

CHAPTER 5: LOCAL LABOUR ENVIRONMENTS AND FET COLLEGES: THREE CASE STUDIES



AZEEM BADROODIEN

Introduction

The relationship between technical education institutions and the world of work in South Africa is a complex issue given the historical aspects of education and training provision and the various kinds of technical education programmes available in public institutions in this country. Importantly, technical education institutions in the past had a diverse range of links with industry and work but rarely focused as acutely on developing educational programmes that led directly to particular forms of employment. In fact, it could be argued that the provision of technical education for white learners is the only context in the past in which firm links between education and the *formal* labour environment can be easily spoken about, but then only in terms of college provision of theory courses to indentured apprentices. It is also notable that technical education institutions were never in the past tasked with job creation responsibilities as is envisaged presently.

Over the last decade the transformation of technical education in South Africa has been a prominent aspect of the education reform agenda. Characterised as a weak and fragmented education-led, predominantly college-based system, poorly articulated with an almost non-existent employer-led work-based system, the reform of the South African technical and vocational education provision after 1990 was deemed critical for social and economic development (Chisholm 1992: 6). It was hoped that, with reform, further education and training provision would nurture the kinds of knowledge and skills that could fulfil socio-economic development imperatives.

In this respect, the *New Institutional Landscape for Public Further Education and Training Colleges: Reform of South Africa's Technical Colleges* (DoE 2001a) set out to develop a flexible infrastructure that could respond to particular skills needs of the country. The restructured college landscape has seen 160 technical colleges and colleges of education reorganised and merged into 50 large, multi-site FET colleges.

It is said that the development of the new infrastructure for FET colleges will offer opportunities for the provision of both lifelong learning and workforce development, while also providing learners with key citizenship skills, attitudes, values and knowledge. FET colleges thus operate in a legislative climate that anticipates the provision of skills development programmes alongside structured technical education courses. While developing new institutional programmes and structures that respond to their new envisaged roles, FET colleges are also charged with pulling together sets of institutions with significantly different historical legacies in ways that collectively link them to local worlds of work. By formalising links with local labour environments, FET colleges are expected to better serve their core constituencies and so fulfil their mandates. In this regard, the term 'local labour environment' incorporates the various kinds of interaction between role-players and socio-economic factors that shape links to the world of work within individual FET college settings.

This chapter focuses on conditions around individual college sites that shape the ways in which they formalise their interaction with local economies and social environments. It

sets out to understand the respective links of three FET colleges to their worlds of work or local economies. The three FET colleges comprise ten technical education institutional sites that were previously defined as state and state-aided technical colleges,¹ colleges of education and manpower centres in the provinces of the North West, KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State.

Observations about the links between FET colleges and local economies and social environments are based on qualitative research conducted at ten institutional sites during 2002. The research employed four sets of questions to understand and interpret the established cultural and social networks that either inhibited or facilitated change. The four sets of questions focused on:

- Partnerships that existed between colleges and industry, business, government and small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs).
- How such partnerships were established and how learner and employer needs were aligned.
- How the partnerships corresponded with college programmes and their operationalisation.
- The kinds of strategies that individual FET colleges had developed to market their institutions.

Undoubtedly, the new FET policy landscape, along with that of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), provides an important platform for the establishment of formal networks within FET college environments: networks within individual local settings that will be critical for the successful implementation of FET policy. However, many individual college sites are still struggling to come to terms with articulated notions of demand, specialisation and inter-linkage (of what to do, how to do it and where to get the resources to effect the changes). In fact, the chapter's key observation is that many colleges at the local level have not fully absorbed the intended aims of FET policy outlooks, and that this potentially could derail some of the expected policy outcomes.

It is argued that there are a number of underlying issues that are often presumed or overlooked within the different college contexts that inform the ways in which they respond to their expected roles. The daily reality of local institutional provision can certainly contradict legislative visions.

Understanding FET colleges through partnerships with employers and industry

There is little doubt that the new systems of funding options that have developed for the FET college sector will require a move away from a previously reactive college approach to one which actively engages with South Africa's economic and developmental challenges. And as part of this shift, FET colleges will need to develop close partnerships with business, industry and the community. In this regard, partnerships are understood as mechanisms

¹ In 1994 system reform required the incorporation of several different systems and an inevitable rationalisation of provision. Reform included dealing with a differentiated system of governance between two types of colleges: state and state-aided. The defining difference between the two forms of technical college rested on the pre-1994 imbalance of historically advantaged versus historically disadvantaged colleges. Key differences related to governance and legal status, and financing and financial management. A governing body with advisory powers, for example, governed state colleges, and the state held all property rights. A state college was not regarded as a legal person and, therefore, did not have proprietary capacity. State-aided colleges were governed by councils with decision-making powers and which operated as legal persons (having proprietary capacity and the ability to own property). At the time of the redesignation of technical colleges as FET colleges by the Minister of Education in September 2001, 46 per cent of technical colleges were state-aided and 54 per cent were state colleges.

whereby FET colleges engage with particular stakeholders in mapping out their institutional agendas. Partnerships for some institutions thus entail close relationships with industrial partners, and for others close ties with communities and developmental initiatives.

Understanding the ways in which economic and developmental challenges in the college sector are addressed necessitates looking closely at the intersection between the world of work, individual college sites and specific local conditions. This chapter thus provides a brief discussion on the world of work in South Africa, also describing the status of the employed population and their geographical location in the three provinces. It then describes the new FET college landscape, followed by an examination of three FET colleges and their links to local labour environments in KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and North West. The chapter is particularly focused on what constitutes partnerships with industry, business and communities at the local institutional level, and what such partnerships entail.

The world of work and industry

The world of work in South Africa is changing at all levels and in all provinces and regions far faster than education and training systems have been able to respond; although work environments in some areas remain locked into labour relationships reminiscent of times well past. In this regard, Kraak and Hall (1999: 219) have noted that the development of greater labour environment interaction between education and training institutions and the world of work is a critical component of prospective social and economic growth in South Africa. Kraak and Hall (1999: 222) note that:

There remains a low correlation between training in specific technical and commercial fields in technical colleges and actual employment opportunities in the external economy; and where there is a low incidence of employer sponsorship of training, there is a high incidence of unemployment among graduates of college programmes.

Indeed, alongside the dramatic social changes of the 1990s in South Africa, the world of work, while becoming more integrated and interlinked, has become significantly more complex and differentiated since 1994. In that respect, the many opportunities that emerged in South Africa in the period after 1994 have been substantially counterbalanced not only by the legacies of inequality and non-provision but also by a labour environment that has undergone rapid change.

It has also often been noted that changes in the technologies of work, work environments, learning methodologies and the nature of work itself meant that learning systems after 1994 needed to produce significantly different kinds of learners for the new economic environment (Kraak & Hall 1999). This placed an onerous burden after 1994 on the entire educational system, especially the further education and training sector, which was already battling with limited resources and an absence of mechanisms to effectively respond to changed structures driven primarily by 'market logic'.²

In this 'new' environment efforts were thus made to develop sustainable approaches to education and skills acquisition in South Africa in the late 1990s. In particular, policy outlooks and agendas suggested that greater articulation between further education and training institutions and the workplace would both enhance the external efficiency of

² The *FET White Paper* (1998), the *National Strategy for FET* (1999), and the *New Institutional Landscape for Public Further Education and Training Colleges* (2001) constantly allude to the need to understand labour market needs and participation in enhancing the external efficiency of FET providers. A key focus is on how to ensure that colleges are free to respond to labour-market needs and therefore on FET learners being appropriately employed.

further education and training providers and provide the kinds of skills required by the national economy. In this regard, key national goals and requirements needed to be communicated also to the nexus of social institutions, structures and processes in respective local labour environments to ensure that colleges were able to fulfil their envisaged role in meeting future skilled labour demands (Kraak & Hall 1999: 227).

Notably, the above approach to developing sustainable strategies asserted that welfare reform issues of social deprivation, exclusion and poverty could be effectively addressed through the increased participation of learners in the paid economy, and that many previously excluded groups could be reintegrated into the labour market through increased and better access to technical education and re-skilling programmes.

The South African labour environment

Amongst others, two key factors shape labour environments in South Africa. These relate to the size of the employable and employed population and the geographical location of the South African population. In October 1999 it was estimated that:

- Of 26.4 million people of working age in South Africa, about 10.4 million people were employed.
- Almost 54 per cent of the population lived in urban areas in South Africa, with just over 46 per cent in non-urban areas (Stats SA 2001a: 45).

The size of the South African population was estimated at 43.3 million people in 1999, of whom 77.8 per cent were African, 10.5 per cent white, 8.9 per cent coloured, and 2.6 per cent Indian (Stats SA 2001a: 13). Of this total population, 26.4 million people were of working age (defined as all those between the ages of 15 to 65 years). This figure can be separated into 12.8 million people who were 'not economically active' (housewives, pensioners and so on) in 1999 and 13.6 million people who presented their labour for remuneration on the labour market and so were 'economically active'.³ It was estimated that 10.4 million people were employed and 3.2 million people were unemployed in South Africa in 1999 (Stats SA 2001a: 13).

Of the employed population, 26.4 per cent worked in elementary occupations (domestic, tea making in a company, cleaners, planting on commercial farms and so on), 13.3 per cent were in craft and related trades, 10.2 per cent were in technical or semi-professional occupations, twelve per cent were in sales, and 10.4 per cent worked in clerical positions. Only 6.7 per cent worked in managerial positions, while 5.4 per cent were professionals. The rest of the workforce (about 15 per cent) worked in agriculture or the informal sector (Stats SA 2001a: 54).⁴

With regard to geographical location, it was estimated in 1999 that just more than 63 per cent of all urban dwellers and about 95 per cent of all non-urban dwellers were African, and that 67 per cent of the white, coloured and Indian populations were found in urban areas (Stats SA 2001a: 24).⁵ Furthermore, only 6.6 million of the 23.3 million people aged 20 years or more in South Africa in 1999 had passed Grade 12 or had post-school

³ The term 'economically active' includes workers formally and informally employed, the self-employed and the unemployed who wished to work. In 1999 it was estimated that almost 3.2 million people were unemployed. Using an expanded unemployment definition, Stats SA (2001a: 46) noted that up to six million people in South Africa could be unemployed. That would constitute an unemployment rate of almost 27 per cent.

⁴ The Labour Force Survey (LFS) of February 2001 noted that about 11.8 million people (73 per cent of the economically active) were employed and that about 4.2 million were unemployed. This suggests an economically active population of 16.1 million people in 2001, as opposed to the 13.6 million people estimated in the October Household Survey (OHS) of 1999. Muller (2002) argues that one of the significant developments in this LFS was a more accurate calculation of the size of the informal sector. However, it is still likely that its extent is seriously underestimated.

qualifications. And of the approximately 735 000 people who were studying at the post-school level in 1999, only 232 000 learners were enrolled at technical colleges (Stats SA 2001a: 43).

The FET college landscape post-2001

Under the new landscape plan, there are presently 50 FET colleges across nine provinces in South Africa. The 50 FET colleges comprise the 160 technical colleges and colleges of education, as well as manpower centres, that officially provided for learners until September 2001. FET colleges include more than 240 delivery sites (approximately 160 main campus sites and 80 satellite sites).

Most FET colleges comprise between three and six previous technical colleges, colleges of education or training centres. There are instances, though, where individual technical colleges have been retained as single FET colleges.

Most FET colleges are a mixture of previously white and black technical colleges and institutions, located on the whole in close geographical proximity. The formulation of FET colleges also acutely reflects the influence of industrial sites and the complex ways in which industrial settings (themselves partially shaped by apartheid) meshed with geographical locations to provide particular identities for individual technical colleges in the past. The different FET colleges are widely distributed across the country and are distinguishable by their individual urban, peri-urban (towns and townships) and rural characters. Notably, the majority of FET colleges are located in urban and peri-urban areas.

The three FET colleges on which this chapter focuses are located primarily in urban environments in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State, and in medium-sized towns in the North West. FET College A in KwaZulu-Natal comprises three college sites, of which two were black colleges and one white in the past. FET College B in the Free State also comprises three college sites. It is located in a decidedly smaller urban environment than the one in KwaZulu-Natal and includes a township focus. It also includes a college site previously located in one of apartheid's homelands. This adds a further dimension to understanding local labour environments. FET College C in the North West includes four college sites. Before 2001 these sites were an ex-homeland college of education, a black college and two white colleges. Whilst the latter three are located in medium-sized towns, or their townships, the former college of education is located in a deep rural location far from urban centres or industrial activity.

It is notable that the economic and labour conditions of KwaZulu-Natal, North West and the Free State are significantly different, as are the urban and rural residential shares of the various provincial populations. This informs specific FET college learner needs, the nature of college provision and the capacities of local labour environments in the three provinces.

FET College A: KwaZulu-Natal

The economy of KwaZulu-Natal is strongly industry-driven, with industries providing jobs for an estimated 1.6 million workers (about 61 per cent of the economically active population). In recent times private industries in the province have been particularly

5 Africans who live in rural areas make up 43.7 per cent of the total population of South Africa, while Africans living in urban areas constitute about 34.1 per cent of the total South African population. Just more than 19 per cent of the total population of South Africa is comprised of coloured, Indian and white inhabitants living in urban areas, with just three per cent living in rural areas.

willing to invest in higher-level technical skills, especially in college programme areas such as engineering, utility studies and information technology (Erasmus 2000a).

The Durban/Pietermaritzburg area in KwaZulu-Natal drives the growth of the province's economy, framed by its popularity as a tourist destination. Indeed, with Durban as a nodal point, KwaZulu-Natal is fast becoming one of the more popular domestic and international tourist destinations in South Africa. This will undoubtedly create further scope for tourist-related growth in the commercial sector and an increased demand for clerical/sales/service workers and artisans in the future. KwaZulu-Natal presently employs about 17 per cent of all workers in South Africa and contributes substantially to the total created wealth (second only to Gauteng) in the country (Stats SA 2001a). Durban also serves as the most important port in South Africa for the exportation and importation of goods.

Another feature of urban economies in recent times has been the developing informal economy and the need for particular kinds of small business skills. While this employment 'growth' is mostly duplicative and at levels that depend largely on elementary skills, this trend will open up key skills needs and opportunities in urban environments. However, about 57 per cent of the province's population of roughly nine million people remain resident in non-urban areas, many at considerable distances from economic centres (Erasmus 2000a: 10).

The three institutional sites that make up FET College A are all located in close proximity to large-scale urban industrial activity. Two of the facilities were previously state (that is black) institutions. The first facility was established in the 1970s in the second largest township in South Africa. The second facility was conceived in 1975 as an orientation institution to provide practical training and tuition to African learners from surrounding areas. Started by the Department of Education and Training (DET) on the border of an industrial suburb, the facility was converted into a well-resourced state institution in the early 1990s.

The third institutional site was a previous state-aided facility focused almost exclusively on theory-based provision and located in the heart of an urban or city environment. The key orientation of the institution has been to provide learners with direct access to employment opportunities in the local urban environment. Interestingly, while FET College A includes historically black sites that possess well-resourced workshops for hands-on skills training, learners continue to enrol in large numbers at this previous state-aided and predominantly theory-based institutional site. A specific challenge for the FET college in the future will be how to persuade learners (and educators) to attend classes at institutional sites located in the township and previously disadvantaged geographical areas.

Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 provide the most recent headcounts⁶ of learners and staff, staff racial compositions, and a breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the three institutions that comprise FET College A. Notably, even though the majority of learners are African, about 57 per cent of staff across the three institutional sites remain white. Also, most learners in FET College A are enrolled in engineering studies.

⁶ The various statistics for the three provinces are derived from the National Business Initiative (NBI) Institutional Profile Reports of 2000 and data collected by the Joint Education Trust (JET) Education Services in 2001.

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Table 5.1: Student and staff numbers

FET College A	Students	Staff
State-aided institution	1 089	53
State institution close to industrial suburb	1 102	66
State (township) institution	894	60
Total	3 085	179

Table 5.2: The staff composition of the three institutions

Staff composition (by percentage)	White	African	Coloured	Indian	Total
State-aided institution	79	4	7	10	100
State institution close to industrial suburb	71	11	13	5	100
State (township) institution	23	73	2	2	100
Total average	57	30	8	5	100

Table 5.3: Breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the three institutions

FET College A	State-aided	State (industrial)	State (township)	Total
<i>Further Education (N0, N1, N2, N3)</i>				
Art and music	0	0	0	0
Business studies	0	342	51	393
Engineering studies	699	587	584	1 870
General education	0	16	0	16
Utility studies	10	68	0	78
FET Total	709	1 013	635	2 357
<i>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</i>				
Art and music	0	0	0	0
Business studies	0	0	120	120
Educare and social services	52	0	0	52
Engineering studies	328	89	139	556
Utility studies	0	0	0	0
HET Total	380	89	259	728
Total	1 089	1 102	894	3 085

With regard to partnerships with business, industries and local communities, FET College A is blessed with a number of formal links with prominent urban-based industrial companies and businesses. Located within an urban industrial labour environment, FET College A has benefited significantly from the proximity of companies that employ people with a wide range of technical skills. The college has in recent times also formed close links with SETAs as well as with government agencies that promote small enterprise growth. Importantly, these links to industry and business roll out differently across the three institutional sites.

Companies and local businesses on the whole are increasingly interacting with FET College A in ways that best suit their needs. In many cases companies would arrange that the FET college would provide:

- Professional expertise at in-house company training centres using company materials, content and equipment.
- FET college training courses at company sites to ensure minimal disruption to company and business production.
- Courses tailored specifically to particular company needs at the FET college sites.

Interestingly in this regard, the previous state institution located close to an industrial suburb is at the centre of most of such industry-based partnerships.

While the township-based site has historical links with industries, businesses and the SMME sector, such links have always involved a very small number of learners. Community-based partnerships were apparently preferred in township areas, especially in providing access for various extramural activities. This had ramifications for institutional links to SETAs, in that such partnerships tended to predominantly focus on community development, and less on learnership and skills development programmes. However, such leanings also displayed attempts to unpack the social relevance of college course offerings. A recent programme was geared towards community and mostly unemployed members, providing them with basic skills training that combined technical skills with micro-business skills. The intention was to focus on promoting self-employment as a means of income generation.

With regard to the previous state-aided facility, the institution annually turns learners away and thus is under little pressure to develop specific partnerships with industries or business. The fact that most learners are already employed in nearby companies and so do not require practical training also significantly informs this preferred focus on theory-based courses.

Thus all three sites come to the merger with strong but differentiated backgrounds of attempts at responsiveness. To operate successfully FET College A will have to optimise the particular strengths of the respective institutional sites, and also spread lucrative partnerships across these sites in ways that do not reinforce previous inequalities. It is notable, however, notwithstanding valuable links to industry and business, that most partnerships with industries and businesses thus far in the local labour environment of FET College A have not culminated in employment for college graduates. While partnerships based on company demand and need have indeed provided particular

opportunities for FET College A, such foci have not generated enough graduates with high-skills or intermediate skills levels. In this context, companies in KwaZulu-Natal continue to hire their high-level and intermediate skills from outside the FET college sector. It is also worrying that the number of learners involved in partnerships with business, industries and communities remains very low. The mere existence of partnerships can thus be a misleading way of understanding growth and relevance in the FET college sector. These findings reinforce the story of previous chapters regarding the weak placement performance of colleges and the limits to employer-college relationships.

This case also seems to highlight the complexity of the college-industry relationship. Student attitudes about campuses' academic status and the legacy of apartheid urban geography appear to be leading to an increasing mismatch between the well-developed historically-black facilities within the college and the desire of students to study on the historically-white campus.

FET College B: Free State

Whilst KwaZulu-Natal has a relatively diversified economy, the Free State is strongly dependent on mining and agriculture. The province is a major food-producing area in South Africa and generates almost 80 per cent of South Africa's sorghum; half the national wheat crop; a third of the national maize and potato crop; and one-fifth of South Africa's beef, wool and milk. These products constitute the most important basic foodstuffs for a large proportion of the population. Indeed, agriculture is a key income and employment-creating sector in the province and employs 26 per cent of all workers in the Free State.

Nonetheless, mining remains the dominant economic activity in the province, employing almost 47 per cent of the province's working population. This dependence on mining places the workers in the region at risk given the decline in the sector (especially gold mining) in recent years. Erasmus (2000b: 24) has observed, though, that the economy in the Free State in 1996 had become increasingly diversified as the dependence on mining and agriculture declined, and that manufacturing and trade had become more prominent in the provincial economy. This suggests that employment will probably grow in the manufacturing and services sectors and in the professional and managerial categories in the province, with the economy becoming more investment driven. Importantly, the Free State population is small at about 2.8 million people (about 6.5 per cent of South Africa's population), with the majority spread out across a predominantly rural environment (Erasmus 2000b: 24).

The three institutional sites of FET College B were previously a state-aided institution, a state institution based in a township, and a manpower centre in an ex-homeland. The state-aided institution was one of the first technical colleges established in South Africa and served the agricultural training requirements for whites in the early twentieth century Orange Free State. It also had firm links with the SA Railways and the gold and diamond mines. In recent times, the institution mainly served learners who used their college diplomas to study further at higher education institutions, reflecting the broader national shift of white learners away from intermediate-level technical skills programmes.

The state institution was established in 1981 and was moved to a township in 1990. It was established by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to serve African children in an urban area. The institution was mostly a community-based facility with a

particular focus on general skills and knowledge aimed at developing elementary capacities for employment in a segregated labour market. The third institutional site was established as a manpower centre in 1991 in what was then a homeland. It is situated in a densely populated district far from urban environments.

Tables 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 provide the most recent count of learner and staff numbers, staff compositions, and a breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the three institutions that comprise FET College B. It is striking that in a province with a white population of about 12 per cent, just less than 70 per cent of FET College B staff members are white, with just more than 30 per cent African. There is only one coloured staff member and no Indian member across the three institutional sites, although this must be seen, in large part, as reflecting the demographics of the province.

Table 5.4: Student and staff numbers

FET College B	Students	Staff
State-aided	2 010	95
State (township)	2 004	118
State (ex-homeland)	289	25
Total	4 303	238

Table 5.5: The staff composition of the three institutions

Staff composition (by percentage)	White	African	Coloured	Indian	Total
State-aided	91	8	1	0	100
State (township)	62	38	0	0	100
State (ex-homeland)	20	80	0	0	100
Total	69	31	0	0	100

Partnerships with local businesses, industries and communities in the Free State are framed by past college foci and recent institutional decisions. The previous state-aided institution, for instance, had strong links with the mines and railways in the past. More recently, the institution has also come to provide large numbers of learners with college diplomas required for further study at higher education institutions. This theory and higher education focus has not only weakened previous partnerships with industry, but has also meant that the facility does not presently possess adequate workshops or technical training facilities for a skills development focus.

On the other hand, recent evaluations of the capacity of the township-based state institution have shown that it is best positioned to take up FET legislative challenges, especially with regard to flexible programme delivery, learner support, industry

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Table 5.6: Breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the three institutions

FET College B	State-aided	State (township)	State (ex-homeland)	Total
<i>Further Education (N0, N1, N2, N3)</i>				
Art and music	6	0	0	6
Business studies	369	78	61	508
Engineering studies	320	515	81	916
General education	0	324	0	324
Utility studies	57	0	12	69
FET total	752	917	154	1 823
<i>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</i>				
Art and music	21	0	0	21
Business studies	1 120	898	133	2 151
Educare and social services	16	0	0	16
Engineering studies	63	189	2	254
Utility studies	38	0	0	38
HET total	1 258	1 087	135	2 480
Total	2 010	2 004	289	4 303

partnerships and adult learning programmes. Even though programmes remain mostly theory-based, the institution has demonstrated a capacity to innovate and to address learner needs in the area in more flexible ways. This capacity is considerably bolstered by the large number of available workshops at the facility and the efforts to respond to particular kinds of community needs. The existence of workshops also provides the institution with key resources to respond to industrial development around manufacturing in the area, especially with regard to drawing adult workers into skills development programmes.

Sponsored by the Department of Education (DoE), the ex-homeland institution is regarded as the main Internet-based training centre in the region and serves a number of local high schools through the development of computer training skills. This recent institutional emphasis and the rural location have meant, however, that there has not been an urgent need to proactively secure further business or community partners. This is a worrying development for the institutional site, given that learner enrolment and interest have remained low, and the proximity of a number of private and public (school-based) learning competitors.

The three campuses appear to be pointing the college in very different directions, all of which can be seen as problematic in terms of responsiveness to the

labour market. In the face of a decline in the traditional sectors that it was set up to serve, the historically white college has come to see its role as providing a second route to higher education. The township campus is better equipped (in terms of infrastructure) to provide services to industry. However, it has yet to develop strong partnerships and appears more likely to find its niche in short-term skills programmes. The rural campus has chosen to take a route that leaves it poorly articulated with employers and subject to serious competitive pressures from private and school-based providers. None of these routes is likely to build strong linkages with employers in order to develop intermediate skills, the historical mission of the college sector.

FET College C: North West

The North West is also a mineral-rich province. The total population of the province is 3.6 million people, of whom about 65 per cent inhabit non-urban areas (Erasmus 2000c: 3; Stats SA 2001a: 13). The October Household Survey of 1996 noted that an estimated 725 287 people (36 per cent) were employed in the province, while about 866 552 people (42 per cent) were not economically active (housewives, scholars, students, pensioners, retired and disabled people and others not wishing to work), and about 443 546 people (22 per cent) could not find work (Erasmus 2000c: 3). Importantly, the majority of economically active youth in North West aged 15 to 24 could not find employment (Erasmus 2000c: 4).

As with the Free State, the economy of the North West is dominated by mining and agriculture, even though these are in decline. Although the various regions in the province are able to employ workers according to their respective levels of industrial operation, certain regions (especially those that include large towns and industrial centres) do dominate economically in the province. Erasmus (2000c: 20) has noted that industries provide up to 62 per cent of jobs for the economically active population across the North West, in which commercial activities in particular have become increasingly prominent.

There has also been a new focus on tourism and a shift in mining focus to platinum. The increased international interest in gold also suggests possible economic regeneration in regions in decline in recent years. However, new opportunities will probably continue to predominate in the low-skills occupations and not be sufficient to satisfy the expected supply of labour. In efforts to address both the high levels of illiteracy and unemployment in the province, non-formal skills programmes will probably be preferred in the future to increase participation at the community and small business development levels. The hinterland of FET College C includes major centres for mining and agriculture around the three urban sites, as well as significant commercial activity and an institution for higher education. A new emphasis on tourism is also evident in local and regional planning in this area of the province.

The four institutions that make up FET College C have significantly different locations and histories that inform the ways in which they form partnerships with business, industry and local communities. The two state-aided institutions and the one state institution are firmly rooted within the kind of labour environment associated with most North West towns, while the college of education is located in a rural environment and if anything seems to be best suited for agricultural training provision. As a legacy of apartheid, the

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state institution located in a township on the periphery of a North West town was primarily established to serve African learners who lived in close proximity to, and in the same labour environment as, the town's state-aided facility.

The first state-aided institution was established in 1939 for the training of mining apprentices, and was converted to a technical high school in the 1950s. It only began to function as a technical college in 1977. The institution has traditionally had strong links to the mining industry and has operated as a key provider of technical education expertise at the higher education levels.

The second state-aided institution has historically served as a platform to higher education institutions and so has always tended to offer more general (and less technical) theory-based programmes, with no formal workshops on its premises. The facility has always had firm links with other school and higher education institutions in the immediate vicinity and has mainly functioned as a bridging institution for learners keen on pursuing higher education studies.

The township state institution is located just three kilometres outside a North West town and was established in 1983. It is the newest of the four college sites and so possesses better workshop facilities and grounds. However, being located in a township has a number of stigmas and disadvantages and many resident learners have preferred to enrol at the nearby previously state-aided institution.

The college of education was established in 1979 in a then homeland area. In recent times the facility has served as a distance education site for a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and tertiary education programmes. While the FET landscape plan envisages that the institution will develop a greater further education and training focus, the facility does not have the required workshops needed for technical education provision or easy access to practitioners to teach such courses.

Tables 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 provide the most recent count of learner and staff numbers, staff compositions, and a breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the four institutions that comprise FET College C. It is notable that 85 per cent of staff in FET College C are white, and that Africans do not hold a single senior position in the college. While the majority of staff at the college of education are African and could perhaps have been redeployed to the other institutions to get the staff balance right, their skills lie in higher education and teacher training.

Table 5.7: Student and staff numbers

FET College C	Students	Staff
State-aided with technical education focus	775	46
State-aided with higher education focus	760	49
State (township)	345	22
State (college of education)	313	11
Total	2 193	128

TECHNICAL COLLEGE RESPONSIVENESS

Table 5.8: The staff composition of the four institutions

Staff composition (by percentage)	White	African	Coloured	Indian	Total
State-aided (technical)	100	0	0	0	100
State-aided (higher)	92	4	4	0	100
State (township)	77	23	0	0	100
State (college of education)	9	91	0	0	100
Total average	85	13	2	0	100

Table 5.9: Breakdown of learner headcounts per vocational field for the four institutions

FET College C	State-aided college (technical)	State-aided college (higher)	State (township)	State (college of education)	Total
<i>Further Education (N0, N1, N2, N3)</i>					
Art and music	0	0	0	0	0
Business studies	84	232	105	47	468
Engineering studies	263	108	106	29	506
General education	0	0	0	0	0
Utility studies	1	9	0	0	10
FET Total	348	349	211	76	984
<i>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</i>					
Art and music	0	0	0	0	0
Business studies	327	319	115	231	992
Educare and social services	0	23	18	0	41
Engineering studies	100	50	0	6	156
Utility studies	1	19	0	0	20
HET Total	428	411	133	237	1 209
TOTAL	776	760	344	313	2 193

FET College C is closely associated with the economic regeneration of the region, which through a provincial strategy aims to develop new employment in areas such as tourism. This is clearly evident in the large number of partnerships between FET College C and local businesses, industries and communities. In this regard, the key challenge for FET College C will be how it responds to learner and partner needs across institutional sites in ways that do not reinforce previous inequalities and disparities.

CHAPTER 5

Given the close proximity of three institutional sites in a labour environment where industries provide jobs to the majority of the economically active population of the region (recently more in commercial activities), it is inevitable that certain institutions will predominate within the FET college. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that each facility has developed unique responses to the new environment, based on geographical location, the focus of previous institutional programmes, and different levels of institutional innovation and flexibility.

The first previous state-aided institution has redeveloped partnerships with the mining industry, to the extent that a prominent mine has donated its training centre to the institution. This multi-million rand skills training centre is a significant acquisition for FET College C and provides central workshop facilities for three institutional sites. The mine training centre also provides vital access for the FET college to job placements and a wider pool of potential learners from the mine. Indeed, part of the agreement in securing the training centre is that the college will develop particular courses for mine employees and apprentices, and focus on upgrading their respective skills. Whilst mining is a declining sector, it clearly remains a major source of wealth and employment in the province, and this is likely to remain true for the foreseeable future.

With the availability of excellent trade training facilities, the FET college is also able to attract private further education and training partnerships with boiler-making, electrician, fitting and turning, and millwright firms. The acquisition of the centre has also facilitated the successful institutional formulation of an engineering-based learnership, the only functioning learnership in the North West.

Furthermore, the institution has also developed a number of partnership agreements with the local municipality, local panel-beating shops and electrical pump manufacturers to provide short skills development and trade training courses. The institution further provides accredited computer training courses and adult education programmes alongside its established further and higher technical education courses. This ensures that there are learners at the facility until late evening every day.

The second previous state-aided institution has traditionally served as a bridging facility to higher education studies and formed part of a network of educational institutions in this locality that provided learners with particular kinds of programmes that gave them access to further studies. The understanding that the higher education focus in colleges will need to be reduced (although this is now less certain in the policy arena) has led to significant reconfiguration and a new focus for the institution. However, the impact of this shift has been somewhat softened by an increase in tourism in the area. Thus, recent institutional programmes have focused on developing computer skills, hotelier, catering and small business capacities for the area. During festival and holiday periods, hotels and catering services have taken advantage of these available skills, albeit still at very low levels, and have provided valuable on-site training opportunities. The institution has also brokered a number of partnerships with poultry farms and manufacturers in the area to provide adult basic education and training courses.

A key future concern, then, will be the extent to which the institution focuses on such short course and adult basic education programmes. Given that the facility has traditionally not had any workshops on its premises, this may well lead to a diminished

interest in the provision of formally accredited technical education programmes in the future. Importantly, employers have at least shown some interest in forming partnerships with the (state-aided) institutional site.

For the township institution, however, partnerships are very weak. Given the success of the other nearby institutions, the township institution has been unable to attract business and industry partnerships. This failure is as much attributable to the institution's township location as to prejudices among local businesses and industries with regard to presumed African learner capacities. Local impoverishment and unemployment have further limited the ability of the institution to market itself amongst local residents.

In recent times, the facility has developed a number of community partnerships whereby sewing, handcraft, pottery and vegetable growing classes are provided for both unemployed and working residents. However, such partnerships are largely instances where individuals have sought to use institutional facilities to benefit financially, and will probably not be formalised in the near future. Importantly, being the newest technical education institution in the area, the township facility boasts well-resourced workshops that are a significant asset to FET College C, both for formally accredited practical training and for developing the small business focus required by FET college policy outlooks. The challenge remains how the FET college gets both learners and educators from other institutional sites to visit and use the township workshops and facilities.

If securing partnerships with business and industry is difficult for a township institution in the North West, it is a virtual impossibility for a college of education in an ex-homeland. In addition to the lack of programme, educator and workshop capacity to develop further education and training programmes, the college of education is firmly located in a rural enclave where there is virtually no economic, let alone industrial, activity.

The institutional culture of a previous higher education enterprise, then, has served to further paralyse the possible ways in which the college of education could respond to its new mandate. The local community would probably have been better served if the institution had focused on agricultural training. In this regard, there was talk during the college landscape reconfiguration in 2001 that the college of education would be partnered with an agricultural college in the area. However, after negotiations with the Department of Agriculture broke down, it was decided that the reconfiguration of the institutional site as a further education and training facility would provide some useful ways of engaging with and understanding the skills development legacies of ex-homeland areas.

The successful functioning of FET College C is indeed critical for the regeneration of the local labour environment. However, there is justifiable concern that the present formulation and emphasis of FET College C may reinforce old inequalities in skills levels and perpetuate one of the enduring legacies of apartheid further education and training policies, namely that learners were provided with differentiated access to skills and knowledge. Moreover, as the performance of colleges becomes increasingly assessed in terms of efficiency and labour market outcomes, the future of campuses far from strong labour markets may return as an issue.

Conclusion

The successful envisioning and implementation of further education and training (FET) policy with regard to FET colleges in South Africa hinges on two processes, namely:

- The attainment of strong collaborative links between the various partners within FET college settings.
- The ability of FET colleges, in facilitating the transition from school to work, to build up the crucial intermediate skills levels of the country.

This chapter has shown that FET colleges interact differently within individual local labour environments, both in economic terms and with regard to institutional contexts. It has been shown that each institutional site has significantly different social partners as well as different reasons for the ways in which it engages with its local labour environment.

However, there are a number of issues that could derail the restructuring process. One of these issues is how to achieve the correct mix within each FET college between structured technical education provision, short skills development programmes and preparation for post-N3 education. This impacts also on the historical mix of facilities for theoretical and practical training. If FET colleges in South Africa are to build up the country's intermediate and high-skills levels, then greater attention needs to be given to ways of spreading that focus across the FET colleges and across institutional sites.

Also, in disparate local environments where legacies of the past, advantage and impoverishment operate and mesh in quite complex ways, the success of individual FET colleges will depend on how they link up with community, business and industry partners to forge educational and skills centres that respond to the needs of local labour environments. In this regard, the FET college case studies in KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and the North West have raised a number of concerns.

First, colleges generally appear to have little strategic vision that links them to changing national, provincial and local skills needs and development strategies. Without such strategic vision, they struggle to develop a rationale and programme for better partnerships. At the same time, the awareness that programme reforms are planned, but are not yet finalised, further curtails their ability to be responsive to new economic niches in their nationally-accredited programmes, although there are some signs of better responsiveness in terms of short courses.

Second, employers remain insufficiently engaged with and interested in the FET system. Indeed, the kinds and number of partnerships that presently exist between colleges, industries and local businesses in the three provinces paint a very worrying picture. The study shows very few formal partnerships between institutional sites and social partners. However, where partnerships do exist they involve extremely low learner numbers and are predominantly concentrated around low-skills training programmes.

Third, the racial composition of staffing may well inhibit responsiveness. At present, the aggregate picture across the three colleges is that they have 69 per cent white staff and a

similar, if not greater, white complement at senior levels. It seems inevitable that this disparity, especially at the management level, will be an area that receives much attention in the playing out of the merger process and beyond. The impact of competition for management roles in the new colleges cannot be underplayed and is likely also to have a broader impact on linkages. Many existing linkages with industry are informal and reside in the personal networks of senior management. Such linkages are threatened by the restructuring of the sector. It is possible that some managers will seek to strengthen their own positions by stressing the personal nature of external relations, whilst other linkages will be put under threat by any shift in the racial composition of college management teams.

Lastly, it remains disconcerting that short-term skills development and community-oriented programmes are primarily associated with township-based and ex-homeland institutional sites. Even within the urban-based and previously advantaged institutions, African learners often tend to register for short-term study programmes rather than for full courses. This could undermine commitment and investment within institutional structures to develop the crucial intermediate skills required in South Africa.