

A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON PROPOSED COMMUNITY COLLEGES FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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Prepared for the Task Team of the Director-General of Higher Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CURRENT SITUATION

There is no reason for South Africa not to have functional Community Colleges, as proposed in the White Paper of 2013. This is so especially as we now have near universal access to primary and secondary education, and are expanding the provision of early childhood development.

We face some persistent questions:

- ▶ Why do South African youth remain vulnerable and marginalised in spite of substantial government spending on support for them?
- ▶ Why does unemployment remain so high in spite of the Skills Development Levy and affirmative policies?
- ▶ How can we make adult education offerings worthwhile to millions of South Africans who still suffer from educational deprivation?
- ▶ How can we help young South Africans believe that getting into university is not the only positive option?

Strategies for reducing the number of South African 'NEETs' have not been successful, and we have one of the highest unemployment rates of young people in the world. People need to learn how to generate income outside the formal job market and thus to find ways out of poverty. They need to be able to discover options open to them, to know what information they need, and to build enough confidence in themselves to risk failure. Providing learning opportunities that enable people to develop in these ways may be possible, and community education may provide some solutions, especially if its delivery incorporates currently available technology.

POTENTIAL OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Most South Africans assume that Community Colleges will continue in the tradition of night schools, simply teaching adult basic education and second chance Grade 12.

We need a shared, new understanding of Community Colleges as places:

- where all kinds of training can be offered to people at all stages of life;
- that offer support and training that relates directly to people's daily life, particularly in relation to ensuring the safety and sustainable livelihoods of families; in this, it should be ensured that the needs of women are well met;
- where there should be training options to articulate with all levels of schooling AND ALSO stand-alone formal and non-formal options;

- that take advantage of what current technology can offer, bringing people free access to the internet, information and learning options and resources;
- where people gather for community activities and to access services, including possibly those from Home Affairs, mobile clinics, mobile libraries and so on;
- where people volunteer for a range of services to the community and gain experience;
- where local, provincial and national government departments, civil society organisations, businesses and NGOs / CBOs cooperate and form alliances for the good of ordinary people, and to achieve collective goals.

POLICY ENVIRONMENT

An enabling policy environment exists, provided by the White Paper (DHET 2013a), The New Growth Path (Department of Economic Development, 2011), the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2009), the Youth Employment Accord (Department of Economic Development, 2013), and The National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011).

The vision for Community Colleges is to create an institution so attractive that enrolment expands by 300% to one million students, by 2030.

NEW VISION

As a country, South Africa does not lack the capacity to develop and run a thoroughly effective Community College system. The main obstacle in the way of getting there is an entrenched mind set. We are so trapped in the 'Bantu education' / 'night school' concepts that is very difficult to imagine investing in and running an adult and community system that has decent infrastructure, up to date technology, and the flexibility to be constructively and imaginatively responsive to needs of communities. To change the system, there has to be a new vision shared by planners, organisers, educators – and importantly, learners. An entirely new kind of institution, must be imagined and information technology offers both a cost cutting measure and a powerful means of shifting what currently exists towards the Community Colleges proposed in policy documents.

A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The central recommendation in this discussion document is to equip and maintain all learning centres that make up the Community College system with whatever is needed in each context to enable them to offer free WiFi and thus access to the internet. This access should be available to enrolled learners as well as to members of the surrounding community. Although it might seem initially costly, this move is less expensive, simpler, quicker and easier to implement than other interventions (such as retraining educators) that could transform the Post-school system from one in the tradition of old style night schools to one that is relevant to people's current needs.

Advantages and spinoffs of offering internet access:

- Community College learning centres would immediately become attractive to all in the community, especially young people - defined as the central target group;
- Limitations of teaching staff and resources at these learning centres could be ameliorated through access to, and training in the use of, the plethora of Open Educational Resources (OERs) - educational texts, interactive materials and recorded lessons and demonstrations etc available on the internet;

- In addition to what is generally available, a database of electronic materials specifically relevant to South African contexts and geared to our Community Colleges could be developed, and regularly updated and adapted to specific needs without the expense and waste involved in print materials;
- After initial set up costs, the expense of communicating with learning centres and delivering materials to them would be much reduced;
- Administration systems including registration of learners, appointment of educators, collation and submission of marks could be computerised and communicated electronically, thus improving accuracy and obviating the time and expense involved in physical delivery of print materials;
- Community Colleges and Community Learning Centres would automatically become centres of access to information relating to further study, NSFAS, career information, work opportunities, non-formal learning, marketing opportunities for crafts and produce, and so on.
- Far from excluding rural people, this move would be a significant step in making information and opportunities available to people in rural areas and including them in the post school system
- It would shift the post school system into the modern era.

It must be emphasised though, that educators will need a particular set of capabilities in order to utilise the opportunities that internet access will provide, and therefore will need training and support to enable them to access and use the internet for educational purposes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

While internet access would facilitate delivery and expand access, essential components would still be:

1. Adult basic education and secondary school equivalence programmes;
2. Cost effective training in a wide range of skills;
3. Non-formal education driven by local community needs, assets and opportunities;
4. Flexibility rather than uniformity in the education system.

EFFECTIVE CENTRES

For Community Colleges to be effective:

- Planning, management, record keeping and monitoring needs to be clearly communicated, accepted and supported by staff, and effectively implemented;
- Effective communication and cooperation with the host institution, local institutions and organisations is essential;
- Staff need to work in an atmosphere of support and encouragement, with critical reflection on their work, knowledge of how they can improve their practice and access to opportunities for development;
- Governance structures need to support management and pursuance of the vision and aims of the centre;
- Internal cooperation must be strong, and educators need to be knowledgeable, committed to teaching and respectful of learners;
- Available resources are well used.

(Rule et al. 2016).

STAFFING

Ambitious new qualifications are being developed at considerable cost, and educator training is the most important nodal point for engineering change in the system. It is important to note that for these qualifications to attract students, there need to be solid chances of employment in Community Colleges.

For staff already teaching, access to the internet will be of limited value if it is not accompanied by training in:

- how to use electronic devices such as tablets, smart phones, and whatever devices are yet to be developed;
- general internet use;
- how to find and access learning material that meets learners' needs;
- selecting, downloading and adapting material;
- dealing with hazards of the internet.

FUNDING

Because the target group is primarily people who lack resources, funding cannot come from course fees. There are suggestions that funds could be accessed from SETAs and the National Skills Fund, and although this is possible, it would require creative solutions to accommodate and organise skills training.

With the introduction of access to the internet, possibilities associated with advertising become available, but careful control should be exercised here, particularly in view of South Africa's recent history of the use of electronic information to prey on grant recipients.

In terms of infrastructure, there appears to be general consensus across policy papers that the new Community Colleges should be housed in buildings and offices that are already available, and that sharing premises is an acceptable strategy. While this does make sense where suitable premises are accessible and available, there is a risk that this idea could restrict possibilities and impoverish the vision where new infrastructure is needed. Premises that cannot support the introduction of WiFi would severely limit the success of such Community College.

OPEN LEARNING

Open learning, where geographic, financial and other obstacles are removed should be a central tenet in the transformed Community Colleges. As part of open learning, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit transfer should be common practice.

FORMAL LEARNING

Community Colleges should include options at all levels of schooling from ABE to GETCA and NASCA, PLUS stand-alone skills training, PLUS arts and crafts, PLUS whatever other formal options are requested by particular communities. This formal learning would be profoundly enhanced if learners and educators had access to the internet and were not restricted to the resources at the current learning centres.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Adults do take up learning opportunities, if they are easily accessible, for reasons other than gaining employment. Options that have proved attractive in NGOs relate to improvement of livelihoods, support for children's schooling, financial literacy, and study groups that simply add enjoyment and purposeful socialising to adults' lives. Others may be of practical value such as support for organising initiatives in communities, how to access services from government departments, how to access and use the internet, or

banks, or aspects of planning and managing that NGOs have taught for decades. These educational needs are seldom met in formal courses, and their delivery would be eased and their usefulness to learners dramatically increased if they included resources and strategies accessed through the internet.

Rural areas of each province are very different, and no single set of non-formal options will be appropriate across the country; however, popular options may include:

- ✓ training for participation in local government structures;
- ✓ voter education and political tolerance;
- ✓ resolving conflict without violence;
- ✓ managing a household;
- ✓ optimal use of social grants and managing money;
- ✓ driver training and road safety;
- ✓ skills development for income generation
- ✓ health care
- ✓ living with alcoholism or other addictions;
- ✓ understanding the law;
- ✓ support for SMMEs
- ✓ using smart phones;
- ✓ childcare and early childhood development.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance of all aspects of Community Colleges should ensure the provision of relevant programmes in a cost effective manner. Quality and relevance are critical factors in ensuring that communities will want to attend the college programmes.

TRANSFORMATION

Information technology, and new methods of communication and learning is unavoidably the first step of the way. It is not an easily done or cheap step, but if DHET is serious about creating an effective Community College system, setting up Community Colleges as free WiFi hotspots will be a key move, and a powerful catalyst for further innovative and positive change towards the ideals expressed in the Freedom Charter. ⁱ

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Against the above background the task of the Director-General of Education makes the following recommendations:

SECTION 1: WHAT ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGES? THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

1. That models for Community Colleges in developed and developing countries, and the previous reviews commissioned by the DHET, be considered in designing Community Colleges which would benefit South African Communities.
2. The establishment of Community Colleges as a third institutional form alongside Universities and Technical and Vocational (TVET) Colleges to enable general access, in urban and rural areas, to offer effective learning programmes at a range of levels in different fields and modes of learning, affording people in all contexts access to learning opportunities that relate to their life contexts.
3. Policy and practice for community education and training should be founded on the underpinnings of a democratic society which views collective improvement in quality of life as the primary goal of its educational initiatives.

SECTION 2: HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. That the recommendations of the original Task Team of 2012 and the White Paper be reconsidered, noting the practical difficulties experienced with the NICE CETCAs and the operations of over 3250 CLCs.

SECTION 3: POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS

1. That in addressing the youth unemployment crisis SA is facing, the severe limitations in success of current programmes be noted.
2. That the key texts relevant to the current Community College policies be noted.
3. It must be noted that in the main, technological development tends to shift work from people to computers and machines, thus decreasing employment opportunities. To keep a growing population employed, extremely rapid development in training in both basic and current technology are required.

SECTION 4: FACTORS THAT FACILITATE OR HINDER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. That the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats described in this report may hinder or facilitate the establishment of Community Colleges, and should be noted and considered in the design of the ideal Community College structure.

SECTION 5: MODELS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

1. Governance structures will need to represent the networks of relationships existing within communities rather than one representing the state. All the key stakeholders and role players in a community should have a say in how the Community College system and separate learning centres should function, what programmes should be offered, and how, according to the needs in each community.
2. That District Education Forums be established to serve as a link between educational institutions and the general public.
3. The Centralised Skills Planning (CSP) Intelligence Unit be located in DHET.
4. More emphasis be placed on the demand aspect in planning skills development and ensure more coordination amongst government departments.
5. An understanding be created among South Africans of how different post-school institutions could work together in the sphere of governance and functioning. The debilitating perception that anything other than university is an inadequate place of learning needs to be changed.
6. Constructive coordination between TVET Colleges, Community Colleges and Higher Education Institutions needs to be preceded by the establishment of formal agreements of cooperation.

SECTION 6: STAFFING OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. Community College educators need to have improved work contracts.
2. Once employed, Community College educators should continue with in-service courses and training that relates to their teaching and the learning needs of that community college.
3. Cross institution cooperation may be beneficial for all concerned and help facilitate coherence among different parts of the whole South African education system.

SECTION 7: FUNDING OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. The success of the Community Colleges is dependent on an accurate funding model.
2. It is imperative that investment in Community Colleges is seen not as an unwelcome cost, but as a worthwhile investment with the potential to yield real gains for ordinary South Africans.

SECTION 8: INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS

1. Community Colleges should be characterised by suitable and sufficient learning resources, including technological resources that enable secure internet connectivity, and have the capacity to rapidly access a range of learning resources.

SECTION 9: FORMAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS THAT COULD BE OFFERED AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. Training in both hard and soft skills should be offered, within a framework that “seeks to improve livelihoods, promote inclusion into the world of work and that supports community and individual needs”, for example, NOF Level 1 General Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETCA), and the new NOF Level 4 National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA).
2. Community Colleges should offer skills, vocational and occupational programmes funded by SETAs or the NSF.
3. In view of the well documented threats to food security and energy, education relating to agriculture and sustainable energy should be offered.
4. Harmony should be created between policies and regulations pertaining to Higher Education, TVET and Community Colleges.
5. A clear system of credit recognition and transfer must be developed.

SECTION 10: LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. Access to all courses at Community Colleges should be open. Learners should be allowed access to whatever class they believe they can cope with, and should be allowed to switch to a lower or higher level if they find the course below or above the level they need.
2. Learners should not have to travel far to access learning. Given funding and logistical constraints, this means that Community Colleges need to offer education using a combination of delivery methods.
3. Community Colleges need to accommodate learners facing barriers to learning; particular attention needs to be paid to access for people with disabilities, particularly those from poor families.
4. Community Colleges to offer coaching in how to compile portfolio of evidence for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer.

SECTION 11: NON-FORMAL LEARNING AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. Community Colleges must recognise that many adults value non formal education more than formal qualifications, and should offer whatever non-formal options appeal to the local population.

SECTION 12: POSSIBLE MODES OF EDUCATION AND DELIVERY OPTIONS

1. In meeting the needs of their particular communities, Community Colleges will need to offer a wide range of programmes, using different modes of provision so as to optimise accessibility.
2. Community Colleges could offer certain formal Higher Education (NOF level 5) Higher Certificate qualification.

SECTION 13: COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. Community Colleges must locate themselves firmly within local communities, meet local needs and contribute to local development.
2. Good communication with all stakeholders is essential for Community Colleges to function effectively.
3. Government departments should use the services of Community Colleges for upskilling their workers.
4. Community Colleges should strive to offer educational opportunities that appeal to business enterprises within their reach.

SECTION 14: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

That the quality assurance of Community Colleges be regarded as a necessary condition for good performance and positive outcomes of the system.

SECTION 15 AND CONCLUSION: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PILOTING AND ROLLOUT

That the piloting of Community Colleges should be used to implement and test the recommended changes between the old PALC system and the new Community College system before the rollout and full scale implementation.

ⁱ Prepared for the Task Team of the Director-General of Education by Sandra Land, Adult and Community Education Unit, Durban University of Technology.