

Centre for Adult Education
University of Natal

Interpreting the 2002 National ABET Level 4 (GETC) Examination data

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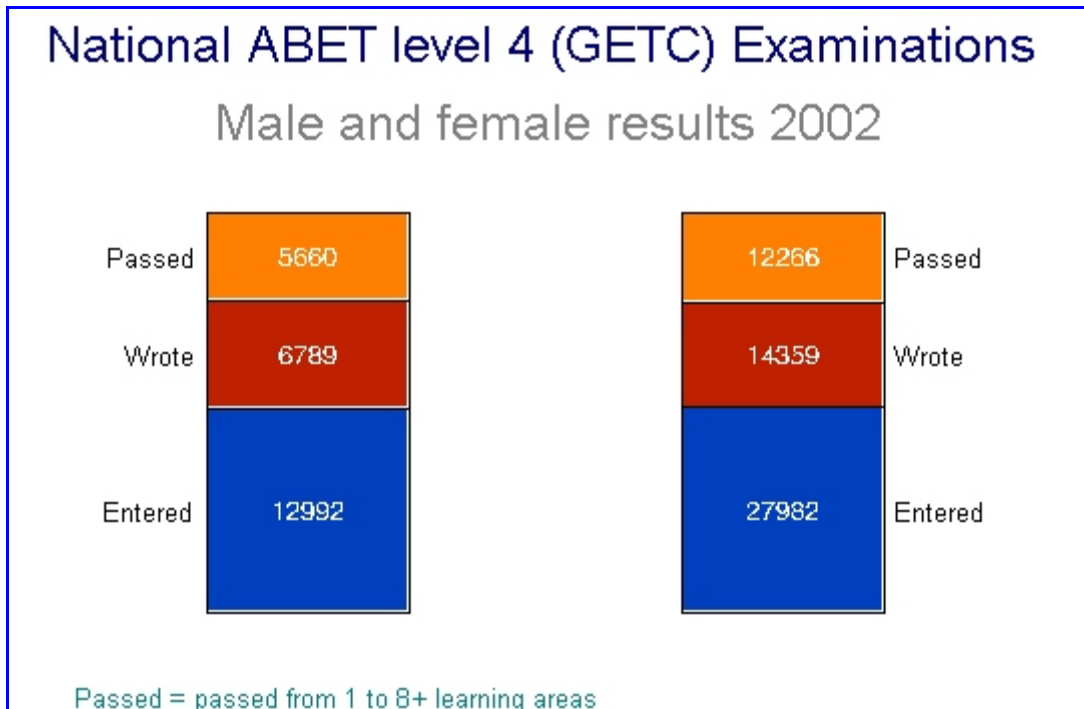
Interpreting the National ABET Level 4 (GETC) Examination data for the two years that these examinations have been run is somewhat bedevilled by the fact that there is as yet no public announcement of how many students have in fact achieved the end purpose of writing these examinations in various learning areas – that is, been awarded a General Education and Training Certificate. Imagine public consternation if the Department of Education released reams of statistics about the Senior Certificate examinations: how many enrolled, how many wrote, the numbers of males and females who wrote various subjects, etc., but omitted to provide any information on how many had actually passed their Senior Certificate and how many had also obtained matriculation exemption (the ‘matric’)! There are reasons to explain this failure. ABET, unlike schooling, went the route of standards (the GETC for schooling is a so-called ‘whole qualification’ and there are still disputes about the genuine conformity of the current ABET examinations to these standards. But the problem remains, at this stage we do not know what the final output of ABET GETCs is from the state ABET system run through Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs).

However, that considerable caveat aside, there is still much that can be learned from the statistics that have been released so far by the Chief Directorate: National Examination and Assessment and the report on these examinations to the .

Below is an analysis of some of the important statistics.

How many people enrolled, wrote and passed the examinations?

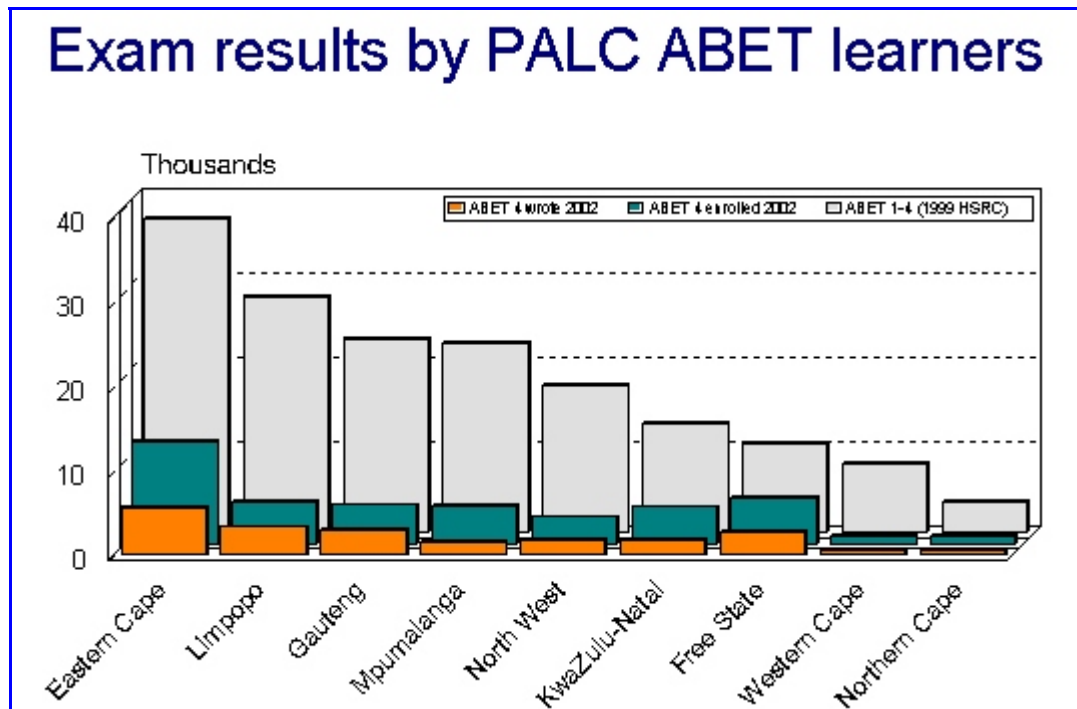
In 2002 some 40 974 people enrolled, 21 148 (or 21106) wrote and 17 926 (or 18254) passed between 1 and 8 or more learning areas, thereby qualifying for a Learning Area certificate.¹ Of these successful candidates only 778 qualify for a GETC. Below is a graph which shows these statistics disaggregated for men and women.



The male:female ratio of 3:7 conforms to what previous surveys have found and it is likely that this sort of ratio holds throughout the PALC system. It does affirm that the PALCs do provide most of their ABET service to women and that it has a fairly low attraction to men.

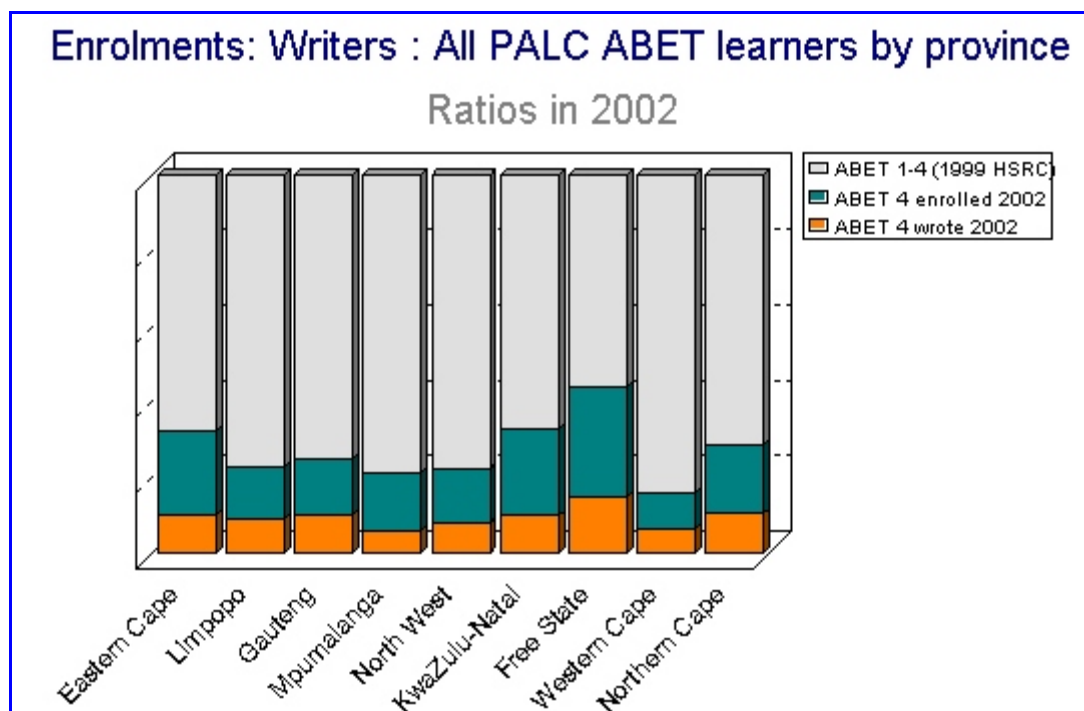
¹ The differing figures arise because this analysis is based on two sources, an electronic spreadsheet dated 24 February 2003 and the ABET report to the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (U malusi) (undated).

How to enrolments in each province compare?



There are some anomalies in the numbers of students in each province that enrolled and wrote in 2002 when compared with the best estimates (made for 1999 by the Human Sciences Research Council) of the number of ABET students in each province.

This can be seen more dramatically in the graph below.

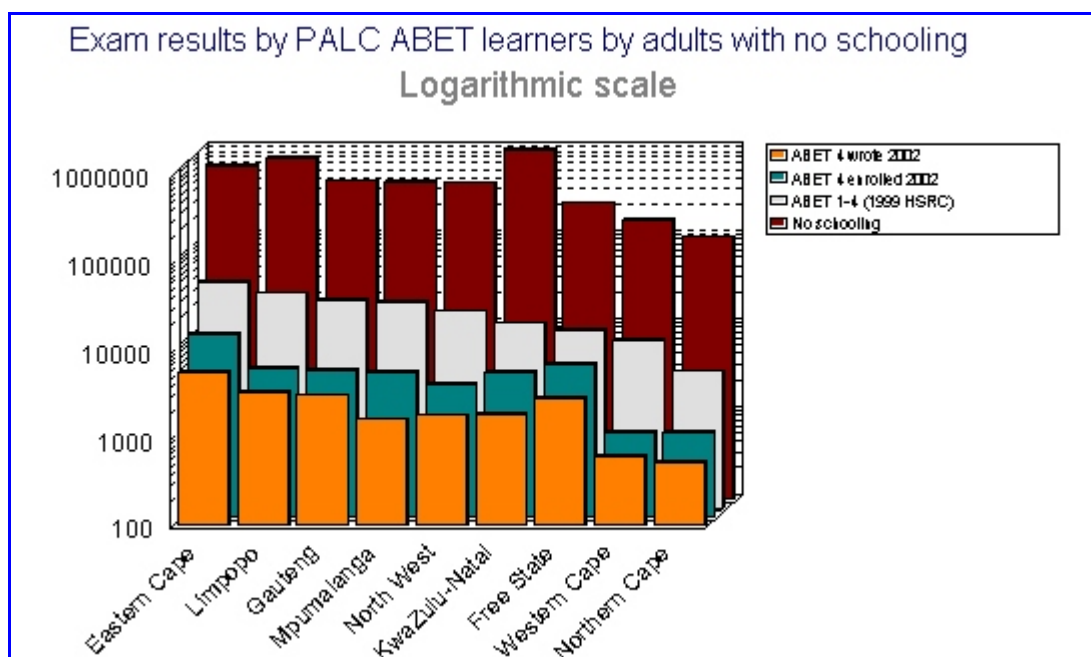


Why in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State have such a high percentage of PALC taught ABET learners enrolled (34% and 52% respectively) and why such a small percentage in the Western Cape (11%)? Why has Mpumalanga got the worst drop out rate (64%) and why the Western Cape the lowest (32%)? Why is KwaZulu-Natal so hopelessly behind in addressing literacy and ABET needs?

The table below makes some comparisons between the 2002 examinations enrolments and actual writings and the estimates of the numbers of ABET learners (in 1999) and of the number of people clearly in need of ABET (those aged 20 or more who had no schooling at all).

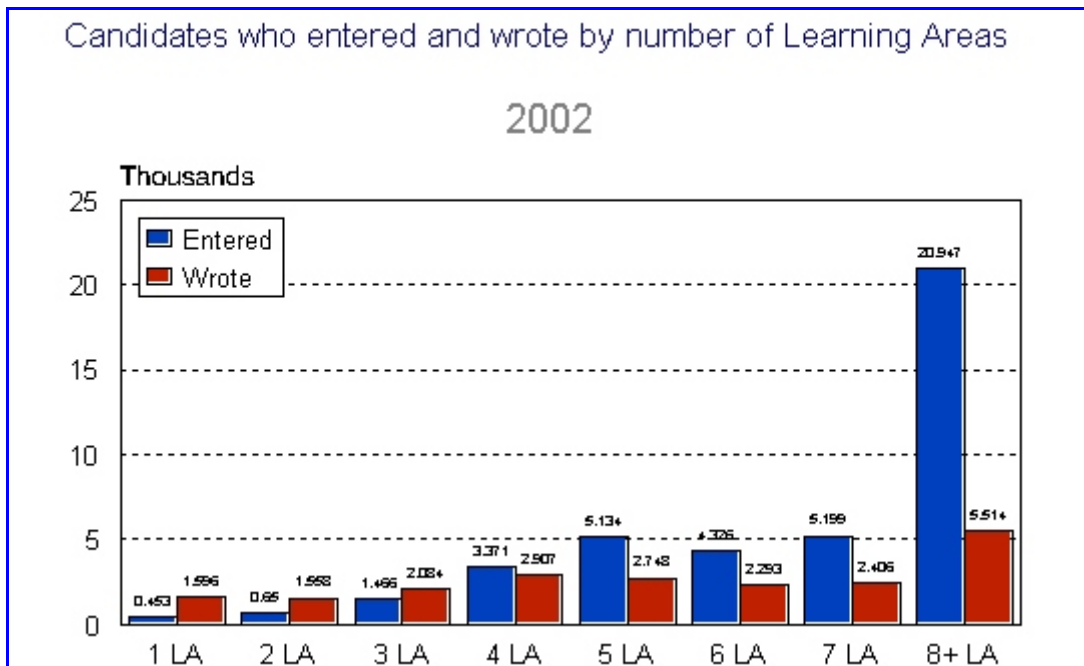
	Wrote as % of enrolment in 2002	Enrolled as % of PALC ABET learners (1999)	Wrote as % of PALC ABET learners (1999)	PALC ABET learners as % of those aged 20+ with no schooling
Eastern Cape	46%	33%	15%	6%
Limpopo	67%	18%	12%	4%
Gauteng	66%	20%	13%	5%
Mpumalanga	36%	20%	7%	5%
North West	56%	18%	10%	4%
KwaZulu-Natal	43%	34%	15%	1%
Free State	51%	52%	26%	4%
Western Cape	68%	11%	8%	5%
Northern Cape	57%	25%	14%	4%

The above data can be visually represented in the logarithmic graph below that compresses the different scales.

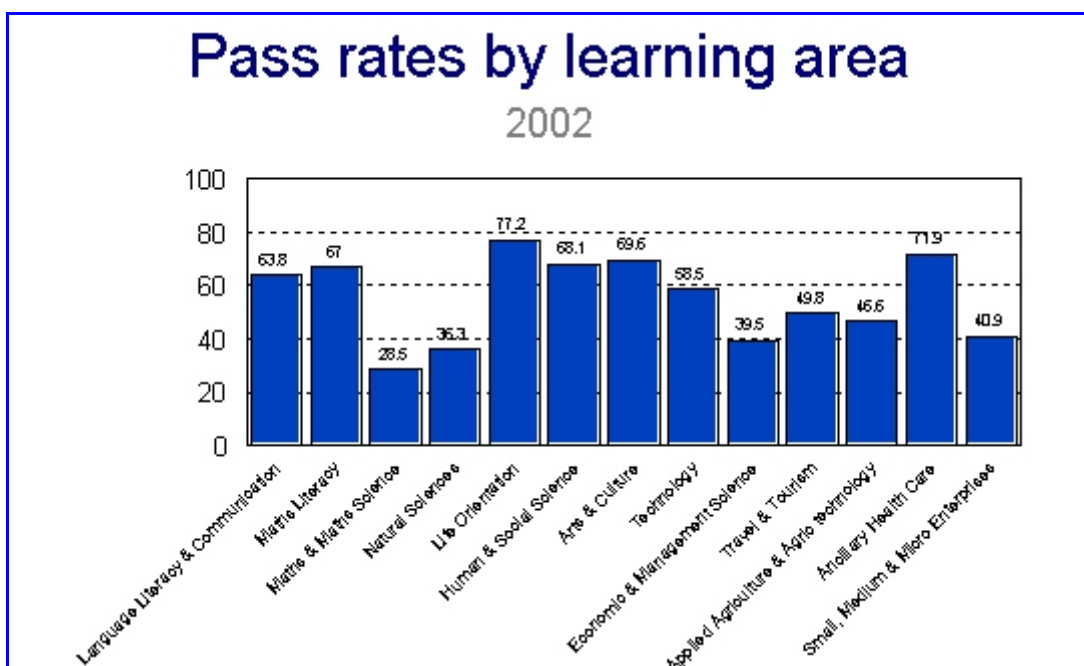


How did the students do in particular learning areas?

The enrolment, wrote and passed figures in respect of the number of learning areas written is shown in this graph:

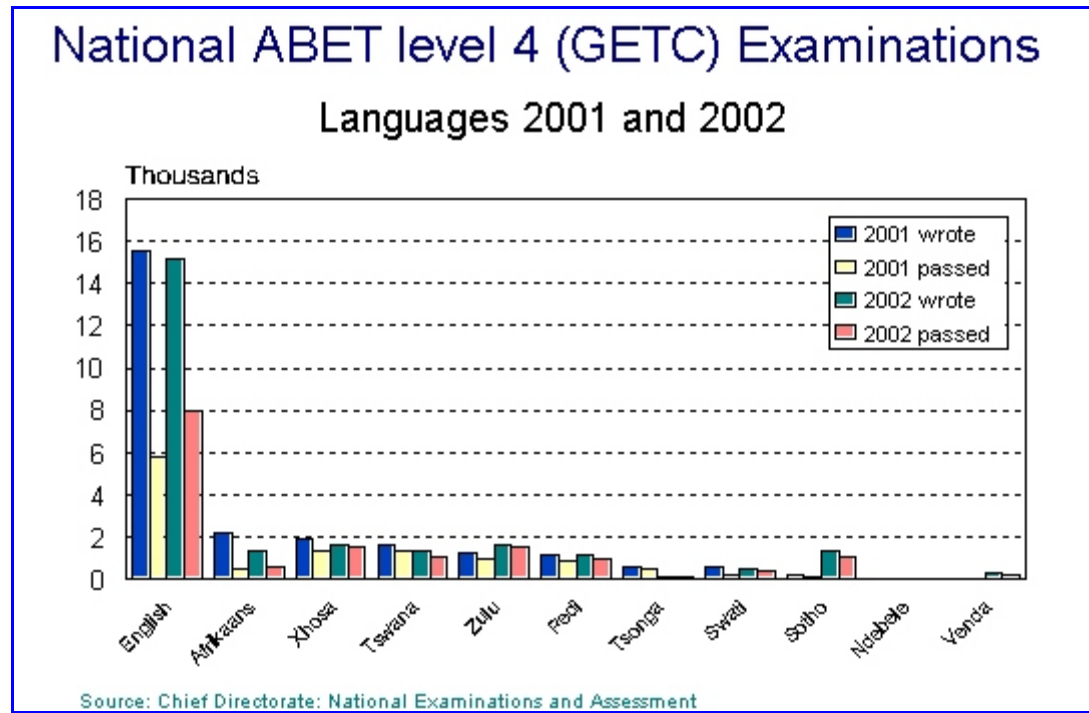


It is unclear at what stage students enrol for the examinations, but clearly there is either a high drop out rate in the PALCs or, at the time the students enrol, either they or their teachers have a very unrealistic assessment of their ability to cope with a large number of learning areas at once.



The pass rates for key areas: Maths and Maths science, Natural sciences, Economic and management sciences, and Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises are all below 45% and suggest that teaching is simply inadequate.

The language situation is in certain respects even more worrying.



Clearly the ABET system is not in any sense providing full support for all languages up to the GETC. Only English is attracting significant enrolments. Passes in 2002 in smaller languages are derisory, for example Tsonga 25, Venda 25, Ndebele 10. Unfortunately, given the dominance of English, the pass rate is not great – 52%, nor is it great in the other dominant second language, Afrikaans – 47%. With all the other languages the pass rate is above 76% and mainly in the 80s and 90s.