications were that a normal set of supports would be insufficient and additional interventions were required at both mainstream school institutions and within communities in general. Approximately 40+% of young people belonged to this category.

- **Category three** was “already marginalised”. These included young people already well outside the support structures needed to make the transition to a healthy adulthood. The recommendation was that intensive programmes had to be provided on a large and national scale if this group of young people was to be brought back into mainstream society. Just below 30% of youth fell into this category.

- **Category four** constituted the final group that was classified as “lost” or “dangerously disengaged”. Even if put into place, large national programmes were unlikely to reach or attract this group.

The usefulness of this research was that it:

- spelt out the massive and systemic nature of the problems facing young people;
- showed that the problems facing young people were societal, i.e. ascribable to a dysfunctional education system; endemic violence in communities; poverty; a dearth of constructive community programmes engaging children and youth, and so on. Hence, it was not a “youth issue” but a significant and overwhelming challenge to all structures in society;
- illustrated that simply dealing with one issue, such as education and training or sport, would be insufficient to change the circumstances of young people.
• **Testing the Principles: 1994–1999**

Over the next five years, a strange mixture of activities took place. A number of government departments considered various principles of youth development as they rewrote core policies; the NYC was formed and tasked with drafting the National Youth Policy; and a large number of NGOs – some youth-based and others not – began to test, through the delivery of projects, the principles of what came to be called “integrated youth development”.

This concept was represented in different ways in most youth development documents of the time: the Youth Development Network defined it as “a process that enables young people to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable them to become self-sufficient individuals who can contribute positively to their own communities and society. It is based on the inherent belief that young people are resources and have something to offer”.

While policy on the concept was being developed, various NGOs were trying to work out how it should be implemented. In many cases the programmes became a long series of activities, with lots being done but no clarity about the amount of learning involved!

Perhaps the most useful illustration of how the thinking/practice of the integrated youth idea evolved is the way in which JEP kept on tackling the issues of “out-of-school youth and learning, education, employment and self-esteem”. Initially, JEP ran a skills training programme in the early 90s, designed for young people aged between 25 and 35. This soon degenerated into a bursary programme with some life skills workshops attached. At best, participation in this programme gave students enough confidence, skills, qualifications and “security” to launch themselves into the job market. Approximately 20% of students graduated into employment. Another 25% were able to move into further study or work after additional coaching and support, while the remainder were left disappointed and disheartened.

Perhaps the overwhelming lesson of this period, from a very practical point of view, was the intensity required for the work to succeed. If competent and dedicated youth workers were on hand and the learning was mediated, participants had a much higher chance of succeeding. However, with funding moving to Government, the NGO sector was not able to sustain the interventions. Furthermore, unless programmes were managed properly, young people found themselves moving through a series of “activities”, unable to make the cognitive or conceptual links between all they were learning.
During this period, some provincial and national government departments were exploring ways of working with young people. However, few understood that their services would have to be delivered differently to people over the age of 18 if they wanted to have an impact.

- **Government takes over: 2000 to date**

In the nineties, a tenuous link continued between NGOs and the political discourse on youth. However, by the year 2000, there was an almost complete breakdown in the way the “machinery of youth development” engaged with government departments and a drastic reduction in the number of competent youth NGOs that had experience in implementing complex and multi-faceted programmes.

The failure of the big youth institutions, such as the NYC and the *Umsobomvu* Youth Fund, to engage with either the Department of Education or the Department of Labour at any strategic level was a consistent problem. A number of programmes aimed at offering learning and work opportunities to out-of-school youth began to be implemented. These included learnerships; university catch-up programmes; diversionary justice interventions run for youth in conflict with the law; and, of course, the “government-run” National Youth Service (NYS) Programme.

It is exceedingly difficult to measure the impact of the programmes. Perhaps the most critical indicator would be the completion rate among participants and their progress to further learning, employment or income-generating opportunities. The initial NYS pilot projects run by *Umsobomvu* and focusing directly on using the integrated youth development approach, were achieving placement rates of 90% six months after the programmes ended. This can be compared with a retention rate of 15% of young people in learnerships.

At the time, it cost approximately twice the standard learnership cost of R25 000 per learner to run an NYS programme. However, the learnerships were programmes run by NGOs or public institutions such as the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board. As soon as private training providers started running the programmes, the costs sky-rocketed.

Then, as programmes were beginning to be run through government departments, and often through multiple subcontracting agencies, several things started happening. Programmes became more expensive and offered less. Increasingly, consultants and contractors from the **training** rather than the **development** fraternity were
appointed and they simply did not understand the principles set out in the initial youth policy. In some of the graduate development programmes on offer, the relevant learning institution would provide a degree of “mentorship” and “personal support”. In such cases, significantly higher success rates were achieved. This was also noticeable concerning some of the pilot learnerships, such as the Shintsha Programme run by the Furniture Industry SETA. These examples clearly demonstrated that, where training staff intervened actively in the learning process and assisted learners in gaining confidence and experience in applying their skills in the market place, and provided some support as learners set up their businesses, the latter were much more likely to succeed.

Finally, a real slip backward towards the North American/Western dynamic of youth development began to manifest itself. In this scenario, the individual is, generally, blamed for his/her failure to succeed and young people are regarded as the problem. There is no understanding of the systemic issues in society that prevent young people from moving onto a healthy and independent adulthood. It must also be remembered that the composition of marginalised youth has changed, since more young people attend school, while they also do not grow up in a violent and war-torn country. Nevertheless, many of them still do not complete school, are not adequately educated and prepared for work and, mostly, struggle to find employment.

4.2. The National Youth Commission (NYC)

The NYC is the main body that has been advocating for youth development and issues relating to youth in the country. It defined youth development as a “process whereby young women and men are able to improve their skills, talents and abilities, as well as to extend their intellectual, physical and emotional capacities; it includes the opportunity for young men and women to express themselves and to live full lives in all social, cultural, economic and spiritual spheres. Youth development also refers to engaging young women and men in development activities as participants in the decision-making processes and as beneficiaries”.

The NYC has tabled a recent revision of its policy on youth, which is aimed at addressing the needs of young people through the provision of integrated and coordinated packages for particularly young people who are outside the social and economic mainstream (NYC, 2008). This policy covers youth between the ages of 14 and 35 and comprises an inclusive approach that takes into account both historical and present-day conditions.
Concerning education, the Commission states that:

- There is a predominance of learners with “some secondary education”. This incomplete qualification syndrome is cause for concern, since it curtails this group’s prospects of finding employment and chances to mature to productive citizens.
- The participation of youth in FET colleges is relatively small at 2.7%.
- There is insufficient facilitation of out-of-school youth to re-enter the system and become qualified.
- There is a substantial gap between the number of young people who obtain matric and those who pursue post-secondary education. While young women tend to stay the course in secondary education, they enter post-secondary education in disproportionately low numbers.
- Unimpressive literacy and numeracy levels among young people with primary and upper secondary education signal problems concerning the quality of education.
- There is an overall improvement in the attainment of qualifications among black African youth, but employment prospects often do not match these achievements. This trend points to the problem of skills-specific educational needs and social and economic facilitation, as well as life skills education.

In relation to youth economic participation, the Commission has the following to say (NYC, 2008):

- Securing employment is a problem for a large proportion of South African youth. They account for 74% of the unemployed in the country.
- The unemployment rate of those who drop out of secondary school before completing senior secondary education (58.5%) is the highest of any education exit group and these young people represent 40.3% of the unemployed youth in South Africa.
- There is discontent about learnerships among employers and confusion among those who offer apprenticeships about the future of apprenticeships and their place within the context
of learnerships. The absorption capacity and throughput rates of the learnership system are insufficient to meet the demands of industry or to absorb the supply of young people requiring training and emerging from learnerships.

The NYC goes on to recommend that schools should:

- Provide knowledge and skills for life and work while serving as sites where young people can feel they belong and where they can develop their identities and build their self-esteem through personal discovery and social interaction;
- ensure that all young people attain their National Senior Certificate or equivalent qualification with practical and economically valuable skills;
- provide out-of-school youth with second chances to complete their school education; and
- aid young people in their transition to adulthood by promoting a wider and more flexible range of learning pathways available to them and showing how these can impact on their prospects for further learning, personal development and employment.
Transformation of apartheid education and finding solutions to the problems of a non-integrated system that does not offer articulation possibilities to higher education have been priorities of the new government since it came into power. It is therefore no wonder that the NQF Act was one of the first acts government promulgated in 1995 (South African Qualifications Authority [SAQA], 1995). The NQF was established to integrate the different parts of the education system. Yet, South Africa still has four education systems that function independently of one another, namely the school, further, higher and adult education systems. The assumption was that with the establishment of a separate structure like the NQF, all three tracks in the FET band would automatically provide some progression to the higher education system. This did not happen.

5.1. School education

South Africa presents us with a complex range of contradictory scenarios in relation to its secondary education system. To start with, the country has a very ugly history of extreme inequality and all efforts have been geared towards erasing this history. In the last fifteen years, the school education sector has taken major strides in making school education more available to and attainable by all children. The country has not only expanded education provision but has also been able to obtain what Holsinger and Cowell (2002) consider to be a precursor of successful massification of schooling, namely a widespread adoption of cultural commitment to education. When the new government took office, the education cause was helped immensely by the “back-to-school” call by none other than former President Mandela himself. Millions of students responded and returned to school in droves. Further evidence of a “massified” school system are the enrolment and retention numbers that have been increasing steadily according to the latest survival and drop-out rate study carried out in the country concerning the twelve-grade school system (Ministerial Committee Report, 2008). Trend studies of the Senior Certificate examinations also provide proof of increased school participation and improved secondary schooling outcomes. Enrolment figures for this examination have been increasing steadily and the pass rates have climbed from 47% in 1997 to 73% in 2003 (Naidoo, 2006).
When the new government was established, there was a sense that there had to be a level up to which education had to be declared compulsory. This was pegged at nine years of education, which was considered to be basic education. This decision was largely informed by international practice where even developed countries make education available and compulsory until the age of 15 or 16 years (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992). The structuring of school education into basic and compulsory education versus senior secondary education was a good start, since the soon-to-be government could not really know what it would be able to afford, especially because it was taking over an almost collapsed schooling system for black African children. Fourteen years down the line, there is evidence that almost 80% of young people attend school up to Grade 12 and almost 60% of the cohort sit for the Senior Certificate examinations (Crouch, 2005; Ministerial Committee, 2008). At the same time, it is also becoming clear that not completing 12 years of schooling is a great barrier for young people in becoming productive citizens (National Youth Commission, 2008; Altman & Marock, 2008). In fact, Altman and Marock state that those who do not complete their senior secondary schooling or access higher education are the most vulnerable and their chances of employment are greatly reduced. Altman and Marock contend that a senior secondary qualification does not seem to make much difference in increasing the employability prospects of youth. What does make a difference, is having “matric” plus a qualification. While universal secondary education provision is implicated here, it is also clear that a system without options for young people to complete their senior secondary school education is not just, nor does it serve the youth. On the one hand, the problem of the South African education system, and to a high degree that of sub-Saharan Africa, has been described by some as a consequence of the unprecedented success of the Education For All (EFA) movement, since more children are entering the school system and staying longer in either the primary school or compulsory school phase (Bregman, 2008).

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* The qualification awarded after successful completion of high school.
5.2. Adult education

Before 1994, government night schools and linked private centres offered the only officially recognised certification in adult education in South Africa. This was the Standard 5 adult examination and matric for private candidates. In the new dispensation, the Standard 5 qualification was widely regarded as unacceptable. Apart from it reflecting apartheid education, it emphasised authoritarian and rote learning and was based on a school curriculum. With the introduction of Curriculum 2005, the former official Standard 5 examinations for adults fell away. This was replaced by Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) certification, which, at the time, was based on unguided assessments by Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). The introduction of Curriculum 2005 for school-going learners and the growing status of the NQF further led to a period of confusion, uncertainties, a lack of direction, low motivation and poor quality of learning at many PALCs. It became clear that adults were increasingly losing ground in getting access to an important currency, namely certificates for their qualifications.

The voice of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a very powerful body that lobbied for the education of its members, strengthened the focus on ABET qualifications. COSATU was very influential in early education policy formulations like in the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in the early 1990s. In many ways, this contributed to the shifts toward adult education provision in the country. A powerful voice like that of COSATU, combined with employers who had to be seen to be doing the right thing, an emerging NQF that was developing new qualifications, and a growing consultancy provider system contributed to the shift that saw adult education as ABET. Private matric was becoming overshadowed. The ABET provision that emerged was a poor mirror of the schooling system. Yet, the dominant view at the time silenced any debate about general education up to matric level for those outside school, especially the youth. Thus, over the years, adult education has grown to favour the older adult population at the exclusion of young adults.

Currently, adult education in the country functions far removed from mainstream institutions. It mainly takes place at PALCs, which are,
for the greater part, housed in schools at night. In addition, there is a thin spread of private provision that is dominated by consultants who offer their services at the work-place. The recent Ministerial Committee recommendations on Adult Education will give direction to a field that has long been fragmented and almost in disarray (Ministerial Committee, 2008 [b]). The Committee recommends a wide range of institutions for adult learning delivery, as well as a wide range of programmes and delivery methods. This has to be underpinned by a robust funding system for adult education. At last, there is hope.

5.3 Higher education

The first significant changes in higher education resulted from proposals of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). The work of this Commission had far-reaching consequences for the higher education sector. Its activities culminated in the Higher Education Act of 1997. The NCHE proposed that higher education should move from an elite to a mass system wherein the participation target would be set at 30%. It also proposed that higher education should be steered from the centre, primarily through goal-directed funding. Research shows that major shifts have occurred in the system: the student composition changed to favour those discriminated against previously with their numbers more than doubling from 1986 to 2005.

Among the proposals submitted for the transformation of higher education, the NCHE recommended the incorporation of colleges of education, nursing and agriculture into existing universities and technikons as faculties or schools or constituent parts thereof. Colleges of education were in the majority in the non-university, post-secondary system and totalled 93 as opposed to the 23 higher education institutions that existed by 2004. What is also worth noting here is the ratio of 66:27 of rural to urban colleges (Kruss, 2008). The process of incorporating colleges into higher education institutions started in 2002 and was finalised by 2006.

Yet, it was only in 2001 that the Department of Education responded to the proposals of the NCHE. The Department produced a National Plan for Higher Education to enact the recommendations in the NCHE report (Department of Education, 2001). The intention of the Plan was to guide higher education institutions towards meeting the goals for the system as a whole. Inherent in the plan were strategies to:

- Increase participation rates from 15% to 20% in ten to fifteen years by, for example, recruiting workers, mature students, in particular women and the disabled, and students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC);
increase graduate outputs;
shift enrolments from humanities to sciences, engineering and technology;
maintain the existing mission and programme differentiation between technikons and universities in the short term;
create new institutional and organisational forms to address the racial fragmentation of the system; and
establish two national institutes of higher education in the two provinces that did not have any.

Although the institutional landscape of higher education was not a priority in the National Plan for Higher Education, it is this activity that received the most attention and energy in the higher education sector and from the public. Through mergers, the 36 institutions of higher education were reduced to 21, plus two institutes of higher education in provinces that had no history of higher education provision, without closing any sight of delivery. Three institutional types were established, namely a university type, a university of technology type (from the former technikons), and a comprehensive university type, which is a mixture of the first two types. In the early years of the new government, higher education enrolments did not grow. Instead, there was a palpable decline in enrolment rates (Bunting & Cloete, 2008) This phenomenon could be attributed to the fewer matriculants produced by the school system during this period (1995–2000).

As the new government’s confidence increased, directed efforts to shape the size of higher education also grew exponentially. Ng’ethe et al. (2008) note that South Africa stands out as the only country that has attempted to address the issue of size and shape in sub-Saharan Africa higher education systems. In 2000, the Department restructured a smaller agency (the Tertiary Education Financial Scheme Agency or TEFSA), which was providing financial aid to needy students in higher education, to a bigger agency now called the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Despite humble beginnings, the new agency did not take long to increase the income to be deployed for student funding, as well as its efficiency levels to recuperate loaned funds. NSFAS records are impressive, boasting fund increments from a mere R21 million in 1991 to over R2 billion in 2008 that allowed them to assist 120 000 students compared with only 7 220 in 1991. The pass rate of students so assisted remained above 70% consistently (NSFAS Facts, 2008).

The availability of funding, improved school pass rates after 2000 and the opening up of all institutions to all race groups must be the three top factors that saw enrolments sky-rocket in most higher education institutions. In 2004, this resulted in the Minister of Education sending out parameters for managing and restraining student
enrolments. In 2005, the Minister issued guidelines for student enrolment planning in public higher education. It was the first attempt to control enrolment numbers (Bunting & Cloete, 2008). The enrolment plan evoked very strong counter arguments, the most vocal of which were those coming from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and Higher Education South Africa (HESA). They argued that capping countered government policies on access and equity. The Minister was forced to open up the consultation process on the matter and she took the advice that was given to her, which resulted in a review of the student enrolment plan. Each institution was going to have its own targeted growth rate, inclusive of both enrolment and success rates. Even though the higher education enrolment rate has been set at 820,000 by 2010, there is already an indication that the Minister would like to increase this number to at least one million students. This inclination is driven by the acute shortage of skills in a country that has taken on massive infrastructural projects, as well as the growing demand from the schooling system for post-secondary education. Would the current higher education system be able to cope with this demand?

5.4. Further education and training

Today’s FET colleges system is a far cry from the institutions that the new government inherited in 1994. Faced with the reality of apprenticeship demise in the country, most of these institutions became warehouses for students who were unable to access higher education, except for those led by highly innovative and smart principals. The FET colleges system evolved from technical colleges that primarily supported the apprenticeship system and used to produce trade artisans for the major industries in the country, namely mining, telecommunications, power stations and construction. Office-related and general studies were added to the programmes of these institutions at a later stage (Kraak & Hall, 1999). The collapse of this labour market scheme for the young and out-of-school in the country stimulated rigorous debate about the form and shape of this sector. Most technical colleges used to be located predominantly at secondary school level. It would be through this route that those who did not complete their secondary education could gain a “different” secondary school qualification. The qualification was different because, unlike those with a school qualification, these learners did not proceed to higher education. Many technical colleges began to offer various post-secondary education programmes, the role of which within the tertiary sector was dubious. It must be said that, as time went on, technical colleges started drawing more and more numbers from the ranks of students who passed the senior secondary education examinations, but either did not qualify for university admission or did not have the exorbitant resources required to enter universities. Some colleges formed
partnerships with technikons, which resulted in limited credits to their students. The point to note here is that this was always negotiated among institutions themselves and there are no cases where college learners, after having completed matric, were credited with anything more than one semester at a technikon after having spent up to four years at a technical college.

Following in the footsteps of the NCHE, a National Committee on Further Education was set up in 1998. This Committee presented numerous recommendations about changing former technical colleges to community colleges and there was a strong push to get these institutions to reflect community colleges in the United States of America (USA). An NGO called National Institute for Community Education (NICE) was the leading body in this campaign. It also advocated the need to expand the mission of technical colleges in terms of programmes that would support access, equity and redress (National Committee on Further Education, 1998). By 1999, there were a number of technical colleges that had transformed themselves into community and youth colleges. However, Government’s Further Education Act of 1998, which was to provide decisive direction to these colleges, squashed this enthusiasm. The first focus was on restructuring the colleges, which were spread over 152 sites, to 50 mega colleges. Like in the higher education sector, this was a painful process, since it mainly affected leadership. However, it was not as contested as was the case in higher education. Treasury allocated a substantial amount (R1, 9 billion) to recapitalise the sector for further modernisation. The next serious intervention in the further education sector was the introduction of a new curriculum. In 2007, the Department of Education introduced modernised vocational education in the FET colleges sector, which would be the equivalent of the academic, secondary education qualification in school education. Alongside the new curriculum, learners following this curriculum were, for the first time, awarded financial aid and bursaries from the same pool of funding that financed learners in higher education institutions. This was a major draw card for students to enrol at FET colleges.

Government did not accept all the recommendations of this Committee fully, especially concerning the community college concept. The major resistance against this concept was that it would, most likely, “ghettoise” this institutional type, since it was already largely filled by black African learners. At the same time, two external interventions were beginning to influence the thinking about FET colleges in the country to a large extent. Firstly, there was the
financial support coming from the British Council for many exchange programmes in colleges. In that regard, Government persuaded those involved to adopt the UK FET colleges model. Secondly, there was the unfolding policy implementation in higher education. Notably concerning both influences was the attraction to the creation of large institutions by amalgamating and reducing the number of existing institutions. This saw 152 technical colleges being amalgamated into 50 institutions. Later on, even governance structures were to change with more power being allocated to institutional councils.

One of the proposals of the National Committee on Further Education concerned the governance of colleges. It argued in favour of making the colleges a national competence. This proposal was not accepted, especially since colleges were always regarded as pre-tertiary institutions. Many saw the governance and administration arrangements related to the colleges as the one single constraint to the development of the sector, since they were effectively lumped with schools that dominated the attention of the provincial education departments. Yet, the FET sector is unique and complex in South Africa. Thanks to the NQF, it is a sector that includes senior secondary schools; technical and community colleges; enterprise-based training; and a wide array of private providers, including NGOs (Kraak & Hall, 1999).

In 2009, there were 50 mega public FET institutions spread over 236 campuses in the country and ± 900 private FET colleges of varying size. The original 152 campuses increased to 236 because some training centres that used to belong to the Department of Labour shifted to the Department of Education. These institutions have a very wide reach, covering the rural and urban divides. As pointed out earlier, FET institutions seem to be the only place where students end up who have either failed or passed the final school examinations weakly and thus could not be admitted to universities. In addition, as has also been mentioned, the new, modernised curriculum and the bursary scheme attached to the sector are major drawing cards for many of these learners. The public sector carries almost half a million students, while private colleges carry close to a million students (Akojee, 2005; Umalusi, 2008). The majority of the learners in the public sector are in the senior secondary phase of learning, even though they have actually passed the final grade in academic, senior secondary schools.

Also worth noting, is the breakdown between the FET colleges system and the rest of the education system. At present, the system does

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1 The Department of Education puts this number at about 100 000, since it probably counts students enrolled in full qualifications.
not articulate well with either the school or the higher education system. The following two problems seem to be relevant in this regard: confusion among the target groups, since these institutions cater for learners aged 16 up to 18+ in the same class, and curriculum articulation. Curriculum articulation problems are manifested concerning the problematic cross-recognition of achievements among the various institutions in the FET sector, for example, ordinary schools, technical high schools and comprehensive schools.

The National Plan for Further Education and Training Colleges (Department of Education, 2008) is the latest policy document developed in an attempt to steer and enhance progress in the sector. This plan represents a culmination of developments that have been made over the years in developing this sector, starting with the National Committee on Further Education already referred to above, through the various versions of the Further Education Act, curriculum innovation in vocational education provisioning and the recapitalisation of colleges. The aim of the Plan is to increase youth access, retention, success and throughput rates, and to ensure improved quality provision. It opens up new spaces in colleges, in the following ways:

- NQF programmes at levels 5 and 6 that reside in higher education, subject to approval by the Minister of Education.
- 20–30% of non-DoE programmes or programmes not appearing in the register approved by the Minister. These would be adult education programmes, occupational programmes funded by SETAs, community development projects, as well as projects funded on a public/private partnership basis.
- Intentions to double enrolment figures by 2014 to one million students.
- More space for possible delivery sites.
- Opportunities for strong collaboration with other government departments.
- Common quality assurance for public and private colleges, as well as possible collaboration between public and private institutions.
- Greater autonomy to FET colleges in respect of governance and own affairs management.

While the Plan will contribute significantly towards taking the FET colleges sector forward, increasing youth participation and, as such, facilitating extended engagement in education, the role of this institutional type in increasing the small post-secondary sector is still understated, even in the Plan itself.
6. Transition Routes and Connection with Work

In theory, young people can choose from a variety of paths that connect education and work during their evolution from school to work, for example:

- School to a higher education institution and to work.
- School to an apprenticeship and to work.
- School to an FET college and maybe to work.
- School to a learnership and maybe to work.

It can be argued that where the transition from one type of provision to the next is clear and an established relationship exists, the connection with work is also more effective. For example, it is true that the school education system is actually mapped into the higher education system – the nature of the subjects learnt in the latter part of secondary education is often mirrored in the higher education system. In fact, it is almost an extension and deepening of secondary education knowledge. Where this is not necessarily the case, as in the case of vocationally orientated higher education like medicine, physiotherapy, engineering, and so on, the selection of topics and the pacing and framing of content knowledge have the same base but are presented to suit the vocation (Young, 2006). However, even in cases where there is a disjuncture between school subjects and higher education subjects, for example, concerning law qualifications, there is still a definite connection with school work, since even law studies build on cognitive skills like research, synthesising, writing, explaining, discussing, applying, and so on, first developed and nurtured in the school system. In fact, without these skills and the propensity to develop them further, a student would never be able to launch him/herself into any of the highly vocationalised higher education qualifications. Furthermore, what cements the connection between school and higher education learning is not limited to the content and cognitive skills learnt. Even the process of credentialising the acquisition of such skills is similar, with standard examinations that sample domains of knowledge and skills in an educationally sound way applied in both sectors. This makes it easier for the users of such qualifications, such as employers and other institutions, to feel comfortable in the knowledge that certain standards that are acceptable to the professions were adhered to when such qualifications were awarded.

The connection in terms of content, skills and the processes engendered in the education and training process, is not limited to
school and higher education learning. Gamble (2003) points us to the same phenomenon in the context of artisan training in the form of apprenticeships. Firstly, the general education part of artisan training relates to the disciplinary knowledge that is pursued later on in such training, for example, mathematics, physical sciences, and so on. Gamble also observes that there has always been a relationship between conceptual knowledge taught, practical work selected for workshop training and workplace learning in artisan training. One of the most important features of artisan training is the fact that its success depends on a set curriculum that culminates in common external assessments and the presence of well-defined, dedicated institutions for the specific parts of the three-dimensional curriculum.

On the other hand, when there is an unclear transition between education, training and work, there is also less clarity on how these elements are connected, for example in the case of learnerships. Learnerships have unit standards based on a functional analysis of work itself, no standard curriculum, individualised assessments and no institutional basis of provision. In what is to follow, it will be argued that, where the transition routes are less clear and the connections with work weak or absent, youth flounder and are, in essence, thrown into a very helpless state regarding their futures. The unclear and seemingly disconnected attempts to provide training to the multitudes of young people who are not going to higher education institutions and who are not taking the apprenticeship route will be examined, because it seems as though this is where most of the problems remain, despite the amount of money already spent in an attempt to find solutions. Firstly, the effectiveness of one the most-recognised training programmes in the form of learnerships will be interrogated concerning its ability to act as a bridge for young people to secure employment or other forms of livelihoods. Secondly, the largest EPWP rolled out by government to assist young people in crossing the barrier of lack of experience will be reviewed. Altman (2008) strongly advocates that it is the responsibility of governments to identify young people who do not have access to networks and to assist them in entering their ‘first jobs’. The EPWP provides us with such a ‘first-job’ scenario to interrogate.
6.1 Learnerships and work

In 1998, the Department of Labour legislated the Skills Development Act that identified learnerships as the key system that would drive the training of young people, the unemployed and even those at work. In many instances, learnerships were conceived as the replacement of the dying artisan training and sometimes as an innovative way of structuring training in areas where there was no history of artisan training. Learnerships have been introduced in the South African training system as an intervention to a number of problems experienced in the production of skills for the country. These problems include:

- A need to create a work-based learning pathway of education and training qualifications and thus move away from an institution-based only learning mode. The creation of this pathway was particularly important in the last decade, since the school system was performing extremely poorly, with less than 50% of students writing the Senior Certificate examination passing. The alternate form of education was to function as compensatory education with a practical aim.
- A need to replace artisan training, which had declined and was also regarded as taking too long to complete and not enabling learners to access employment using part credentials.
- A need to formalise programmes to meet the skills demands of the labour market that could not be satisfied easily by way of the FET system that provided a limited range of programmes within a restrictive and centralised curriculum.
- The inadequacy of workshop facilities at FET colleges and the added need to include work experience in the curriculum to better prepare learners for the world of work.

When learnerships were introduced in the system, they carried all of the above underlying assumptions, although this was never articulated overtly. At the time, SAQA designed qualifications based on unit standards, which would be “national qualifications” because they were not linked to any institutional provision (any provider could provide them) and pegged at the level of some of the formal and institutionalised qualifications, like the senior secondary school leaving certificate. SAQA, furthermore, used lengthy and unfamiliar terminology to describe them (Allais, 2007).
These qualifications were supposed to provide an alternative route to obtain a qualification equivalent to a senior secondary school qualification or compensatory education. Evidence exists that this is not happening.

Compensatory education is not happening because, firstly, the school system has been picking up momentum and increasing its pool of grade-12-qualifying learners. Learners are staying in school longer and it is clear that for the majority of young people and their parents, completing Grade 12 first is still the first priority and preferred route. So, learnerships are now primarily taken up by young people who have attempted Grade 12, but have failed or passed weakly, instead of being used as an alternative pathway to obtaining a Senior Certificate. Recent HSRC research shows that the majority of learners in the learnership system are at NQF level 2 (22%) and NQF level 4 (31%), which coincides with formalised exit levels (HSRC, 2008). So, learners start with formal education and see learnerships as a way of improving their chances of accessing work and career opportunities rather than as compensatory education.

Learnerships also function as repackaged artisan training. Artisan training in South Africa can be traced back to the development of technical education that was responding to the mushrooming industrial development in mining, the railways, harbours and small engineering workshops (Gamble, 2003). It was clearly a technical-sciences-based education and like its British counterpart, was a clear alternative to liberal or general academic education. The introduction of mass production in industry had ramifications for this specialised form of training. This happened when other non-technical occupations were beginning to look at the technical form of education to improve skills attainment among would-be employees and employees. Furthermore, as mentioned already, technical training in the form of artisan training was fashioned after craft training. It was, therefore, long and only credentialed after many years of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

The deracialising of education and training in South Africa had other unintended consequences. It, firstly, happened during the period of mass production, making it difficult to obtain sponsored work
experience for learners and thus rendering the established artisan
training package incomplete. Secondly, the introduction of black
people into technical education happened at the time when
vocational education for “non-technical” fields was being introduced.
According to Gamble (2003), the former, subsequently, got linked to
education for the poor. Gamble further indicates that vocational
education in South Africa was particularly introduced as “relief of
indigency”. By the time this form of education was taken up by black
learners, there was already a particular slant to vocational or trade
education. Those working already argued for the skills they had
already picked up and which they should be credentialed for. This saw
the introduction of the repackaging of comprehensive qualifications
so that learners could be accredited at different levels rather than
only on completion of a long and single qualification.

The establishment of the NQF affirmed the awarding of qualifications
at every level of the framework. It is not yet clear whether this
packaging is yielding any benefits for system. In the context of the
NC(V) qualifications introduced at FET colleges, students are still
staying on to complete the three-year qualification and there is now
some further thinking about the usefulness of external examinations
and certification at NQF levels 2 and 3. Again, the HSRC study shows
that most students enter the learnerships system at points where
there are exits in the formal general education system, with fewer
students in the in-between levels. This suggests that exit
qualifications between the general and further education bands may
not be necessary. Instead, there must be a way of recognising the
skills of those attainments that fall in-between, but not by way of
qualifications. This will be dealt with in what is to follow.

The fact that learnerships qualifications are often without an
institutional base has become extremely problematic, since providers
in this market are a mixed bag that regard training provision as a
business and have limited capacity for adding meaningful value to the
learning process. A second problem has to do with the nature of
knowledge in these training programmes. It is described as
functional analysis of work itself or occupational as opposed to the
general academic nature of the school curriculum (Gamble, 2003;
Young, 2006). It, consequently, becomes difficult to equate the
different kinds of knowledge. Another problem has to do with the
appropriateness of knowledge based on functional analysis of work
itself being provided as off-the-job training in a continuously
changing environment context.

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* This is based on anecdotal conversations with many individuals working in this area.
6.2 The “first sponsored job”

Altman (2008) reports that 75% of the white, brown and Indian population in the Western Cape have work by the age of 22, as compared with 24% to 35% of black Africans. There are probably many reasons for this situation, but the limitation of workplace networks for black young people that makes it difficult for them to get their “first job” seems to top the list. In addition, this group seems to be deficient in the life skills that would render them work-ready when they presented themselves for job selection. This justifies state intervention in the form of sponsoring jobs that would propel these young people forward to further employment opportunities.

In 2004/5, Government established the EPWP with the overarching objective of creating one million opportunities over five years for the unskilled unemployed of South Africa. It particularly targets young people, women and the rural poor. The HSRC has just subjected this Programme to an extensive mid-term review (HSRC, 2008 [b]). The EPWP review is comprehensive and provides comparisons with similar interventions in countries like India (NREGP), the USA (New Deal), Ethiopia (PSNP), Senegal (SGETIP), Argentina, (JEFES), the OECD (ALMP), Zimbabwe (Red Cross HBC) and Indonesia. Of interest is the role that education should be playing in strengthening the Programme and easing the entrance of many young people into the labour market with government-sponsored “first jobs”.

This evaluation confirms the racial bias concerning joblessness that regards it as largely the burden of the African population. However, the overall impact of the Programme seems to be positive in that the review points to the fact that it does lead to increases in employment performance. One major constraint seems to be the size of the EPWP itself, despite the major investments by Government. While there is hope that the target of one million work opportunities will be reached, it seems that the target concerning training will not be met. The report states that:

The scale of education and training required is massive. Of the unemployed, 5.8 million have incomplete secondary education and are generally unprepared for the increasingly skilled work available. Basic literacy and numeracy are also a challenge among a significant portion of these unemployed. Any skills development programme seeking to make a meaningful contribution to this scenario would need to be very large, and also targeted to providing the kind of skills for which there is demand (p.48).
One of the key problems found in the EPWP relates to institutional arrangements. While the Department of Public Works is primarily responsible for the Programme, the responsibilities of other departments are difficult to track. The absence of the Department of Education is particularly conspicuous, considering the scale of training problems identified in the report. It seems as though the SETA training paradigm is not able to accommodate the Programme, since this model relies on almost virtual providers who set up house as the need arises. Many are unable to get into technical skills training and almost confine their training to soft-skills areas. The duration of training also turned out to be shorter than expected. However, no reasons for this are provided in the report. An added and major weakness is the fact that there seems to be weak or no exit strategies and career development for learners in the Programme, which leaves participants in a lurch. The way in which the programme is functioning with training providers appearing and disappearing on demand, makes it difficult to see how this non-institutionalised Programme can be extended to include after-care services such as exit and career development services. These issues would also be of relevance in the case of other non-institutionalised education and training efforts, for example, learnerships. There is a big segment of government-sponsored training that does not involve public institutions, but only “for-profit” providers with limited capacity. This is an alarming situation when considering that another HSRC evaluation reveals that 74% of those who participated in learnerships offered by such providers terminated their participation because they found either the workplace or the classroom training to be poor (HSRC, 2008[c]).

At national level, two departments are very prominent as far as sponsoring “first job” opportunities for young people is concerned. These are the Department of Social Development that supports programmes for youth skills training and SME development, and the Department of Labour, which oversees the roll-out of the EPWP. The documents reviewed for this paper do not include specific research on the initiatives of the Department of Social Development related to youth employment access. Further analysis is needed to evaluate the scale and impact of such initiatives. However, the roll-out of the EPWP is well-documented and included in the review.

At its inception, EPWP specified that “relevant and targeted training is essential to the success of the EPWP and will be a central component to ensure that workers attain relevant and marketable skills.” However, the report begs the question: What kind of training

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is relevant and what skills are “marketable”? And to whom? A clear example illustrates the issue. Some EPWP infrastructure projects provide learnerships for young learner contractors, particularly young women. The same projects will also employ 20–30 young people (mainly young men) as basic labourers. While the 3–4 learner contractors will benefit from training and transferable skills such as budgeting and accounting; technical planning and procurement; supervision and management; and how to deal with banking and finance, the labourers will not necessarily gain skills that may lead to future employment (Walker, 2008). The above anecdote is isolated, but it emphasises the fact that, while the report quantifies the number of people who have been engaged in the EPWP projects, it does not qualify who, within the cohort, received what type of training, skills and development and whether, indeed, these are “marketable.”

The EPWP mid-term report notes that senior managers responsible for project delivery at local sites have raised concerns about “the quality of EPWP employment,” including employment conditions; employee dissatisfaction; lack of planning concerning training and the ability to provide accredited training; and the absence of exit strategies. The report also indicates that five out of the nine provincial assessments critique specific aspects of EPWP training: projects are too short to allow for “meaningful” training (Eastern Cape); training budgets and the number of service providers are limited (Northern Cape); projects lack sufficient training elements, including competency/capacity to train (North West); poor training and exit strategies (Gauteng); and general lack of training (Mpumalanga). The report states bluntly: the “EPWP is not meeting its targets in respect to training” and “is lagging, particularly in the Social Sector”.

The report also includes an international review of public works programmes (PWPs) in general. One of the key findings is that, while skills development is a primary part of many OECD PWPs, impact tends to be limited and highly conditional. The study found that skills development initiatives “have an influence only if the training provided is closely aligned to the specific skills gaps identified in the wider economy.” Citing the World Bank’s Social Risk Management

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8 Burns (2008), p. 26 also raises questions about the EPWP’s project management capacity, budget constraints and whether or not an expansion of the intervention will actually “make a dent on youth employment”.
9 Anecdotal evidence is based on the author’s own Gauteng EPWP infrastructure project site visit and contract-learner interviews conducted on behalf of Singizi Consulting for the Business Trust in April 2008.
11 Ib(id), pp. 30-31.
12 Ib(id), pp. 44 and 48. Interestingly, while the report documents how and where training is “lagging”, instead of recommending how to correct or improve training issues, it actually notes that “training as a conditional component should be reconsidered and possibly transferred as a responsibility of the National Skills Development Framework”. See p. 57.
framework, the report indicates that PWPs may only be effective in contexts of chronic poverty and unemployment if “they offer sustained employment or employment guarantees, as well as creating productive assets”\(^{14}\). The EPWP only offers young people short-term access to limited project employment and the report itself casts doubts on the Programme’s abilities to create significant scales of “productive assets” like marketable skills and occupational competencies through training and skills development. External reviews of the EPWP also suggest that more research is needed to understand whether and how the EPWP (and related NYC initiatives) are actually “able to reach any significant scale” with regard to helping young people gain marketable skills and workplace competencies.\(^{15}\)

6.3 Skills supply and employment

Unless sufficient job opportunities exist, are waiting to be filled and training is explicitly linked to skills shortages, the EPWP will have no significant net impact on aggregate employment, and will, at best, result in substituting PWP workers for others (Mid-Term Review of the Expanded Public Works Programme: Synthesis Report Final, p. 15.)

It is a general fact that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for young people in South Africa to get jobs. Altman (2008) puts the number of black African young people who have not worked by age 22 at 76% and that of whites, coloureds and Indians at 25%. Even the better scenario is bad if one considers that it represents one out of every four young people. This crisis happens in a context where it is also generally known that the country is experiencing an acute shortage of skills. While we know that the race groups who fare better in accessing employment are more likely to be benefitting from the employment networks at their disposal, as opposed to those who grow up in households with no wage earners, there is a serious concern about mismatched skills for the economy.

\(^{14}\) ibid., p. 46.
\(^{15}\) Burns, Reducing Youth Employment in South Africa, p. 29.
An important HSRC study recently conducted to verify the critical nature of the reported scarce skills in the country is very illuminating. For example, the study almost refutes the generally claimed “truth” about the need to train artisans in abundance. On the contrary, this study shows that technicians and trade workers constituted only 5.35% of the advertised vacancies in 2007 compared with the category for professionals that constituted 50.37%. However, the vacancy fill rate for technicians and trade workers can still be regarded as low at 48.72% (Erasmus, 2008). In the same study, the verification exercise shows that, while there is a general conception that there is a shortage of teachers as reported in the National Scarce Skills List 2007, the actual category of scarce teachers may rather be in higher education than in schools, where the vacancy and fill rates are high and low, respectively. Although low, there is evidence of teacher shortages (9.3%), but this seems to be in specific skills and qualities rather than in the number of teachers available. There is also the case of health workers who are supposedly in acute shortage and yet, the HSRC study found that the shortage of doctors is prevalent in the public sector and in rural areas only, while the availability of nurses in absolute terms is still adequate. What is problematic is the immense attrition between graduation and registration. There are many, many more examples that refute the accepted wisdoms on the state of the skills crisis. More importantly, it found that the country does not yet seem to possess the sophisticated tools required to understand the problem of skills deficiency correctly, since many of the so-called problems often result from incorrect readings.

The scarce skills verification report is revealing for the education and training sector. In the first instance, there is no intelligence in education and training to assist in understanding and verifying the levels of scarce skills beyond the generally accepted anecdotes that are usually turned into truths. There are different sources\(^{16}\) of information on the topic of scarce skills in the country, all of which are contradicting one another. For example, if we take the exaggerated truth about the dire need to train far more artisans, many institutions could easily turn out to be artisan producing institutions when the market may actually be calling for something else. Secondly, both local and international research shows that low-level and semi-skilled jobs have a much higher percentage fill than skilled-level and professional jobs (Altman, 2008; Levy & Murnane, 2004; Erasmus, 2008). In other words, the education and training sector must aim to provide most young people with skills after a good general education at the higher levels. The need for higher-level skills

\(^{16}\) SETA collects information for the Department of Labour; JIPSA receives information mainly from consultants; the HSRC undertakes a fair amount of work; and there are also a number of independent research interests.
has also been confirmed for the so-called “second economy” in South Africa. Philip (2008), for example, indicates that higher levels of formality in the second economy seem to unlock an expanding and different scale of opportunities. She uses formality as a proxy for the ability to comply with expected business standards, which in turn comes with higher levels of education and training. It has been found that there is a tendency to underutilise some professions in the field, especially engineers (Erasmus, 2008). This brings us to the third problem, namely that of understanding intermediate skills. Because the supply of skills in South Africa comes predominantly from the higher education sector in the absence of a dedicated intermediate sector, it is difficult to understand what training should be aimed at in the middle level to support the professional skills at the top end.

Some sectors have, indeed, been wrestling with the skills mix problem, for example, the Department of Health. While the Department of Health is fighting to put more emphasis on mid-level skills production, the funding formula in the Department of Education contradicts this by placing more emphasis on post-graduate studies. There is also no relationship between the Department of Health and FET institutions (Department of Heath, 2006). All in all, the supply side of skills seems to be foraging in a non-educated place and this might be behind the problems evident in the mismatch between the supply of skills and employment opportunities.
7. Students’ Aspirations and Navigation Tools from School

There are a number of studies that have tried to deepen our understanding of how young people generally handle the transition from one school to another. For example, Simkins (2004), states that there is an evolution path that is quite predictable that young adults take from school to work via higher education or post-secondary education, where possible. We also know from the same study that a high school qualification is almost, but not quite, *sine qua non* for higher education. Even though we know that the majority of African young adults neither proceed to higher education nor to employment, we still do not know how they spend their state of “disengagement”. We know even less about their aspirations before becoming “disengaged”. But Simkins gives us further glimpses of what happens and he has this to say:

“A great number of South African learners in Grade 12 have not yet formed realistic assessment of where they are in the world, and their schools do not help them. To them, their results in the Senior Certificate are a terrible shock and necessarily lead to major revisions in their plans.” (p.8)

On the other hand, Cosser’s (2002) study provides us with very detailed insights into the choices students make about further learning and the factors that influence them. Surveying students during their final year of school, Cosser found that 73% of Grade 12 learners intended to enter higher education within the next three years after graduating, 13% had no intention of doing that, while 14% were unsure. The optimistic 73% figure confirms a number of factors we are already aware of concerning students at this stage of development: (i) that most students in secondary schooling are hoping to enter higher education as the next step in their evolution (Simkins, 2004); (ii) that the entire schooling system is structured and geared towards higher education progression (Lolwana, 2007; Bregman, 2008); and (iii) that higher education is seen as the mid-state in the evolution journey toward employment (Simkins, 2004). It is disappointing but to be expected that Cosser’s (2004) follow-up study shows a picture with a vast difference between intentions and realities. His follow-up survey on the 2002 study reveals that the destinations of students were not as hopeful as their intentions:

- 13% were repeating Grade 12 at school.
- 47% were in further learning (FET or university).
• 14% were employed.
• 26% were unemployed (22% looking for a job and 4% not actually economically active).

These two studies give us more insight into students’ aspirations while at school. Most of them aspire to continue to higher education. The first issue to dampen this enthusiasm seems to be the quality of attainments at the end of the schooling experience. In South Africa, we know that only 15% qualify outright to enter higher education, while 50% obtain only a school-leaving certificate, which is a lower qualification and only admissible at higher education institutions under specific conditions (Department of Education, 2007). Cosser (2004) is of the opinion that grade 12 results are the strongest predictor of whether or not a student will enter higher education after graduating from school. This stands to reason, since students who demonstrate academic strengths are likely to have many others, like parents, teachers, siblings and friends rallying around them and encouraging them to look toward higher education compared with weaker students.

So, in the main, students aspire to enter higher education. It seems like the main destination known to them after school. However, in the process to this destination, many other factors intervene, including poor results; financial constraints; inability to meet admission requirements; not having realistic information about institutions and programmes that would meet their abilities and resources; and, generally, a very confused view of how to proceed begins to emerge and dominate. This confusion is not helped by the general lack of information on the next “destination” in the system for young adults. Cosser’s studies also point us to this factor, namely the lack of information and tools on how to navigate the system, which could be an even greater impediment for young people than the lack of career information.

The lack of information and guidance for students who must make decisions about work and higher education is, therefore, another critical weakness in the system. It requires systematised attention so that equality and redistributive justice can be promoted within this still fractured segment of our society. The provision of career information and guidance in the South African education system have always followed the racial inequality patterns where white schools had the most information and black schools almost none. However, what was lacking from government provision was compensated for by large NGOs that filled the gap and provided such services. Here we can cite NGOs like the Careers and Research Information Centre (CRIC) in Cape Town and the Educational Information Centre (EIC) in Johannesburg. These centres and others played a very critical role in
supporting young people and schools in gaining information about careers and the world of work. They were largely supported by donor money that was channelled to the NGO sector during the apartheid boycott. It is a well-known fact that the NGO community did not survive long after the new government took over as a result of donor money being channelled to the new government instead. The centres had to close down eventually.

The impact of the void created in a system with insufficient information and guidance is well illustrated by Flederman (2008). She describes the services available as:

“... thundershower provision (that) has resulted in some good quality information and services reaching small pockets of people. For some pockets of people the thundershower helps a garden blossom; for those on steep barren slopes it doesn’t”. (p.24)

In government, both the Department of Education and the Department of Labour provide information and career guidance for different audiences. The Department of Education has moved a long way from the historical provision of guidance almost exclusively to white schools to making career guidance provision a part of the Life Orientation learning area in all 12 grades of schooling. However, career guidance competes with other modules in the same learning area and the amount of time devoted to this aspect remains questionable (Flederman, 2008; Du Toit, 2005). However, the time constraints imposed on the learning environment are not the only problematic issue concerning the provision of career guidance. To this can be added the availability of information; the way it is packaged and utilised; and the knowledge of teachers who handle the subject about careers and further study opportunities. The higher education sector has always placed more emphasis on guidance and employment services from both the institutional and national perspective. For example, the Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) provides leadership in this area. However, these services are only available to those in institutionalised education and not to those on the outside.
In the context of a country like South Africa with a deep history of inequality, it can be anticipated that, in general, Africans and especially those in rural areas will be reached less by information on further learning options and careers. Two studies support this point from different angles. Bunting and Cloete’s (2008) study clearly shows us that there is a problem for South Africa as a whole as far as the participation rate in higher education, which lies at 16%, is concerned. But the gross, unequal participation rates of different races in the system are a reflection of a number of things, including a lack of information and guidance opportunities for African students while at school. Simkins (2004) supports this with his statement that most Grade 12 learners have not yet formed a realistic assessment of where they are in the world, and their schools do not help them.

The fact that this problem is exaggerated among the African population is due to historical inequalities on the one hand, but also due to the fact that the majority of African youth are still confined to poorly performing schools (Soudien, 2006). As long as this is the case, the education system has a responsibility to confront and make provisions for this reality. This brings us back to the first point about the role of the secondary school system in increasing participation in higher education. Cosser and Du Toit (2002), for example, found that the most disadvantaged Grade 12 student groups were more likely to choose to study at a technikon rather than at a university. They attribute this to easier access to technikons and the lower percentage of disadvantaged students who meet university admission requirements.
8. International Experience

When looking at countries where youth unemployment is a marginal problem, one realises that not many 16-year-olds to 18-year-olds are pushed towards employment, whether imaginary or real. Such countries also tend to keep young people in the education system longer. Therefore, a large proportion of the cohort we are concerned about in this study is often engaged in one or other form of education and training. Furthermore, the secondary, further and higher education systems seem to be more integrated in such countries and, as such, provide better learning pathways to a wider range of students (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009).

8.1 The secondary education system

Although the secondary education system does not have a very long history, it is recognised as a very important part in any education system. In the USA, where secondary education was first made available to the general public, it was only after the Civil War that the country stopped viewing it as merely an extension of the elementary schooling system, but as a unique unit of provision (Holsinger & Cowell, 2000). The secondary education system serves as a link between schooling and work, work-preparedness and higher education.

Secondary education is not only important as a necessary prerequisite for trainability. It is also the level where young people consolidate their acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, an important aspect of education. In fact, Young (2007) regards disciplinary knowledge as the main reason why schools exist and argues convincingly that it is this element of education that equalises unequal societies, not the attendance of schools. According to him, the acquisition of this “powerful knowledge” enables children from disadvantaged backgrounds to move, at least intellectually, beyond their local and particular circumstances. Townsend and Dougherty (2006) also advance an argument in favour of the importance of general education. They see it as contributing towards the make-up of educated persons who go on to become part of the knowledge society. The more individuals are included in this group, the more their societies are seen as educated and the more the level of knowledge in these societies is raised.
Many secondary education systems have come to realise that curriculum diversity is an important element of senior secondary education. It plays a significant role in promoting universal secondary education and offers a better chance of reaching the disaffected and less academically inclined (Holsinger & Cowell, 2000). In this regard, it should be noted that a diversified secondary curriculum is different from a differentiated secondary education system. In the former, the curriculum is broad, allowing students to pick and choose from a mixed menu of academic, vocational and practical subjects, while in the latter students have to move along clear curriculum tracks.

However, because the greatest job growth has been taking place on the upper part of the remuneration scale, there has been a corresponding request for more and more education. In other words, while secondary education acquisition is becoming very important for accessing work, it is no longer sufficient to ensure access to today’s labour market, which increasingly requires post-secondary education qualifications (Levy & Murnane, 2003).

8.2 Higher education

Many higher education publications submit proof that post-secondary education is on the move. In fact, Garrod and Macfarlane (2009,) quoting statistics from the OECD, are of the opinion that:

“... the higher education expansion witnessed all over OECD countries reflects a widening of access to new groups of students that have historically been excluded from post-secondary education and the changing needs of a global, knowledge-based economy”. (p.3)

The two needs identified above are reflected in the differentiation in higher education institutions that are found increasingly in the higher education systems of OECD countries. For example, Norway has established what is called “third-generation” higher education institutions (CHET, 2008); further education colleges in the UK now offer foundational degrees; and Korea and Singapore have expanded their systems through a junior college system (Ng’ethe, 2008). The emergence of other institutions in higher education has not only brought about a diverse system, but has essentially done away with the exclusivity of elite pathways from school to higher education.
Even though Garrod and Macfarlane (2009) remind us that Eton College in England still dominates admissions to Oxford and Cambridge, there is a range of institutions to accommodate a variety of learners in the system and many different routes to access higher education. Therefore, this exclusivity is no longer an issue. It appears that students who go to junior or community colleges are actually different from those who go straight to universities and it is primarily this group that goes wasted in South Africa (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Ng’ethe (2008) considers a system of differentiation to be an appropriate way of massifying the higher education system. He has the following to say in this regard:

“A system of elite higher education without the balancing force of mass higher education would not be politically or socially viable, and a system of mass higher education without the academic models and values of elite institutions would be unsound educationally and politically.”

Although the current equity-driven approach is highly appreciated, it cannot be implemented at the expense of muting and silencing the differentiation discourse that would open up options for different student profiles in the system, and thus massify higher education in South Africa.

Also, in most developing countries, the expansion of post-secondary education systems has been largely unplanned and is regulated insufficiently. Estimates of private further education provision in such countries far outstrip the numbers in public further education and training institutions (Akojee, 2005; Umalusi, 2008). The size of this sector can also be regarded as a response to the huge failure on the part of the public education system to meet demand. Kim et al. (2007) argue convincingly that no higher education system has succeeded in massifying without treating the private component of its system as an integral part of the whole system. Therefore, in the first instance, the diversification that is needed in the higher education system comprises the inclusion of the range of other institutions that are already playing a significant but unrecognised role in the new post-secondary education system. That would allow both public and private further education institutions to provide for a diverse sector. It would also bring about a more differentiated higher education sector in which colleges, universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities would all play unique roles.
There is a view that as soon as different types of institutions belong to one system, isomorphism tends to creep in (Ng'ethe, 2008). What would prevent further education colleges from mimicking universities or developing isomorphism? While institutional differentiation implies horizontal differentiation by bringing on board different institutional types, programme differentiation implies vertical differentiation, since the latter is in reaction to the demand for greater diversity among graduates (World Bank, 2000). That means that institutional differentiation is not enough. Programme differentiation is as much a critical component in ensuring differentiation. Programme differentiation is informed by a detailed content analysis, as well as a stipulation of the qualifications to be awarded in one institutional type as opposed to another institutional type. Higher education institutions often get stuck looking at admission requirements and making judgments about the worth of programmes based on admission requirements. This is wrong. Ng’ethe (2008), states that programme differentiation requires different analytical methods, which is true. FET colleges should not entertain thoughts about awarding degrees. They should stick to awarding certificates and diplomas that have significant recognition in higher education. Hence, the content of the programmes offered at FET colleges should allow for genuine transferability of achievements into degree awarding programmes. Then differentiation can be regarded as articulating successfully. South Africa’s NQF promised to give the education system this articulation with a system that intended to create equivalences that would allow credit accumulation and transfer. However, this has not happened (Young, 2004). Ng’ethe (2008) cautions us about the complexity of engendering articulation in differentiated programmes, since it requires a different mindset and multiple institutional actors, multiple sub-sets of the educational system, and a system-wide student information system.

There are those who would argue that, even though African higher education systems are facing the same pressures for expansion, they have unfortunately just delivered “more of the same” (CHET, 2008). Ng’ethe (2008) attributes this phenomenon to the lack of direction from the centre that would allow African higher education institutions and programmes to articulate. As a result, more institutions may open their doors, but they do almost the same things. Ng’ethe, therefore, concludes that the kind of differentiation that seems to exist in African higher education is horizontal with different types of knowledge fields, not different types of institutions. This is in contrast to OECD institutions where the focus has been on mission expansion. That resulted in the development of different institutions with different missions, which have been instrumental in improving access to higher education (Garrod & Macfarlane, 2009).
8.3 Adult and further education and training

In other countries, institutions like the South African FET colleges are comprehensive or multi-purpose in nature and cater for a wider range of student needs in their communities. The colleges in the USA exemplify the most diverse and comprehensive institutions. They provide a range of programmes, including academic development, work preparation, community development, continuing education, general education or liberal arts, education for talented scholars, entrepreneurship and transfer courses to degree-awarding programmes at university (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006; Vaughan, 2000). There are three kinds of colleges, although the lines of distinction are becoming increasingly blurred, namely, community colleges that tend to encompass the full diversity; technical colleges that are primarily work-preparation institutions similar to our FET colleges; and junior colleges that focus on transfer courses. Again, these distinctions tend to be more theoretical, since most of these institutions are mainly learner-facing and design their courses around student needs.

However, it is also clear that the community college is increasingly becoming the most dominant and favoured form because it encompasses a wider provision range.17

The second way in which college institutions in other countries differ from those in South Africa, is that they are considered to be a part of the higher education system and not an alternate secondary education system, because their focus is on the provision of post-secondary education. They are, therefore, places where students go who have attempted but not completed high school; who have a weak academic record; who are undecided about university study; who have personal, financial or social problems barring them from enrolling at a university immediately; who want a technical/vocational career; and who are “coming back”, or places where young adults spend a “cooling-out” period. The post-secondary education nature and a feeling of belonging to the higher education system are key to the popularity of these institutions. Learners see themselves as progressing instead of going back to start secondary education when they register at a college. What is interesting about the college

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17 Discussions with many Vice-Presidents and senior staff at Gordon College (Georgia); Athens Technical College (Georgia); Haywood College (North Carolina); and Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina).
institution in the USA in particular, is that it has now expanded to a point where the 2000 enrolment figure exceeded 12 million students constituting a 45% share of all first-time college student enrolment, 49% of minority college students and 51% of first-generation college students (Vaughan, 2000). According to Vaughan, the impetus of this expansion can be traced back to external factors such as the rapid expansion of the high school sector after 1890; the GI Bill; the baby boom; skills demands in industry; the civil rights movement of the 1960s that stimulated college education interest within minority communities; and the push for women’s rights that broke down the barriers for women in education, at work and at home. The American response to society’s quest for this kind of institution can be found in many countries that have managed to massify their education systems beyond school level where it matters, for example, Korea, Chile, Singapore and India (Ng’ethe et al., 2008). This is a very important lesson for South Africa, since the country faces similar external pressures but has not yet been able to develop an institutional response to such pressures brought to bear by young adults.

Lastly, but related to the above point of catering for a diverse range of programmes, is the resulting diverse target student group that one finds at such institutions. One cannot expect to find only, or mainly, full-time learners because some are students sent by their employers for up-skilling; some come for their own academic development; some come on their own to study after work; some are just trying out; some are hobby students, while a community is sometimes serviced as the public-interest face of a college. This makes this institutional type the logical home for adult education, since more and more separate adult education institutions are becoming obsolete. Added to the appeal of this kind of institution is its open admission policy, which allows any student to register. This makes for college participation that is age-diverse and makes these institutions unique as they try to be second-chance high schools; junior colleges; community colleges and technical colleges, all at the same time. As such, they are bound to attract a very diverse population to the fold.
It is useful to revisit the work of two South African organisations that have developed expertise in the area of youth work, namely, JEP\textsuperscript{18} and the NYC\textsuperscript{19}. JEP, usefully, provided an analysis of youth into four identifiable categories:

- Young people who are “fine”. These people participate fully in education and social life, and have good support systems at home and in the community.
- Young people who are “at risk” of not making a healthy transition to either adulthood or a democratic society.
- The next group is “already marginalised”. This group includes young people who are already well outside the support structures they would need in order to make the transition to positive, healthy adulthood.
- The final group is described as “lost” or “dangerously disengaged”. The understanding is that this group is unlikely to be reached by or attracted to large national programmes, even if they were put into place.

Even though this classification was done during the period when many young people were still traumatised by the brutal era of fighting apartheid, there is no reason to believe that today’s youth do not bear similar scars: many young people experience a lot of violence in the schools they attend; poverty seems to be on the increase in many households, and, like the world over, the 16-year to 24-year age group accounts for 50% of HIV-infected individuals in society (World Health Organisation, 2006). Some young people bear the brunt of growing up in households without an adult, some are at the receiving end of a violent society and some fall prey to drugs and crime. Many of them are not engaged in education, training or employment (Ministerial Committee, 2008(a); Altman, 2008; Altman & Marock, 2008). It can be hypothesised, therefore, that present-day youth continue to fall into the categories of the JEP classification.

The JEP recommendations of 1995 concerning interventions required for the youth were later taken forward by the NYC. Although the NYC remained the only government-led organisation active in the youth

\textsuperscript{18} JEP was established in 1990 and closed its doors in 1999.

\textsuperscript{19} The NYC was established at the onset of the new government but eventually took over the work started by JEP in 2000. The NYC office closed in November 2008.
development sector (2000–2008), its failure to engage with the Departments of Education or Labour at any strategic level has always been problematic. However, the NYC, in a recent policy document (2008), recommended the following:

- Schools should provide the knowledge and skills for life and work while serving as sites where young people can feel they belong, develop their identities and build their self-esteem through personal discovery and social interaction.
- Schools (and colleges) should ensure that all young people attain their National Senior Certificates, or an equivalent qualification with practical and economically valuable skills.
- The education and training system should provide out-of-school youth with second-chance opportunities to complete their school education.
- The education and training system should aid young people in their transition to adulthood by promoting a wider and more flexible range of learning pathways available to them, and demonstrate how these can impact on young people’s prospects for further learning, personal development and employment.

In the context of this youth vulnerability, coupled with what seems to be their needs, we have to scrutinize the ways in which the education and training system does not meet their needs, despite increased investment in making the system more accessible and equitable. The system seems not to be meeting the needs of young people in the following ways.

9.1 Inability to complete the school qualification or general education

In the first place, something still drives learners away from schooling when they reach the secondary education level and the highest drop-out rate happens here. It seems as if the secondary education agenda makes this part of schooling unattractive to many young people. We know from Crouch’s (2005) study that boys drop out of school as soon as they find it uninteresting. School can lose its appeal for different reasons, including a restrictive curriculum that does not cater for a wider range of interests, teachers’ lack of competence in the subjects that they teach and/or poor resourcing of schools.

9.2 Absence of a second-chance secondary education qualification

The fact that the education system does not provide second-chance
secondary education options has very serious effects for South African youth. This happens when the Senior Certificate, obtained after the successful completion of secondary education, is the single, most required qualification for entering the labour market and higher education. Increased participation in higher education is, therefore, highly dependent on a successful secondary education system for those in school and for those who have temporarily suspended their schooling careers. An extended, more flexible education and training system should also incorporate other options of accessing higher education, particularly for those who have not completed their secondary education.

9.3 Inappropriateness of adult education for youth

The current attention paid to ABET qualifications and literacy resulted from very strong voices in COSATU, a powerful body that lobbied for the education of its members. This emphasis contributed to the shifts that started to happen in adult education provision in the country. A powerful voice like that of COSATU, combined with employers who had to be seen to be doing the right thing, an emerging NQF that was developing new qualifications and a growing consultancy-provider system all contributed to the shift that saw adult education defined as ABET, while the private matric was overshadowed. The ABET provision that emerged was a poor mirror of the schooling system, but this dominant approach squashed any debate about – and provision of – general education up to matric level for those outside school, especially the youth. In fact, over the years, adult education has grown to favour the adult population, specifically to the exclusion of the youth.

9.4 Incomplete higher and further education qualifications

More than a quarter of higher education students are estimated to exit the system at the end of their first year (Kellog’s study). Even though there is a drop-out rate throughout all the years of university study, it is at its highest after the first and second years. In further education, the most cited reasons for not being able to pursue studies are lack of money and work (National Plan for Further Education and Training, 2008). The factors implicated in both higher and further education point to an inherent weakness in the system that militates against young people leaving education with complete qualifications. Because of poor articulation between the higher and further education systems, as well as articulation from one university to another, honourable drop-downs and movement from one institution to another are difficult, if not impossible.
9.5 Lack of articulation of the FET college system with the rest of the education system

There is a startling breakdown between the FET colleges system and the rest of the education system. Currently, the FET colleges system does not articulate with either the school or the higher education system. There seems to be two problems here: confusion among target groups (these institutions cater for 16-year-olds up to 18-year-olds-plus in the same classes with the same curriculum articulation). Curriculum articulation problems show up in the difficulties concerning the cross-recognition of achievements among the many different institutions, such as ordinary schools, technical high schools and comprehensive schools in the FET system.

9.6 Reduction in the size of post-secondary education

In South Africa, post-secondary education has come to be synonymous with university education and has shrunk dramatically over the past decade. The NCHE (1996) had set the participation target for South Africa at 30%, but at 16% the system is already showing signs of stress (Bunting & Cloete, 2008). While enrolments have improved, particularly concerning a headcount of African students who used to be underrepresented in higher education historically, this phenomenal growth in student population masks deep-seated inequalities in the system. The participation of black African students continues to be the lowest (12%) as opposed to that of whites, which has been constant in the 60% range (Bunting & Cloete, 2008).

9.7 Higher education admission policies

While many things have changed in higher education, admission policies have remained intact. This ensures that more or less the same number of students qualify for higher education from the school system, even though the overall numbers of those who pass have been increasing.

9.8 Private provision in further and higher education

In both further and higher education, private provision is virtually set up as competition to public provision. Although the National Plan on Further Education and Training (2008) does not rule out possible collaboration between public and private providers, the conditions are such that it is a remote possibility, if one at all. The size of the
education and training problem to be addressed here is so huge that it would be a major error to leave it only in the hands of the public sector: the private sector has an invaluable complementary role to play.

9.9 Absence of an institution that meets the diverse needs of youth

We know that youth presents with a range of needs as identified by JEP and the NYC earlier on. These needs range from second-chance education to short courses, remedial education, general vocational education, specific skills development, career reinforcement, entrepreneurship development, life skills development and post-secondary education, to name but a few. Some young people are already working, some have young children to look after, and for some reason, some cannot afford to relocate to a distant place for studying. There does not seem to be an institutional type or types able to provide a wide range of education opportunities for such a diverse set of needs in the system.

9.10 Difficult transitions from school

For many young people who are not going to university immediately, the exit from school is often the first step to a life of “unplanned” inactivity. As Simkins (2004) explains: for many, failing the Senior Certificate examination is a rude awakening to where they are in the universe. This is partly due to the unavailability of information about the next steps in the education context, especially for young people in areas far away from urban settings. Also, for many young people who come from families with no income, there are no first-hand networks for accessing jobs and the labour market.

9.11 Cost and scale of learnerships

Irrespective of the worth and quality of learnerships, they do provide a reprieve and sometimes a meaningful bridge to work for many young people. However, there are structural problems that prevent this intervention from going to scale. One major problem seems to be the fact that the cost of learnerships is, by definition, exorbitant: learnerships have resulted in the development of an extensive consultancy training class. The absence of a public provider network in this area of education and training currently prevents the learnership system from going to scale.
9.12  Post-school institutions not rooted in local communities

In both rural and urban settings, higher education and FET institutions are geographically located in communities, but remain institutions that are both psychologically and financially far away from communities. Even those FET colleges or campuses that are located in communities where they are needed the most are not necessarily rooted in or connected to those local communities.

9.13  Inadequate research on skills needs

Despite the crisis concerning skills shortages in the country, there seems to be a lack of sophistication in collecting information that would help the supply institutions deal with the issue. Firstly, the credibility of information about scarce, priority and critical skills is in question (HSRC, 2008). This information, which comes from a range of sources such as SETAs, JIPSA, the Department of Labour, the HSRC and independent researchers, can be questioned in terms of the methodology and the reports produced. There also seems to be no clarity on the mid-level skills range where most young people are to be found, since most research is often done at the top end of the professions.

9.14  Effects of central steering through funding

Steering through funding has been helpful in making institutions accountable, equalising the playing field and providing incentives to institutions to move toward desired goals. However, as much as there are positive effects, there have also been unintended negative consequences. Some of the consequences have to do with the isomorphism now experienced in the different university types as funding steers them all towards the same kind of things in higher education. The absence of institutions such as technikons that used to be responsible for post-secondary education as well as mid-level skills production, is a critical gap resulting from the effect of funding formulae. It is still early days in the FET colleges sector, but it can already be expected that the bursary scheme for the NC(V) programmes will be such a draw card that any other unfunded programmes will stand a slim chance of raising participation levels, irrespective of their worth.

9.15  Many pieces of the puzzle, but few that fit together

Numerous stakeholders are grappling with the questions of youth, education and employability. There are many departments,
organisations and initiatives that espouse goals and intentions towards youth skills development, training and employment, but there is little evidence of integration and collaboration among them. Stakeholders lack synergy.
Few people would be in disagreement about the urgency of the problems facing our youth and the potential crisis that this situation holds for the country. While most young people navigate the passage from childhood to adulthood without falling prey to drugs, early pregnancy, poverty, crime, family break-ups, abuse, violence and dropping out of school, far too many of our nation’s future workers, parents and citizens are blighted by these rampant pathologies. Can education do anything to remedy and prevent the situation? Education cannot be seen as the panacea for all these ills. However, it has a big role to play in the lives of young people. In many instances, youth who remain untouched by such social ills during their development, eventually fall prey to a life of uselessness – unfortunately, current public systems are designed to catch only a few of these unfortunate youngsters, not the majority.

Today, young people also face a far more challenging economic future that they did 20 years ago. Competition in the labour market is far more intense; the range of career paths that are not dependent on some post-secondary education has narrowed; and the earning prospects of young wage earners have eroded sharply. In addition, the drop in work requiring mid-level skills complicates the labour market even further for the youth. Most observers agree that the skills requirements of the workplace have increased much faster than public education’s capacity to respond to them. The “skills premium” – the value of having better education and the capacity to apply it successfully in the workplace – is increasing. Indeed, the erosion in earning power and the increasing number of young people who are unable to access employment accrue largely from the widening mismatch between their skills and educational levels, and the demands of a dynamic labour market.

The departure point for interventions aimed at young people in the 16–24 age group should be about extending their engagement in education rather than trying to get
them into employment sooner. To this end, the aim should be to:

- Retain young people in some form of learning programme until they are closer to the age of 24 by providing an accessible and successful secondary education system;
- establish second-chance programmes as an integral part of the design and implementation of education programmes;
- provide wide and flexible learning pathways in secondary education and beyond that will ensure that all young people can find home institutions, programmes of interests and delivery mechanisms that suit them; and
- develop this institutional capacity with immediate effect to alleviate the pressing problem.

The aim of education would then be not only to retain the majority of learners in the system, but primarily to improve the first-chance option so that most young people can succeed in the first place. A second chance is important, but should be regarded as such. The interventions that are suggested below are aimed at tackling the system, bearing in mind most specifically the challenges facing the youth.

10.1 Institutions

Full-time education should still be compulsory until the end of the school year in which a learner reaches the age of 16, or completes at least Grade 9. Furthermore, learners should be obliged to attend an educational institution or to participate in any other form of learning until they reach the age of 18. Besides strengthening the quality and variety of school education itself, a more diversified range of institutions should be provided in the system to target learners other than those who are seeking university admission.

While schools should remain the main institutions for providing school education, there should be opportunities for those young people who do not like school to complete their secondary education somewhere else, for example at FET colleges. PALCs have not worked particularly well because of their exclusive focus on literacy and ABET; their lack of connection with skills development and progression routes; and the dangers associated with night school
provision. However, the qualifications and curriculum of FET colleges as institutions for youth should of necessity be very diverse and have strong linking pathways with the rest of the education system. Currently, the FET colleges system is an institutional type with an underdeveloped identity not actually relating to the rest of the education system.

The current private-public institution mix of provision goes against the prevailing demand among young people for post-secondary and alternate post-school options, since private college participation by poor students is not supported financially. Private provision in the country is not homogeneous and has a mix of institutions of variable quality. In this mix, there is a combination of institutionalised and so-called “consultancy-class” or “suitcase” providers. In an environment where it is clear that the system must expand, lack of support for private provision by the Department of Education does not make sense, because such providers already benefit hugely from government money in the form of learnerships and other traineeship funds available in the system. Although many countries seem to be moving aggressively toward expanding their tertiary education systems through private provision, reaction to this intervention seems to be mixed. For example, Brazil is a country with a large and poor private higher education sector in which mostly poor students who have not had good public schooling that allows them to qualify for good public higher education, participate. On the other hand, Asian countries like Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and so on, have had more success in expanding their tertiary education systems through private provision (Kim, et al., 2007). From all of this, we learn that, by considering private provision as an integral part of the whole education system, governments are able to grow this system and improve its performance instead of regarding private provision as peripheral. It is, therefore, recommended that:

- There should be a review of the role of the different types of high schools in the system, namely ordinary and technical high schools, academies, comprehensive schools, special schools, and so on, with the aim of expanding school options and making secondary education achievable for all.
- Ordinary schools should diversify their curriculum incrementally to include more practical subjects.
- FET colleges should become organising institutions for out-of-school youth and take in some of the PALCs.
- Private provision should be included incrementally in building a coherent and expanded system.
10.2 Qualifications and curriculum

Apart from the limitations in the school curriculum, the lack of FET college articulation with the school system makes such colleges difficult destinations for young people. Articulation with higher education is also currently almost impossible. In addition, because public FET colleges have been left out of the loop of the skills development system, especially in terms of learnerships, the qualifications of FET colleges do not really articulate with these either. Finally, there are far too many programmes that do not really relate to either the school or the college curriculum. The following curriculum diversification is therefore suggested for the system:

- In school, it should be possible to obtain a National Senior Certificate by combining the core general education curriculum made up of languages; mathematics/mathematical literacy; natural sciences and social sciences with subjects like food services; clothing production; interior decoration; nature conservation; and printing and design as practical and sometimes independent subjects that would not necessarily take learners to university, but would increase their chances of acquiring a secondary education qualification. In other words, an increase in practical subjects at school is suggested.
- Specially designed programmes for 15-year-old to 16-year-old learners should be included in the colleges system for those learners who do not find their way in the school system. These could be offered exclusively in the colleges set-up, as is the case in the UK. Alternatively, colleges could partner with schools, as is the case in some colleges in the USA.
- There is a need to investigate a curriculum route that would allow learners with a Senior Certificate to move straight to the higher levels of the NC(V), for example, NC(V) 4.
- It is also important for partnerships to be established between colleges and their neighbourhood universities so that access courses could be offered to those learners who do not gain the minimum requirements for university admission outright, as is the case in the UK. Again, once FET colleges are seen as a viable route to higher education, their isolation in the system would be reduced.20

While it would not be appropriate to establish an education system purely for the purposes of serving the labour market, an education system that ignores the links between employment and education is

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20 Specific recommendations will be made later on.
not just to its citizens. For example, the new economic markets increasingly produce jobs in a stratified manner. Jobs are either at a high or at a minimum skills level, emptying out the mid-skills centre where most youth find themselves (Levy & Murnane, 2004). Therefore, the qualification and curriculum functions of the educational system have to take cognisance of changes in the labour market.

The new NC(V) (NQF levels 2–4) has recently been implemented as the main qualification route for studying at an FET college. However, in its current format, the NC(V) has a number of limitations that prevent it from being the basis for a comprehensive qualification structure for all 16-year-olds to 24-year-olds. A range of international examples of qualifications broadly similar to the NC(V), such as the French Baccalaureate Professional and the OND/HND and ONC/HNC programmes in the UK can be achieved by alternative full-time and part-time (work-based) routes. A similar possibility should be developed for the NC(V) as an alternative to the predominantly college-based, full-time route with work experience. The second (part-time) route would give greater emphasis to the assessment of learning at work, while including the same college-based modules as those required for the existing NC(V). It would merely be possible to access them in a flexible manner. The current limitations could be overcome in the following ways:

- **Extending the range of fields of study for the NC(V).** The current NC(V) has 14 programme areas. These do not provide opportunities for those wanting to specialise in fields such as health, social care, art and design, etc. International experience suggests that these fields can provide important access routes and sources of motivation for mainstream learners and for those who have dropped out or who have, for various reasons, encountered difficulties with the mainstream curriculum. These new areas of study relate to significant employment opportunities in the future. They can also be important examples of second-chance opportunities while staying within the mainstream system. Extending the range of fields of study could easily be built into the existing NC(V) framework.

- **Increasing the take up of the NC(V) by providing alternate, work-based, flexible, progression routes.** The NC(V) does not provide straightforward access routes to learners wanting to progress to higher education by, for example, providing higher level NC(V) offerings that are also recognised by universities as an intrinsic part of degree programmes. At
present, it is not possible for those who already have a Senior Certificate and who are participating in learnerships to study for the NC(V). At best, they end up with NQF unit standards that are unlikely to offer them either reliable progression routes to higher education or employment, or a framework for developing “off-the-job” programmes.

- **The possibility of taking only a subject and not a full qualification through** the NC(V) route, for example, welding, computer studies, etc.

- **The possibility of an NC(V) for those in learnerships** (and others), even if it would take at least an additional year to complete. If this alternative route to a learnership were made a requirement, it could help raise standards, force providers to offer off-the-job programmes, bring the public colleges in on the provision of learnerships and thus increase the possibility of going on scale. Umalusi could develop the work-based NC(V) as part of its new quality council role, but both NC(V) routes would be under the same accreditation and quality assurance provisions provided jointly by Umalusi and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupation (QCTO). What would essentially be a part-time route to an NC(V) could also provide many opportunities to the many post-secondary learners who currently undertake various kinds of low-paid, part-time work (including domestic work), especially if the registration of an NC(V) were linked to some form of financial support.

The introduction of the NC(V) marks an important development in policy on the part of the Department of Education. Since 1995, and prior to the new NC(V) becoming national policy, the NQF discourse has been widely assumed as the default, as was the case when the NVQs were launched in the UK. According to that, the FET colleges curriculum could be “designed down” from qualifications that were expressed in the form of unit standards or outcomes (Young, 2007). In contrast to statements of outcomes, where knowledge content is implicit or left up to educators, outcomes-based education (OBE) policy places an explicit emphasis on the specialist knowledge associated with the 14 occupational fields. The curriculum also states clearly that the acquisition of this knowledge will be assessed by a substantial component of external examinations. In addition, the expectations that the FET colleges system will totally re-engineer itself and close the gaps identified in the system definitely need the development of capacity that is not likely to be in the current colleges system. Lecturer training and development, a critical component of

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21 This is also expressed, at least by implication, in a number of SAQA documents.
the upgrading process, will also build confidence in the higher education offered at FET colleges. It is, therefore, recommended that:

- The capacity of educators and leadership at colleges should be developed as soon as possible. First and foremost, FET college educators should be specialists in areas of knowledge related to specific occupational fields such as construction, financial services, tourism, electronics, and so on. It is, therefore, likely that they would have studied for some form of technical or other professional qualification.

- Educators at colleges should be specialist vocational teachers in particular areas of the curriculum. They should not only be familiar with the content of the new curriculum and how it may need to change, but also aware of its implications for teaching, learning and assessment.

- The leadership capacity at these institutions should be developed so that they could develop their own unique identity in the system.

10.3 Open and flexible admission policies

Admission policies from school to higher education remained unchanged for a long time. This is partly why a “constant” number of students flow through the school system to higher education. The need for an expansion of the system is evident and this cannot happen within the current parameters. Therefore, the time has come for admission policies to be reconstructed so that those who do not achieve university admission will still be able to access higher education. This can be done by making FET colleges institutions with open admission requirements in order for such colleges to serve as “access institutions”. There are three ways in which this could be done:

- FET colleges could be the main institutions for providing second-chance Senior Certificates to out-of-school candidates (Ministerial Committee, 2008). The colleges could do this through PALCs or other neighbourhood institutions that cater for adults. It would be important for this qualification to accommodate both part-time candidates (those who wrote the Senior Certificate after full-time studies, but did not achieve it) and those who have never written the Senior Certificate examination. This qualification should have the same access possibilities as the Senior Certificate for full-time learners.
- FET colleges could provide access courses for learners who failed their Senior Certificate examinations or passed it poorly. These courses should be developed in partnership with neighbourhood universities, with the CHE providing oversight on quality.
- FET colleges should progressively offer foundation degrees or transfer courses, the first part of which should be completed at a college. This should happen under very strict criteria that should be worked out by a committee looking at the expansion of post-secondary education options. It should be noted that all countries that have expanded their higher education systems successfully have not been able to do this without the establishment of a solid junior college or further education system that provides higher education as well (Scotland, Chile, Egypt, Korea, USA, China, etc.).

### 10.4 Quality Assurance

It is important that both public and private institutions be held accountable for the way in which they spend public money. This accountability should also extend to individuals and their families who pay fees. A regulatory framework for institutions has largely to do with the outcomes that should be achieved and the level at which these should be achieved. Such a framework should also serve as a steering mechanism for the sector. An arm’s length oversight over public and private colleges should be balanced with a rigorous quality assurance system.

Without the currency of accredited programmes from accredited institutions, the public FET sector would not be able to shed the prevailing suspicion about the integrity and quality of its work. It would be very difficult to continue with only the examination system for the diversity of programmes proposed in this study. Also, the quality of higher education programmes in FET colleges would depend entirely on both institutional audits and programmatic accreditation. Within current quality assurance arrangements, the National Plan for Further Education and Training suggests that Umalusi would be the institution responsible for institutional audits, while programme accreditation or approval should be done either by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the QCTO, Umalusi, or a combination of these quality councils.

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22 Specific recommendations will be made later.
10.5 Funding

Education institutions belong to the Department of Education and it is, therefore, expected that this Department should be primarily responsible for the funding of these colleges. However, the responsibility for, and interest in, preparing young people for the world of work do not reside with this Department alone. The Department of Labour also has a direct interest in training young people for the labour market. At the moment, sources of social funding tend to be an exclusive reserve for the private-consultant class instead of being accessible to public sector training providers as well. In addition, government departments also need institutional support for general training projects, such as the Department of Public Works with its EPWP, as well as for specific departmental skills development. Such support would be greatly enhanced by the involvement of FET colleges, which could serve the human resources (HR) development needs of departments directly. Departments like Health, Agriculture, Social Development, and so on, have already started involving universities with this kind of support. Business South Africa has started to structure its work experience provision opportunities to FET college learners, and this initiative must be encouraged so that NGOs can be included. All these ventures would have to be interrogated in terms of funding sources for the programmes mentioned above.

Below are the broad areas that would need funding to steer FET colleges in the direction of national institutions that could cater for regional and local needs:

- **Infrastructure funding**: There are already 50 public colleges with 236 campuses. There are probably ±100 private colleges. While it must be said that this institutional network is far more spread-out than the university network, it is still not clear whether there is a fairly reasonable geographical distribution among all communities. A study to check this should be undertaken. Ideally, all 286 local municipalities should have some form of institutional access to an FET college and this should be a goal to work towards. The Recapitalisation Fund should help a lot towards improving the infrastructure of these institutions, but the long history of neglect would take time to overcome. Also, the potential to draw students to such institutions would be enhanced by making them attractive and well-resourced institutions.
- The second element that needs urgent funding is the development of capacity in FET colleges. Numerous studies
show that this is the Achilles heel of the FET colleges system. On average, the system is weak, both concerning its teaching and its management capacity. Resources should be made available to build these capacities, especially if these institutions are to become the backbone of intermediate skills development in the country and serious players in post-secondary education. In this regard, a multi-pronged strategy is advisable, which should include both pre-service and in-service elements. For example, the following programmes should be in place:

- An accelerated short-cycle programme for building the specialist knowledge of educators.
- A well-considered plan for the development of FET college educator supply, with both pre-service and in-service elements.
- Short-term placement of educators in the workplace in order for them to gain additional experience and insight.
- Specific development support from universities for FET educators to teach post-secondary courses already existing in the university sector.
- FET college leadership programmes.
- Support service personnel

The suggested broadened provisioning system calls for an expanded curriculum. While the NC(V) curriculum would remain the common element of FET provisioning and the flagship for these institutions, it is important that FET institutions should also find their roots in the realities of their communities. With the suggested expansion that should include remedial; short-cycle and skills programmes; and post-secondary, life-skills and entrepreneurship programmes, there is also a real likelihood that colleges could follow a haphazard approach, cause more quality problems and waste a lot of resources in the system. Curriculum rethinking is going to need greater resources to expand the system and to rationalise what could be done in the FET sector, even while allowing the sector to innovate sufficiently.

Funding is going to be needed to support students who would otherwise not be able to undertake further studies. A great start has already been made with the bursary scheme made available to NC(V) learners. However, the unintended consequence has been to draw learners into the programme who may not be suitable for it. A more distributive funding formula should be found that would cover most of the FET provisioning and support the students who are likely to be
the neediest. It is also envisaged that student support should apply to both public and private institutions.

- **Government incentives in the form of money** should be set aside for the things it wants to see happening, such as partnerships between colleges and universities in order to provide access courses to university programmes. For example, evidence from the UK shows that this became possible once the British government set aside funds to reward institutions that succeeded in putting this arrangement in place.

### 10.6 Raising the aspirations of young people

It has already been noted that many young people have no idea of what they want to do or will do after completing schooling, or if they do, this notion is usually vague and not grounded in reality (Simkins, 2004; Cosser, 2002). They need information and support to help them understand the possibilities that exist in the system as they transit from one sub-system into the next sub-system, thus minimising the chances of large numbers of young people becoming disengaged and unattached for long periods. What seems to be more troubling is the absence of guidance for both those in and outside the education system that could direct them to even the limited options that exist in the system at this time.

An intentional and directed support effort focusing on learners exiting schools and FET colleges should be developed and implemented. It is not acceptable that learners leave schools and colleges to enter a life of inactivity with no attempt being made to help them plan while they are still engaged in education. This calls for the development, and dissemination, of information on opportunities for further study and employment. Ways of accessing such information easily should also be put in place. This calls for the routine development of exit strategies for each learner. Such processes, in turn, call for a better connection with employment placement agencies.

### 10.7 Support services

There seems to be no profound sense that, in order for FET colleges to succeed, they should provide the most comprehensive support services in the entire system, since they are, in all likelihood, the
home of students who need the most support. Institutional student support services seem particularly weak in FET colleges at this point. Such support services have two faces, namely a face for regulating student behaviour in an institution so as to maintain institutional order, and a face for helping students to navigate bureaucracy through linking all college functions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). These two functions have been found to be key in the effectiveness of any college system because of the nature of its diverse programmes and its diverse student intake. In fact, some would proclaim that support services in colleges are the hub of, and the core around which these enterprises move. At present, this aspect is very poorly developed in many of our FET colleges. Thus, urgent attention is needed in the following areas:

- **Recruitment and retention**, especially among underrepresented groups. In particular, procedures should link colleges with their surrounding high schools so that students could constantly think about them as the first destination of choice.
- **Counselling and guidance**: It is critical to help students in and out of colleges into careers and into other institutions. They should also be helped with their instructional and non-instructional programmes. Lastly, there should be links with other services available in the country, like health care, social services, transport, and so on.
- **Orientation**: Helping students to move easily from old environments to their new environments and guiding them toward successful college careers are important aspects of FET support.
- **Extracurricular activities**: Although it is more difficult to accommodate part-time and non-residential students, it is through extracurricular activities that many students experience the identity of their institutions, for example, through participation in athletics; literary groups; musical activities; religious and moral organisations, and so on.
- **Financial aid**: Incentive grants and access to financial support have an immediate and discernible impact on enrolments.
- **Articulation** needs to include attention to admissions; exclusions; re-admissions; advice; counselling; planning; and course and credit evaluation.
- **Linking FET colleges with placement agencies**, which are mainly private companies/organisations, is critical to facilitate access to work.
10.8 Coordination

This report confirms the fact that numerous stakeholders are grappling with the question of youth, education and employability. There are many departments, organisations and initiatives that espouse the goals of youth skills development, training and employment, but there is little evidence of integration and collaboration among them. Stakeholders lack synergy. While there are still those who are pining for the integration of the Department of Education and the Department of Labour, there is no evidence that such integration serves young people better where it happens (UK), or that the absence thereof is the cause of poor services.

The Department of Education should take the lead in bridging the gap by championing a multi-sectoral research and policy development agenda related to the link between education and youth employment.

10.9 Governance

Governance structures establish lines of authority and accountability among Government and institutions. Governance has both administrative and institutional aspects. Administrative governance steers the system to ensure that these institutions, besides meeting local goals, also meet national goals. Regarding governance, therefore, the following deserves consideration: Institutional governance of colleges seems to work better where there are local board members who understand their roles, have good working relationships and maintain open communication with internal and external constituencies. FET colleges work better when they are rooted in their communities. The start that has been made in FET colleges to establish institution councils seems to be a step in the right direction. But capacity is very low at the moment and this has the potential of becoming a major risk area for the colleges.

- There is a very strong need to build governance capacity in the colleges sector as well, or else current governance structures may be rejected prematurely. Intervention may correct inherent weaknesses.
- Provincial input into the colleges system does not seem to be adding great value. National steering and local rooting seem to be the levels from which FET institutions would benefit.
In order to establish an FET colleges identity in the education system, a review of the Department’s structure to manage this function should be undertaken. From this study, it has become clear that three branches are necessary within the Department of Education, namely a schools branch, a higher education branch and a further education, adult and community branch. Splitting educational administration by institutional type rather than institutional level makes more sense. Talk of splitting the Ministry of Education into two ministries and locating further, adult and community education in higher education rather than in schools, make more sense, since that would prevent youth issues from falling between the cracks.

10.10 Skills and vocational education research

The problem of lack of credibility of research done on skills needs and priorities in the country has been highlighted. The importance of vocational and FET is increasingly recognised internationally and has become the focus of policy attention for many governments. Within South Africa, a series of policy reforms have attempted to increase the supply and quality of this type of education and to improve the relationship between the supply and demand for suitably educated and trained workers. To date, these efforts have met with mixed success, but the importance of vocational and adult education has been noted by the Government of South Africa in the reports of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and the Department of Education’s HR Development Strategy.

In South Africa, a wide range of organisations and both public (FET colleges and PALCs) and private institutions (private FET colleges, industry groups and businesses) offer vocational, further and adult education courses. However, the quality of instruction of these programmes and their reach have become a cause for concern. Also, the supply side of education provision cannot be effective without a reliable and intelligent source on skills needs in the country. Research that could support robust labour-force planning and institutional and teaching improvement, as well as cross-cultural comparisons have been limited to date.

Cross-cultural comparative research is needed as South Africa plans how best to invest in vocational education. It is important for
researchers to understand the experience and current context of vocational education in the mature economies of the north (UK, Germany and other countries), as well as in the emerging economies of the south (China, Malaysia, India, Korea and others). Therefore, investment in research that would do the following would yield better returns for the system and the young people it seeks to serve:

- Rigorous research on skills needs and labour market trajectories.
- Tracer studies on student destinations from colleges and schools.
- Intensive studies on vocational education curriculum and delivery theories.

The small size of the post-secondary education system is probably the one big problem concerning the big demand that has been growing systematically with the expansion of higher education in the country. However, it is not the only problem. One would argue that the migration of technikons to the university space has robbed the country of a specific institution that was dedicated to the production of mid-level, career-focused qualifications. In addition, the intake of technikons was slightly different from that of universities because they had lower admission requirements (Cosser & du Toit, 2002). Currently, under-prepared and academically weak students have limited post-secondary education opportunities. While secondary education has expanded over the years and students qualifying for entry into higher education have increased to some extent, the system continues to be exclusive, supporting the assertion of Clancy et al. (2007):

“When a given level of education expands, we should expect increasing inequality at the next level due to increasing heterogeneity of the eligible population ... when inequality in an expanding system is stable rather than rising, the system should be regarded as increasingly inclusive because it allows larger proportions of all social strata to attend.” (p.45)

It is therefore argued that, in order to intervene effectively in the looming crisis of youth whose survival chances are becoming increasingly smaller, the post-secondary education system should expand. The proposed expansion should be underpinned by (a) an expansion of secondary school education achievements; and (b) the establishment of a differentiated post-secondary education system
and open and flexible admission policies for post-secondary education. In addition, there is a need to raise the aspirations of young people so that they could stay in education longer and not regard school as a terminal point, especially first-generation learners.
Many people would concur that the problems faced by young people in the country are nothing short of a crisis waiting to explode. The current calls for free education or the opening-up of closed teacher colleges can be seen in the context of reduced educational opportunities, either because of financial barriers, poor schooling or lack of real places where some of the young people can actually go to in preparation of their transition into adulthood. All issues mentioned above are important. However, they cannot all be done at once. It is, therefore, suggested that the following be prioritised as the next and immediate steps to be tackled.

- The development of a second-chance senior certificate needs to be accelerated so that those who failed or passed poorly, and those who aspire to have a general education Senior Certificate have an avenue to achieve this. The work that has been started should be resourced and prioritised, since it should soon be the main driver for obtaining this gateway qualification by many people outside the school system.

- The demand for post-secondary education has been growing alongside the growth in senior secondary education passes for some time now, but the higher education outlet has remained constant in terms of the numbers that can be accommodated, as well as in terms of admission requirements. A steering committee should be put in place as soon as possible. It should be mandated to define how FET colleges should be brought into post-secondary education provision in two particular areas:
  a. The development and delivery of access courses that would allow students with no formal school credentials to participate in higher education; and
  b. foundation degree courses that could be offered in some of the colleges that would eventually be completed in a university setting.

- *Umalusi* should coordinate the conversion of learnerships to work-based NC(V)s. This would not only make it possible for the public provider network to be involved in this vast training field where many young people often end up with little success, but would also bring this training to scale and enable the Department of Education to coordinate and lead education and training activities for young people.
• The professional development of FET college staff is urgent, since all innovations and new developments in this institutional type depend on the existence of capable staff. It is important that the educator framework that has been worked on be made available publicly as soon as possible so that it could work itself into institutions of higher education, which would be responsible for delivering this training. The development of support services in FET institutions should also be prioritised.

• All these activities would be impossible in the absence of funding that is set aside to serve as an incentive and to fund new and key areas of work. To this end, the following is proposed:
  a. Funding incentives should be earmarked for higher education institutions to work with FET colleges in the development and delivery of access and foundation degree courses that would enable many young people to eventually access higher education. These funds should be given to higher education institutions only when there is evidence of successful collaboration and achievable targets, as set out by a post-secondary education steering committee. This funding should be put in college funding for higher education institutions to claim when partnerships arrangements have been concluded successfully. This project should be driven by the steering committee proposed in 9.2.
  b. Other funding incentives needed are those to fund FET colleges to attract part-time learners to the system and to place their students in work-based learning. This could be funding awarded for both recruitment and throughputs.

• More detailed research should be commissioned on the funding of the FET colleges system to enable it to forge a new identity as envisioned in this study. While there is already a commissioned FET
colleges funding study, the research proposed should be informed by this new view of creating a new identity for these institutions. It is not only the funding of the institutions that is important. The setting aside of occasional funds to serve as incentives concerning certain outcomes and student funding that would make the FET colleges system affordable and accessible is equally important.
Educational opportunities seem to be central to the redistribution of chances in society among social classes and this can only happen when the education system itself grows to cater for such opportunities. Consequently, this principle forms the central argument for accommodating wider and longer participation in the education system as one important intervention for the youth crisis in our country. Many young people’s lives are wasted because they do not complete their school education; do not have access to second chances to complete school education; do not have access to post-secondary education options; and, consequently, have limited access to employment. In this paper it is argued that the size of both the secondary education and higher education systems is a key contributing factor to the above problems. It is also argued that the current forms of both act as deterrents for wider access and thus force young people into lives of inactivity prematurely.

The FET colleges system has the best potential of developing the capacity to be home for a wide range of learning opportunities for young people. This capability should be developed with immediate effect before the problem becomes a crisis. Increasing the size of higher education would require an increase in the types of institutions and programmes operating in post-secondary or higher education. This would bring about the diversity that is currently lacking and, therefore, increase the possibility of reaching a wider range of students. A larger post-secondary education system would surely make a difference in the lives of South African young people, more than anything that is available to them right now.


Young, M., 2004: National Qualifications Frameworks; their feasibility and effective implementation in developing countries. A report prepared for the International Labour Organisation.

