

From PALCs to Community Colleges

John Aitchison

University of KwaZulu-Natal

On 11 January 2013 South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training issued a white paper on post school education and training that outlined future policy for higher education, technical and vocational education and adult education in the context of political and economic imperatives to continue to enlarge intake in universities, expand the technical and vocational education and training system, and further centralize national government's control of post school education.

In the period since 1994 there had been a number of significant moves in this direction. With higher education there had been new legislation that made government appointee dominated councils a much more controlling influence and there had been a set of university mergers (of somewhat dubious rationale and benefit) and enormous increase in student funding necessitated by the massification of a student intake with new demographic characteristics. With Further Education and Training¹ there was a drastic merger process and a recapitalization of a sector that was about half that of higher education (in defiance of the common assumption in most of the world that it should be the other way round) and finally a constitutional amendment that placed FET colleges and Adult Learning Centres firmly under national not provincial control. Finally, there was an attempt to conceptualise a new institutional form to replace the dysfunctional and poorly funded and managed system of Public Adult Learning Centres that had operated since 1977.

In this paper I wish to present an account of the policies, programmes, outcomes (and associated bureaucratic machinations) of the attempts to run, reform and reconstitute the state funded Public Adult Learning Centre system, which is now, since 1 April 2015 – April Fools Day – a system (though only nominally) of community colleges.

¹

Because South Africa has compulsory schooling only up to grade 9, in terms of South Africa's National Qualification Framework terminology, **further education** includes both conventional secondary level schooling as well as post school education and training (at less than university level). This causes some confusion when comparisons are made with developed countries where further education is a term applied only to post school education and training.

The Public Adult Learner Centre system

State run night schools, called Adult Education Centres or Adult Learning Centres or most recently Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs), have been operating in South Africa since 1977 (after their forced closure in the 1950s by the apartheid state), through 13 of the various late apartheid era education departments, then through the nine post-apartheid provincial education departments, until finally they became the responsibility of the Department of Higher Education in 2009. They gained some measure of legal identity with the Adult Basic Education and Training Act of 2000, but with the abolition of the Act in 2013 and in terms of the Further Education and Training College Amendment Act of 2013, they were (by legal fiat on 1 April 2015) nominally merged into nine Community Colleges (geographically one per province) and remain as substructures of those new bodies.

PALC staff are now administered from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and what support they will in immediate future will now come from the new staff of the Community College Administrative Centre in each region (though in practice it currently comes from members of the previous provincial Adult Education directorates who, though they had in 2009 been transferred to the DHET, will still be housed in the provincial education departments, probably until 2017).

Over the last two decades the PALC system had come under much criticism from academics and others that it was underfunded, mismanaged and lacklustre with educators who are poorly trained, an absence of learning materials and general confusion around the curriculum. Indeed in April 2005 the Minister of Education held a roundtable discussion in which she openly acknowledged that the ABET system had failed and that she would take action (Department of Education, 2005) – which led to the initiation of the highly successful Kha Ri Gude adult literacy campaign (Aitchison and McKay, 2012).

The data on PALCs and its inadequacy

It is common cause that the existing data on Public Adult Learning Centres is unreliable, in spite of various attempts over the years to improve its collection and analysis, latterly with annual surveys. Data collection and reporting problems were exacerbated by the prevailing policy from 1995 till recently that valorised ABET provision and led to a discounting of, or disguising of the fact, that in many cases there were as many FET level students as ABET ones at PALCs.² These inadequacies have led in the past to severe criticisms of the Department of Education, particularly when it made misleading use of faulty data (see Aitchison and Harley's 2006 critique).

²

From the mid 1990s onwards, adult education policies prioritised “Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)” (which was understandable given that the right to basic adult education was now entrenched in the new constitution of 1996). However, considerable confusion was caused when the national and provincial education departments routinely referred in documents and statistics to ABET only, even though it was clear that what was being described, either also included adult further education (Senior certificate or “matric” studies). The word ABET was used in a bureaucratic rather than educationally descriptive sense.

For most of the last two decades the departments of education had nothing remotely approaching an Education Management and Information System (EMIS) for adult learners and there was no accurate data on the number of PALCs, the number of qualified and unqualified staff, the number and demographic characteristics of the learners, the learning resources supplied (if any), the quality of the educational outcomes, or on the quantities of state expenditure used in running the system.

Making sense of the existing data

Since 1994 a number of official documents containing statistics on PALCs have been issued as well as publication of some surveys or audits. Notable among these are two University of Natal surveys published in 1996 and 1999/2000 (Harley *et al*, 1996, Aitchison *et al*, 1999a,b,c,d/2000, Houghton *et al*, 1999a,b,c,d,e) a Human Sciences Research Council survey (2000), two Department of Education reports, the ***Draft ABET Sectoral report*** (2000) and ***Building an ABET system: the first five years 1995 - 2000*** (2001),³ a South African Institute of Distance Education audit of one province in 2013 (Gauteng Department of Education, 2013) and an Auditor-General Report for 2014 (Auditor-General, 2015). But even with these resources, making sense of the situation and changes over two decades is not however easy. The information presented below is at best approximate.

The key data on PALCs

Centre numbers

One of the main reasons that policy makers in the early 1990s saw the future of adult basic education and training (ABET) as within the Ministry of Education was the existence of a functioning night school system using the existing infrastructure of the schooling system (National Education Policy Investigation (1992, 1993). This is still very much the case and school buildings and school teachers (working part-time after school hours) are the major state resource for ABET.

Most centres, whether main or satellite, operate from school premises and share facilities with the school. Most centres have follow the school term and tend to be open in the afternoons/early evenings, Monday to Thursday, and very few are open on a Friday or Saturday.

In the majority of cases, where facilities are being shared, there is no document governing the relationship between the school and the PALC. This creates difficulties where Centres are expected to use school facilities and services. In many instances, there is disagreement about using toilet facilities, paying for cleaning and maintenance services.

In 1994 there were estimated to be 1 440 public adult education centres in South Africa. Centres were categorised as public, state-aided, private and satellite (the latter not being

³ These two Department of Education reports are unfortunately replete with contradictory statistics, misleading and fanciful claims based upon unsubstantiated and unreferenced data, and a severe confusion between, and conflation of statistics on, ABET and FET provision by PALCs.

recognised as exam centres) (Harley *et al*, 1996, pp. 252-253). Subsequent estimates of the number of PALCs (with or without their satellite centres) vary from the University of Natal figure for 1998/99 of about 3 073 (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, p. 30)⁴ to the Human Sciences Research Council count in 1999 of 2 123 that catered for ABET (another 103 did not) (HSRC, 2000) to the Department's 2001 figure of 2 494 (Department of Education, 2003, p. 27) and the 2002 figure of 1 895 (which distinguished between ABET and FET centres) (Department of Education, 2004, p. 28-29).

Some declines in the number of centres in some provinces may well have been influenced by the temporary closures of PALCs in 1998 and 1999 (because of provinces running out of money for the conventional schooling system) or by the reduction of their number in a deliberate rationalisation or restructuring process or by a termination of FET provision (Senior certificate level), or by combinations of these (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, pp. 38-40).

In 2010 there were 3 083 PALCs on master lists at the DHET. They were down to 2 457 centres in 2012 according to the 2012 Annual Survey of AET Centres (Department of Higher Education, 2014, p. 33), though the Department claims that there are actually 3 150 centres as another 693 centres had not responded to the survey questionnaire sent to them.

Learner numbers

Provincial data since the mid-1990s suggest that learner attendance has ranged from slightly over a quarter of a million in 1995 (258 967) (Department of Education, 1997b, p. 81), up to 386,098 for 1996/97 and then 361 385 for 1997/1998 (Aitchison *et al*, 2000) and has declined to 306 378 in 2012 (Department of Higher Education and Training (2014, p. 35):

Province	ABET level					FET level				Skills	Totals
	1	2	3	4	NQF 1 All	NQF 2 Grade 10	NQF 3 Grade 11	NQF 4 Grade 12	All		
Gauteng	2 288	2 609	3 810	20 806	29 513	130	0	52 740	52 870	3 241	85 624
KwaZulu-Natal	6 435	7 530	8 571	21 651	44 187	45	125	3 364	3 534	240	47 961
Eastern Cape	4 144	6 682	6 920	22 777	40 523	0	0	0	0	223	40 746
Limpopo	1 270	3 609	3 320	25 349	33 548	0	0	0	0	62	33 610
Western Cape	3 307	2 249	2 235	9 884	17 675	66	66	10 229	10 361	1 927	29 963
North West	3 268	4 060	4 252	11 156	22 736	0	0	828	828	785	24 349
Mpumalanga	2 725	5 294	5 152	13 825	26 996	17	0	108	125	5	27 126
Free State	199	854	1 423	6 380	8 856	0	22	3 768	3 790	128	12 774
Northern Cape	577	574	556	2 420	4 127	0	0	0	0	47	4 174
Unspecified		9	14	28	51						51
National	24 213	33 470	36 253	134 276	228 212	258	213	71 037	71 508	6 658	306 378
Percentage	7.9%	10.9%	11.8%	43.8%		0.1%	0.1%	23.2%		2.2%	100%

Many of the problems in the learner statistics since the mid-1990s have revolved around the failure to distinguish between ABET and FET level learners. For virtually the whole period it was difficult to establish how many learners were at ABET level or FET level and it is likely

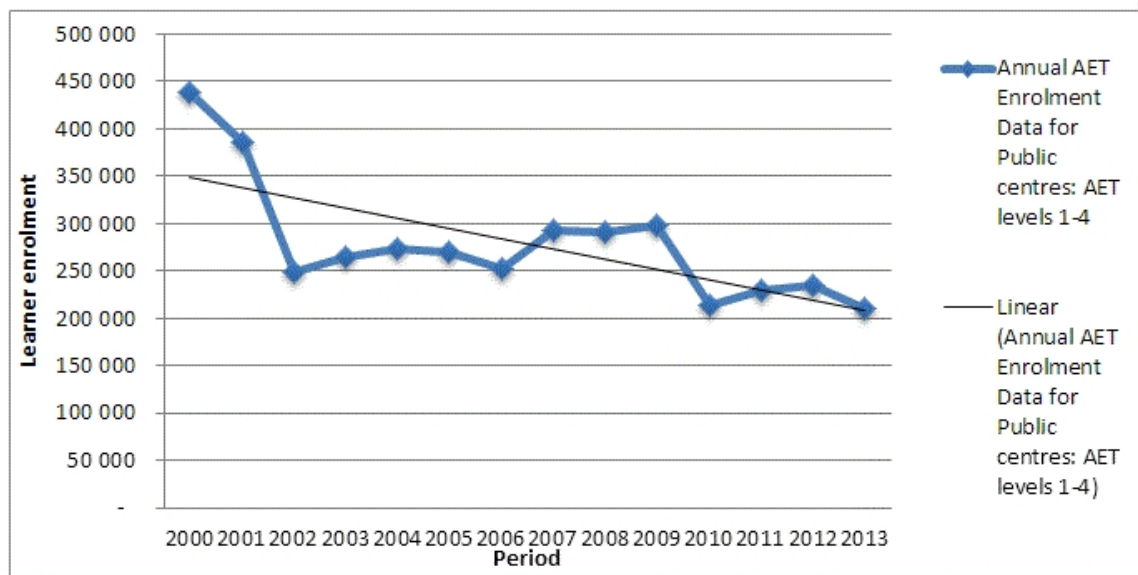
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There were 1 483 centres, which together with satellites and state-aided centres totalled 3 073 in eight provinces - there was no Limpopo data. The University of Natal's survey (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, p. 29) found that it was extremely difficult to gain reliable figures of the number of centres, in spite of the fact that in most provinces there were senior personnel who were responsible for oversight and inspection of all the schools and public adult learning centres based in those schools in a particular district circuit or management area.

that for many years FET learners have either been seriously under enumerated or misclassified as ABET learners. Both the ‘official’ statistics and the research statistics concur in claiming something under 200 ,000 ABET learners.

For the period 2000 to 2013 the Auditor-General (2015, p. 11) provides an interesting graph for PALC enrolments showing a downwards trend line for ABET enrolments.

Annual ABET learner enrolment level 1 to 4, 2000 to 2013



Source: Stats at a glance report 2000 to 2009 and EMIS data 2010 to 2013

Note: enrolment numbers reflected in the Stats at a Glance include grade 10-12 learners, AET level 1-4 enrolment could not be provided separate for 2000-2009

The following points can be added based on the learner data:

- The PALC system did not grow to any great extent and indeed have been on a downwards trajectory.
- The two provinces with the most effective provincial management, Gauteng and the Western Cape, have not declined as much as other provinces and currently show large FET learner numbers.
- For virtually the whole period it was difficult to establish how many learners were at ABET level or FET level and it is likely that for many years FET learners have either been seriously under enumerated or misclassified as ABET learners.
- Although the *Kha Ri Gude* adult literacy campaign output over 3 million learners between 2008 and 2014 with an ABET level 1 equivalent certificate, there are no signs that this made any impact at all in increasing enrolment in ABET level 2 or higher level classes in PALCs – these learners simply did not go on to the PALCs.

The educators

Harley *et al* (1996, p. 437) estimated that there were 14 373 educators in 1994 and by 1998 there were an estimated 20 000 delivering ABET and FET (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, p. 37). The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2000) found 16,089 in 1999 (and was able to determine the provincial breakdown for 13,628 of them) with a teacher:learner ratio of 1:18 (the range was from 1:15 in the Free State and the Northern Province to 1:24 in the Eastern Cape). The Department of Education claimed 18 381, 16 281 and 13 099 for the years 1999, 2001 and 2002 respectively (Aitchison and Harley (2006, p. 105). Research done by the HSRC for the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority and reported on in the *ETDP SETA Annual Report 2002* (p. 5) gives a total of only 10,848 staff employed in South Africa's public ABET system. In 2012

The Department of Higher Education and Training's 2012 statistics (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014, p. 34) are the source of data for this summary:

AET learners, educators and centres: 2012					
Province	Learners	Educators	Centres	Teacher: Learner ratio	Centre: Teacher ratio
Gauteng	115 137	2 408	47	1:48	1:51
KwaZulu-Natal	47 961	4 871	702	1:10	1:7
Eastern Cape	40 746	2 888	263	1:14	1:11
Limpopo	33 610	1 532	650	1:22	1:2
Western Cape	29 963	926	103	1:32	1:9
North West	24 349	1 373	260	1:18	1:5
Mpumalanga	27 126	1 593	257	1:17	1:6
Free State	12 774	616	71	1:21	1:9
Northern Cape	4 174	236	104	1:18	1:2
Totals	335 840	16 445	2 457	1:20	1:7

In terms of the Adult Basic Education and Training Act of 2000, later amended several times and renamed the Adult Education and Training Act (and then repealed in 2013) only South African Council for Educators (SACE) registered educators could be employed at a public centre. Although school teachers working after hours would generally have had such registration, many educators employed both by the province and by the centre itself would not have. Many educators would have had at the very least a qualification such as the Higher Certificate for Adult Basic Education and Training offered by the University of South Africa.⁵

⁵ More than 80 000 people gained this qualification and this pool of potential educators was one of the enabling things that led to the success of the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign.

The South African Institute of Distance Education survey of Gauteng PALCs (2013) found more educators employed part time than full time across the centres and big discrepancies between the number of educators employed at a centre and the number of hours for which they were employed. Some educators work for ten hours and less per week. Centres reported that their staffing was insufficient because of high demand for some learning areas, while some educators appear to have a very limited workload. It is clear that the various provinces had different caps on the maximum number of hours educators could work per week.

The Gauteng Department of Education was unusual in that most of its main centres had full-time administrators who typically worked a standard working day. These administrators are responsible for tasks such as, but not limited to, registration, student administration and any tasks related to Satellite Centres.

The Auditor General's (2014, p. 5) report on the country-wide audit of adult education and training centres conducted in 2011 and 2012 noted the lack of measures to track, monitor, correct and report on the extent and effect of the underqualified educators. The report relates the poor success rates of adult learners to poor quality of teaching and learning resulting from the number of underqualified educators who struggled to interpret the curriculum.

Programmes, qualifications, curriculum and materials

In the early 1990s the Department of Education and Training (DET) ran courses at literacy, primary and secondary levels and provided materials for these.

From 1995 onwards the prioritisation of ABET led to many provincial ABET sub-directorates not seeing Further Education and Training in the PALCs as their responsibility and plans were made to phase it out, though in reality many provinces had nearly as many FET students as ABET ones (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, p. 25).

In spite of much rhetoric about Adult Basic Education (ABE) **and Training** there do not seem to be many examples of serious attempts to link ABE with Training, though there were plans in the late 1990s to develop ABET electives in Agriculture and Small business development (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, pp. 25-26, 45). In many cases the actual curriculum was perceived by learners to be irrelevant to their needs, which may explain the recent popularity of two elective courses: Ancillary Health Care and Early Childhood Development because they are believed to offer some hope of employment as health workers or as assistants in early childhood centres and creches.

With the imposition of Outcomes-based education (OBE) on the education system in the late 1990s there was some attempt to provide training in this approach as well as the development of some materials (both usually designed by contracted NGOs). A curriculum vacuum was the inevitable consequence of the policy insistence that (in terms of OBE) (Department of Education 1997a, p. 24):

No core curriculum or syllabus will be provided by the Department of Education for the ABET learning areas or the broader organising fields. ... This is an important change from past practice where syllabi and national core curriculum guidelines laid down what should be taught and how it should be taught. In an outcomes-based approach the focus is on the outcomes of learning.

The obsession with OBE, aided by totally inadequate budgets, helped lead to the demise of any serious attempt to provide materials – it was blindly assumed that educators could interpret the meaning of the unit standards, develop their own lesson plans and produce contextually relevant materials.

Allied to the OBE approach was a tendency with the national directorate to have the ABET provision (although it was based on its own unit standards) conform to the schooling system's Curriculum 2005.

With the gradual fading away of OBE few further development in curriculum happened. Generally neither the provincial education departments nor now the Department of Higher Education and Training have demonstrated much energy in relation to adult education qualifications, programmes, the improvement of teaching approaches and methods, or the development and distribution of materials for educators and learners. It takes an inordinate amount of time to get approval for qualifications and curriculum proposals.

Programmes are generally confined to formal ABET and Senior Certificate qualifications, the General Education and Training Certificate and the “old” Senior Certificate (NATED 550) (though there may be limited support too for the “new” National Senior Certificate):

Currently there are three SAQA registered variants of the ABET level 4 (NQF 1, school grade 9 equivalent) qualification, the General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training (GETC: ABET):

GETC: Adult Basic Education and Training - academic

GETC: Ancillary Health Care

GETC: Equine and Equestrian Practice.

Learners can write individual subjects and receive certification for them.

On 18 September 2015 policy for a new General Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETCA) was published in the Government Gazette (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). It replaces the previous GETC qualification.

Secondary schooling qualification equivalents are the Senior Certificate (NATED 550) which was phased out in schools from 2008 and was supposed to be finally closed by 2014) but which has recently been revived and its regulations amended in 2014. It has somewhat less rigorous subject combination rules than the new National Senior Certificate now written by schools. This amended Senior Certificate was offered for the first time in mid 2015. Its curriculum follows the same Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) guidelines as for the school National Senior Certificate.

A new qualification with a different set of subject combinations and meant to be designed expressly for adults, the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA), was, after a long seven year gestation, gazetted in 2015 and will probably be examined for the first time in 2017.

There are some vocational qualifications run in technical schools and Technical and Vocational Colleges such as the National Certificate (Vocational) and older equivalents but they have not been run in PALCs.

Government policy is likely to increasingly support secondary education equivalent programmes (the Senior Certificate and NASCA) being run at community colleges and their Community Learning Centres, as a way of partially addressing the problem of young people not in employment, education or training (the NEETs).

Currently materials are a disaster area for PALCs. In most of the country there are simply none and learners are expected to study without anything to read or work with. It is a bizarre situation when there are classes of learners studying to develop reading, writing and numeracy skills and there are no books or materials of any sort in the classroom.

Assessment

In the mid to late 1990s there was some attempt to provide some guidance on assessment in the ABET field, much of it initially influenced by the Independent Examinations Board which developed competency-based approach ABET examinations and piloted the first of them in July 1994. Gradually the key position that the Independent Examinations Board had held was eroded by educational bureaucrats and the provincial departments started to run their own examinations until the centrally examined General Education and Training Certificate: Adult Basic Education and Training came into operation in 2001. A fair degree of documentation was developed for the running of this examination on the basis of national policy.

Well what happened in the new national ABET level 4 examinations run through the provincial education departments at public adult learning centres from 2001 to date? What kind of throughput was there? The first 2001 examination results were not auspicious – some 33 025 candidates entered, of them only 18,438 wrote and a mere 78 qualified for the General Education and Training (GETC:ABET) certificate (though many did gain some credits for individual learning area courses passed). The results had improved by 2012 – some 90 384 enrolled, 49 856 wrote and 18 663 passed (that is, only 55% of those entered wrote and only 37% of those who wrote passed). In the previous two years only 24% (2010) and 27% (2011) passed). However, estimating the real PALC throughput is difficult unless one has accurate figures on the number of learners at ABET level 4. The Department's 2012 statistics indicate 124 276 learners, so only 40% actually wrote and only 15% passed.

Umalusi (p.9) reported in 2013 that: “the GETC: ABET has been chronically troubled by relatively low uptake, poor throughput and low performance on the final assessment.” It also noted problems with the reliability and comparability of the compulsory Site-Based Assessment and noted (p. 25):

Provincial education departments report that neither teachers nor learners understand what is required in the Site Based Assessment, and that the teaching focus seems to lean towards the SBA due to the lack of a curriculum. ... This confirmed the response of DHET officials about how teachers seem to teach to the SBA, leading to not only inflated SBA marks but also a skewing learner performance.

It also imposes a heavy moderating duty on a limited number of district officials.

The Senior Certificate examination results have been derisory for so-called part-time candidates (not all of whom, of course, attend PALCs, some would study alone and some be enrolled in private colleges). In the 2013 mid-year examinations (when this examination is written) some 159 690 candidates entered (most of these probably carrying some previous credits and wanting to complete the qualification). Of these only 35 106 entered to write six subjects (and thus could be classified as “new” candidates). Only 58% of candidates wrote (93 006) with only 33% of those taking six subjects (11 592). Only 3 811 passed (4% of those who wrote and 2% of those entered) and only 236 passed with a matriculation exemption. There were very odd provincial variations in the pass rate among those writing six subjects variations, possibly suggesting irregularities.

An issue with both the GETC and Senior Certificate examinations is the cost of running them country wide, made worse by the printing of thousands of examination papers that are never written because up to only a third of the candidates actually turn up to write. The DHET has indicated that they may not have the capacity to run these examinations before 2017.

Management and governance

In the early 1990s management was essentially regional, even within the Department of Education and Training. The University of Natal report noted (Harley *et al*, 1996, p. 254) that the adult education centre system in the early 1990s was a large one, widely geographically spread, with a hierarchically organised set of offerings that allowed for progression with formal assessment procedures and nationally recognised certificates but that the Department of Education (Department of Education 1995a) conceded in 1995 that (Harley *et al*, 1996, pp. 254-255) circuit inspectors took little responsibility for centres.

A 1995 Department of Education (Department of Education, 1995b) discussion paper argued that these centres should be governed by Community Education Management Councils, District Adult Education and Training Governance Councils and Provincial ABET councils and that there should also be a national ABET Council. It also recommended that ABET should fall within the College sector, should have strong provincial offices, and that within each district, at least one main centre or campus office will coordinate adult education and training activities in the existing adult education centres (to be transformed into Community Learning Centres), and that the teacher:learner ratio should be between 15 and 30. [These recommendations are remarkably similar to the proposals made by the Task team on Community Education and Training Centres in 2012.]

Although there were various attempts to institute provincial ABET councils as prescribed by the 1997 *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation* (Department of Education, 1997b) these soon failed due to lack of both funding and official enthusiasm.

Then the 2000 Adult Basic Education and Training Act was passed as a largely bureaucratic instrument to regulate ABET and to provide for the establishment, governance and funding of adult learning centres. The Act dealt with both public and private centres, the use of schools for use by public centres, the set up of public centre governing bodies and the role of a centre manager. Constituting of a governing body was mandatory and its members had to consist of members elected from the educator and non-educator staff and learners of the centre, co-opted

community members (including the chair of the school governing body and the principal of the school (or representative of), the centre manager, any representative of a sponsoring body, any representative of an organisation for disabled people, and an expert in the field of adult education. The Act also dealt with quality assurance compliance.

The Act was never fully operationalised and was a failure. Few provinces developed the necessary regulations relating to the Act and though some PALCs did attempt to set up governing bodies in general very little was done to support this form of governance. It can be argued that the requirement to have PALC governing bodies and the onerous nature of the responsibilities imposed on such governing bodies was unrealistic when not even many schools had effective governing bodies.

The Auditor General's (2014, p. 5) report on the country-wide audit of adult education and training centres conducted in 2011 and 2012 provides new and detailed evidence of numerous weaknesses across the 110 sites that were visited. These include the lack of monitoring and evaluation of the performance of PALCs by the national Adult Education Directorate. Only two provinces had functioning Centre Governing Bodies.

Funding and funding sources

In the early 1990s the Department of Education and Training (DET) had the following allocated 0.5% of its budget to adult education and 1.6% to vocational education in technical high schools/colleges

The second University of Natal survey (Aitchison *et al*, 2000, pp. xii, xviii) noted about the funding of Public Adult Learning Centres that the high hopes for a rapid expansion of ABET provision after 1994 had been thoroughly undermined by the failure to increase significantly the funding for ABET. Although provincial education budgets given to adult education (including ABET) increased by about 30% a year in 1995/96 and 1996/97, as a percentage of education expenditure by expenditure data revealed a huge range in the calculated costs per learner – from R389 to R5 766 in the 1996/97 financial year, raising concerns about how accurate such figures can be and as to how varied the quality of provision must be.

In 2007 the Department of Education issued the ***National norms and standards for funding Adult Learning Centres (NSF-ALC)*** aiming at enhancing management, financial monitoring and EMIS systems. The actual norms were that in future certified centres would be funded on a programme enrolment formula basis and include costing for rental, maintenance costs and for materials and equipment. This would happen through a phased approach including audits and certification of centres. The actual formula would be based upon enrolments (on a full-time equivalent basis), “prices” for credits, the quality of the centre’s annual performance linked business plan, a fixed component (so that smaller centres would not be disadvantaged), a rural weighting factor, and its evaluation rating. FET programmes could be funded by provinces (but not with the funds for ABET) and these norms did not apply to such funding. The implementation of these norms was a fiasco and provincial directorates and centres simply lacked the competence (and the data necessary) to implement them.

From 2006/07 to 2012/13 the real average increase in adult education budgets was 6.8%, though between 2009/10 and 2012/13 it was a real average decrease of 1.1% per annum. The

reason given for this lack of recent increases was that the PALC programme was being reviewed (Wildeman, R. and Hemmer-Vitti, R, 2010, pp. 25-26).

Recent data on the expenditures on adult education (in the form of funds transferred from provincial education departments to the PALCs and also the amounts spent on the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign (on average about 34% of the provincial PALC funding) was R1 222 855 000 in 2010/11, R1 413 194 000 in 2011/12 and R 1 464 756 000 was budgeted for in 2012/13 (5% of that year's DHET budget and 0.7% of the entire education budget (Department of Education and Training, 2014, p. 50). So in terms of the proportion of the budget dedicated to adult education little change since 1991.

Funding for the state system has come virtually entirely from the state education budget. Private sponsorship has been minuscule and episodic. Some minor development monies have come to the national Directorate at various times (but mainly in the 1990s) as part of development aid, mainly from the United States of America and the European Union. Tuition fees, although garnered, have been a minor source of income and have, in any case been used only for incidental expenditures at PALCs.

The Auditor-General's conclusions

The *Management report of the Auditor-General of South Africa on the performance audit of the Adult Education and Training Programme at the Department of Higher Education and Training for 2014* (Auditor-general, 2014) has highly negative findings on the PALC system as it was in 2011 and 2012:

- the concurrent functions were not performed, partly because of budget inadequacies
- monitoring and evaluation visits were not done
- adult education and training operations in the provinces were not done
- the Department did not develop a strategy to deal with or track the extent of underqualified and unregistered educators (and in the years 2008 to 2011 audit checks on five provinces (which excluded Eastern Cape and Limpopo) that the percentages of unqualified educators in a province ranged from 4% to 47%.)
- only two provinces had functioning Centre Governing Bodies and the Department did not know how many Centre Governing Boards were in place
- relations between the School Governing Bodies, principals and adult education centre officials, were poor at some centres
- there were challenges relating to facilities, security and resources
- there was no monitoring of the registering of private centres and no checking of the standards at private centres was done
- adequate support was not given to provinces
- the National Advisory Board for Adult Basic Education and Training was not set up
- there was poor liaison with the Kha Ri Gude adult literacy campaign to ensure that Kha Ri Gude learners could progress further
- little curriculum development took place between 2008 and 2014
- little support on materials was provided
- provincial EMIS data on such things as learner enrolment and educators per centre were released too late to be useful for operations and planning for either the current or the following year and neither the provinces or the national department verified the data to

ensure accuracy (and there were differences between EMIS data on learner numbers and Adult Education and Training data)

- there was no crucial management information data on such things as pass rates for ABET levels 1 to 3, dropout rates, absenteeism rates, etc.
- teacher:learner ratios were below the 1:20 norm
- programme performance indicators could not be used because of lack of data
- an adult education and training framework was not developed
- educators conditions of service had not been standardised
- average costs per learners differed hugely between provinces (e.g. in 2010-2011 KwaZulu-Natal was R3 431 and Eastern Cape more than R8 500) and the costs excluding educator payments were even more diverse (Western Cape R5, Gauteng R1 152).

The place of PALCs in the reform and reconstitution of post-school education and training

The Further Education and Training White Paper of 1998 heralded a nationally driven merger that by 2002 saw 151 colleges into 51 larger, multi-campus institutions which had more autonomy and delegated budgetary authority. The merger certainly addressed the historical legacy of the same districts having four or more parallel institutions that previously served the separate apartheid era “race” groups, and of the distinction between state and state-aided institutions, but it also led to the closure of smaller institutions that had operated (though sometimes not very well) in rural areas. The capacity to manage these larger merged colleges was, however, often lacking (Gewer and Morojele, 2014)

Subsequent reforms included the recapitalisation of the declining Further Education and Training college sector from 2005 to 2008 that sought to address infrastructural, resource and capacity challenges, legislation in 2006 that transferred the staff of FET colleges to employment by college councils, and the provision of bursaries for college students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and a new National Certificate (Vocational). Enrolments in the colleges expanded significantly and there were gradual signs of improved academic performance (though from a very low base).

In 2011 the national Department of Education split into two: the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (which now dealt only with schooling at General and Further Education levels) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (which dealt with post-school education and training, which included formal adult education at General and Further Education levels). An anomaly was that the Kha Ri Gude adult literacy campaign remained in the Department of Basic Education.

It became clear that the responsibility for the FET Colleges would shift to the national government, to the DHET, and legislation, including a necessary constitutional amendment, led to the so-called function shift occurred on 1 April 2015 when the staff and assets and budgets of the 51 colleges, now renamed Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, moved from the jurisdiction of the nine provinces to the DHET.

Policies for the reconstitution of post-school education and training

The changes to the FET colleges were just one component of a broader set of new policies and plans for the post-school education and training which included some attention being given to adult education as well.

In 2012 a *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* was published by the DHET. It had a small section on Community Education and Training Centres which it proposed as a replacement for the Public Adult Learning Centres. The green paper noted the inadequacy of provision for people who had failed to complete their schooling. It noted that a task team was looking at a new institutional set up (see below).

The *White Paper* that followed (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013) recommended energetic development planning for the expansion of post-school provision for youth and a large number of adults. It outlined the DHET's focus and strategies for post-school education and training in a set of institutions making up "a coherent but differentiated whole" that could expand to meet the needs of youth (there were 3.4 million young people not in employment, education or training (the so-called NEETs)) but also a large number of adults". There should be articulation between various qualifications and no dead-ends, and partnerships between educational institutions and employers. Though it saw national economic development as the priority it also aimed to develop "thinking citizens" – education had an the "intrinsic importance".

The White Paper included a brief section (pp. 20-24) proposing core-funded and well-staffed Community Colleges (which would cluster the Public Adult Learning Centres) and expand provision nearly 400%. They would offer education and training, formal and non-formal, for community needs, literacy and citizenship education, not only income generation.

Community colleges "must therefore be designed to be flexible in meeting the needs of their own particular communities. The colleges must build on the experiences and traditions of community and people's education developed by non-formal, community-based and non-governmental organisations over many decades." They would be monitored and evaluated by a division within a new South African Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

The Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres

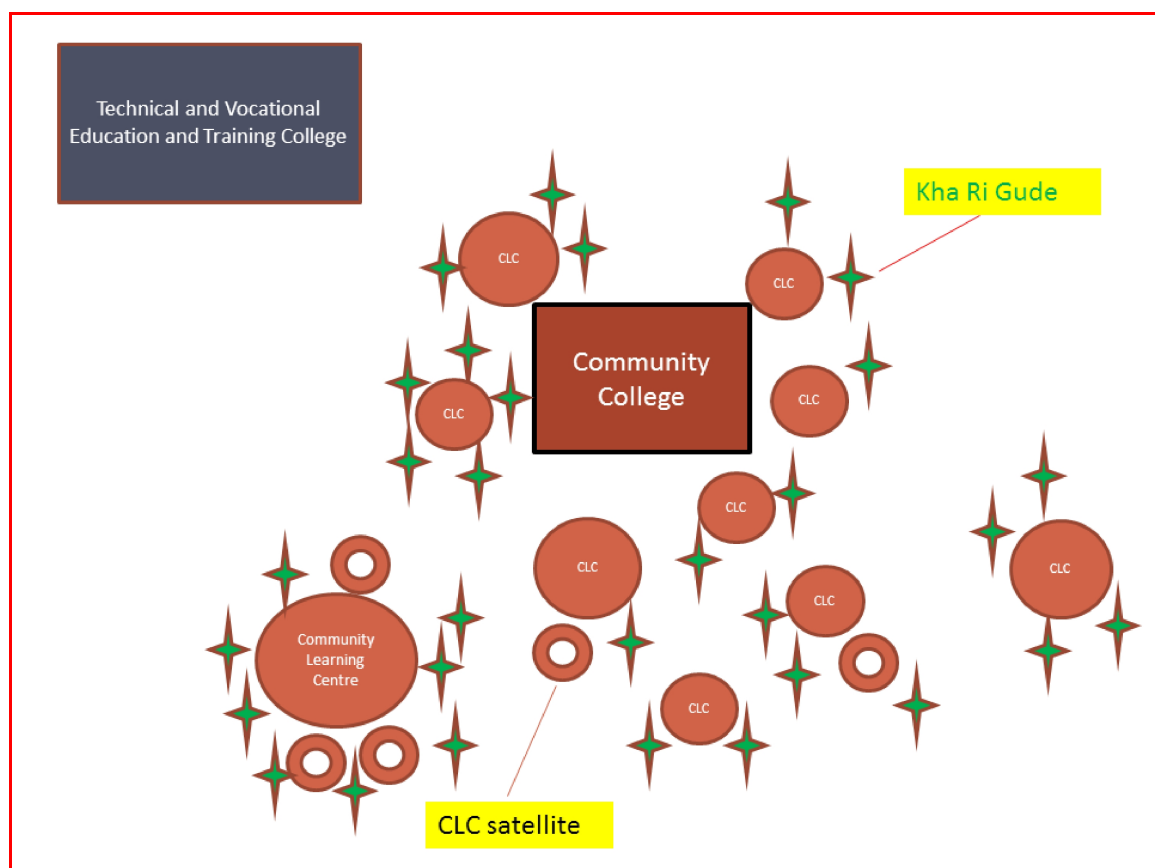
The White Paper's position on Community College development had been informed by (though in certain crucial respects it differed from) the report of a Task Team set up by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2011 as part of the Green paper development process to look at the future of Community Education and Training Centres (that is, the old PALCs) and to conceptualise a workable institutional model of community education and training centres that is distinct and unique. It was also tasked with looking at the policy, legal, programmes, funding, governance and broad implementation aspects of its proposals.

Its mid-2012 report's contextual analysis noted that despite some achievements the South African education system continued to reproduce inequalities in educational access and

outcomes, that there was a huge mass of 12 million severely undereducated adults and 3 million NEETs between the ages of 18 and 24. State adult education had received a minuscule percentage of the education budget and little attention was given to the young NEETs. This situation had been exacerbated by a period of fiscal restraint until the mid 2000s.

The actual proposals were as follows:

- A network rather than a single 'new' institution
- The network would be an integral part of the post school system
- It would have two major components:
 - ▶ **Community Learning Centres (and their smaller satellites):**
(with the Kha Ri Gude literacy campaign infrastructure, matured into a national learning network (with some similarities to the Scandinavian study circles), linked to them)
 - ▶ **Community Colleges** (within a differentiated college sector) as support hubs for the Community Learning Centres clustered around them)
- ▶ Support from an Institute for Adult, Youth and Community Learning (not merely a sub-section of a TVET Institute)
- ▶ Open, distance and e-learning components in all of these institutions.
- ▶ There would be strong links to the TVET college system.
- ▶ There might be a pilot phase in which the model was tested but the aim was for a community college in every district of the country.



The decision to not recommend having “community colleges” as sub-sections of existing TVET colleges was based on the rationale that when adult education is tagged onto another system it is invariably neglected and that expecting weak and overloaded TVET colleges to take on the task of mothering a weak, understaffed and dysfunctional PALC system that served thoroughly under-prepared learners was too much to expect. [In retrospect, financial exigencies may query the realism of this recommendation.]

The Task team saw the work of these Community College/Community Learning Centres as focussing on the following:

NQF level	Institution	Mission	Programmes
1 to 3	Community Learning Centres	First and second chance literacy and vocational	ABET, soft vocational skills, GETC, NASCA, some CLCs focus on hard vocational skills and NCV, community and non-formal education, <i>Kha Ri Gude</i> learning network programmes
1 to 5	<i>Kha Ri Gude</i> Learning Network	Literacy and public education	Literacy, public and community education [Multi-ministry delivery]
4 to 5	Community colleges	First, second chance Senior Certificate. Vocational and occupational programmes	NASCA, NC(V), soft vocational skills, social learnerships, para-professional programmes, university bridging
	Adult, Youth and Community Learning Institute	Develop and support literacy, adult education, community and public learning	Policy, Curriculum, virtual collaboration mechanism

The Task Team report urged urgent attention to:

- Phasing in the model(s) and sites of delivery
- Institutional development and capacity building
- Governance issues
- Legal and policy framework
- Funding
- Linkages and articulation

The White Paper take on Community Colleges

The White Paper certainly took the need for more flexible provision seriously. Community Colleges “must therefore be designed to be flexible in meeting the needs of their own particular communities. The colleges must build on the experiences and traditions of community and people’s education developed by non-formal, community-based and non-governmental organisations over many decades.” However, the main focus was on the new institutional type and there was little reference to what was to be done with the PALCs in the interim. The White Paper said that the PALCs, now that they were the DHET responsibility, would be clustered into the new community colleges. Community colleges would be provided

with “adequate infrastructure and a critical mass of full-time staff” and could enter into partnerships with community-owned, private or church run education and training centres. There would be a pilot phase. Learner support and career guidance services to be established, as would Youth Advisory centres. The DHET would develop funding formulae with core funding to be complemented by Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), National Skills Fund and private monies. Colleges could charge fees but they should be kept to minimum. As far as possible students were to be “fully funded”. The Community Colleges would be monitored and evaluated by a division within a new South African Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

Colleges “must select suitable and qualified adult educators” and new ones trained and older ones retrained. There would be qualifications policy and guidelines for “the recognition of capacities and experience that exist within communities”.

And, echoing a strong recommendation from the Task team, “Universities – and TVET colleges where appropriate – will be supported to develop capacity to train adult educators. Many university-based adult-education units have unfortunately been closed in the past two decades. However, at least two universities have established centres for post-school studies. This is an important development which should be encouraged. Such centres could become hubs for training adult educators and promoting articulation in the post school sector, as well as becoming nuclei for research on the sector.” (p. 23).

On the initial implementation there would:

- Phased introduction after 9 pilots (one per province)
- Principals to be appointed by the DHET Councils will have: ministerial appointments, community, local government, local business, other post-school institutions
- Development of long term plan
- Phased expansion and improvement of infrastructure
- DHET to oversee clustering of PALCs

On programmes there was reference to a mix of the current formal PALC offerings (the General Education and Training Certificate and the Senior Certificate) and the new National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) as well as to various occupational and non-formal programmes and courses. There would be community responsiveness and citizen and social education.

Much of the above is, perhaps predictably for a policy document, aspirational. What would happen in subsequent implementation was far away from these aspirations.

The function shift decisions

Before the Task Team report was finalised or the White Paper published, the DHET legal advisor appraised the Task Team of a plan to rename all PALCs as Community colleges, then immediately merge them into 9 (provincial/regional) ones. This was to give effect to the “function shift” of the PALCs from provincial to national control.

The Task Team was aghast at this proposal for the PALCs as there was a clear need for the clustering, their rationalisation and linking to local community colleges to be phased in over time and at the same time to improve the effectiveness of their continuing provision. This would be a difficult task given the lack of capacity endemic in the PALCs and their management. It was clear that there were no resources to immediately set up new community colleges and the Task Team saw this as a recipe for disaster, a legal sleight of hand, the only beneficiaries being the bureaucrats who could claim a successful “function shift”. Further, they thought it was wrong to mechanically apply the existing TVET college governance model. Their objections were totally ignored and the bureaucratically convenient but otherwise totally illogical process went ahead on 31 March/1 April in terms of Amendments to the Further Education and Training Colleges Act in late 2013.

Predictably there were enormous administrative problems, particularly with payments to PALC staff, and it general seemed that there was great lack of clarity as to who was actually responsible for ongoing support to the PALCs, given that there were in fact no new community colleges (see below).

The Community College Policy Design Evaluation

Bizarrely, while the planning for the “function shift” was going on and, actually on 1 April 2015 happening, another arm of government, in the form of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency had, with the DHET, commissioned an evaluation of the design of the draft Policy on Community Colleges (which was in tardy internal process of development within the Adult Education Directorate within the DHET – exceptionally tardy in that it was now two years since the Task team Report). Such an evaluation was in the way a pilot of what would in future happen to all government policies in the course of their development. It was just happening rather late in the day with the function shift of the PALCs already steamrolling ahead.

In the process of the evaluation it was discovered, amongst other things, that there had been very little consultation with the PALCs about their to be overnight status as a full community college before waking up to find one was merged into a single regional college, which was not, actually a college (even a nascent one) at all, but simply an administrative centre for (continuing) to administer the PALCs (now renamed Community Learning Centres). Further the staff of the previous provincial adult education directorates, now transferred to the national DHET had not the slightest intention of now going to work in the new institutional model of the community college!

The evaluation (South African Institute of Distance Education, 2015) was finalised in August 2015.

Its conclusions were (pp. 4-6), first, in respect of the “function shift” that:

- Whilst it is acknowledged that the PALC system is largely dysfunctional there is little in the draft policy that indicates a detailed plan or process to improve the situation to ensure that these centres become functional. Indeed the plan to nominally consolidate PALCs into one community college may actually replicate all the problems of the past

system, particularly in the larger provinces where little district or local support was given to these centres. The model may also disadvantage those PALCs that in certain provinces are functioning well and are supported by district or regional officials. The lack of budget estimates was alarming, suggesting a likelihood of funding shortages. The lack of buy in from officials was also worrying and the danger of the concept of “community college” being associated in the public mind with what is in effect simply the old dysfunctional PALC model renamed will severely undermine the potential of an inspirational educational development.

- The evaluators recommended that there needs to be a differentiated conceptualization of how the merged PALCs are meant to operate in different provincial contexts. It is known for example that Gauteng was administratively more successful than other provinces and has a fairly large adult education staff. A more comprehensive policy and plan must be developed that deals with the ongoing (even if only interim) existence and support of youth and adult learners currently at the old PALC sites. Key outcome, performance indicators, and sectoral coordination structures must be detailed. This is not to be confused with the policy and plan for the new institutional form of community colleges.

On the new institutional form the evaluation noted:

- The lack of the necessary detailed plan on how to set up a community college system, and, where detail is given, it slavishly follows the TVET college model. The Task team notion of a more flexible network of community learning centres close to the learners has been entirely lost or inverted. There also appears to have been minimal consultation on the new policy and little attention given to how the new system would be funded. Given that new programmes, curriculum and materials development will be crucial to improve the provision, the absence of any proposal of an appropriate mechanism to facilitate the development of these crucial elements, is extremely serious.
- The evaluators recommended a more substantive and imaginative policy be developed that deals with the creation and sustainable continuation of a new institutional form of provision of adult and youth education in decentralised community learning centres supported by community colleges, and with the requisite resources of programmes, curricula, materials and educators and trainers. This policy process should commence with the development of a set of guidelines for the pilot community colleges, including the notion that they should incorporate a number of local community learning centres (PALCs, satellites or NGO Centres). Then the current legislation should be reviewed and where necessary amended or replaced. This should in no way interfere with initiation of genuine pilots of community colleges. Further the DHET would need to establish significant internal capacity to do all this and also ensure that the crucial South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) functions are made operational, especially in regard to programme and materials development. A detailed project plan should be developed with an accompanying monitoring and evaluation framework.

The ongoing process

Current there is a Ministerial Committee busy looking at how TVET colleges and Community Colleges will be funded. It will report in the New Year. Internally the DHET has a group developing a strategic plan.

As yet, there are no community colleges, though some Council members have been appointed and at the Community College Administrative Centres one, or in an exceptional case, two, people sit in an office.

Out in the townships and rural communities PALCs still run, much as they always have, though perhaps more in the dark as to who is actually in charge. Their educators, even the unqualified ones, are now to be called lecturers.

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