Technical College Responsiveness

Learner destinations and labour market environments in South Africa

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Edited by Michael Cosser, Simon McGrath, Azeem Badroodien & Botshabelo Maja

JET EDUCATION SERVICES

RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

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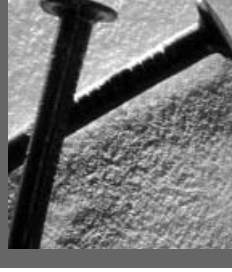

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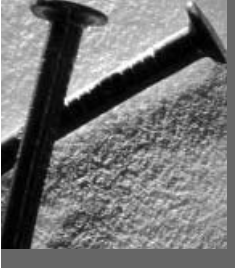

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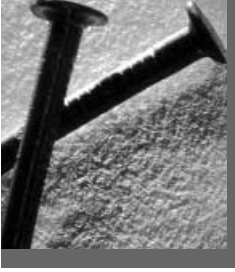

Foreword

The South African Department of Education has, through the National Business Initiative and Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) reports on technical colleges and its own institutional landscape study, subjected the technical college sector to a series of major reviews over the past five years. Long considered the 'Cinderella' of the education and training system – particularly in relation to its sister sector, schooling – technical college education has often been characterised by critics as performing poorly in terms of labour market placement of graduates since its historical links to apprenticeship went into decline in the 1980s.

The broader restructuring of education and training in South Africa into three bands – General Education and Training (GET), Further Education and Training (FET), and Higher Education and Training (HET) – and the formulation of a suite of policies to address imbalances in the education-work interface in South Africa have focused attention on the role of technical college education in the new dispensation and on the contribution of colleges to meeting the skills development needs of the country. That focus has resulted, in the first instance, in a new institutional landscape that sees a reduction from 151 colleges to 50 through a set of mergers based on physical location (colleges to be merged being in the same geographical vicinity) and resource allocation (state- and state-aided colleges, or public and semi-independent colleges, being merged in the process).

It is against this backdrop that the Joint Education Trust (now JET Education Services) commissioned the HSRC in late 2000 to conduct a study on the responsiveness of technical colleges to the labour market. The project proposal, entitled 'Investigating "responsiveness": Employer satisfaction and graduate destination surveys in the South African technical college sector', made provision for three separate but related studies:

- A tracer study of a cohort of technical college students who had graduated from colleges two years prior to the survey (managed by Michael Cosser).
- An employer satisfaction survey of a sample of employers of college graduates (managed by Botshabelo Maja).
- Institutional profiles of a sample of technical colleges (managed by Azeem Badroodien) including a socio-economic profile of the physical locations and local labour markets of colleges throughout the country (compiled by Gina Weir-Smith).

This volume presents the findings of these three studies.[1] What its contents suggest, through the juxtaposition of the core chapters, is the importance of viewing the issue of responsiveness through a series of distinct, but related, lenses. Thus college responsiveness is gauged through a multiple focus on graduate perceptions, employer perceptions, college perceptions, and local labour environment conditions, with the inevitable overlay of the researchers' interpretations of their findings within the context of education and training provision in South Africa. This methodology, while not taken to its logical conclusion in this study, provides a useful model for future studies of institutional responsiveness. As Cosser maintains in his chapter on the graduate destination survey, the bringing together of as many sources of information about institutional responsiveness as possible is needed if a holistic picture of the sector that can inform its transformation is to emerge.

1 The socio-economic profile, however, is subsumed under the institutional profile chapter, which examines the local labour environments within which selected colleges are located and with which they are presumed to engage.

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This volume goes beyond a report on the project itself, however, to place the findings within the broader context of technical and vocational education and training elsewhere in Africa and abroad. Thus Simon McGrath (part of the Secretariat of the Working Group for International Cooperation in Skills Development) and Lorna Unwin (Professor of Vocational Education at the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester) have each contributed to the volume based on their work in other national contexts. By locating the investigation of technical college responsiveness within the broader framework of international technical and vocational training initiatives, the volume demonstrates, within a rapidly globalising economy, the interrelatedness of education and training systems and the constant need for dialogue amongst them.

A chapter is devoted to an analysis, by Michael Cosser, of the unsolicited letters of graduates addressed to the project manager of the graduate destination survey. Going beyond statistics, the letters personalise the predicaments facing many technical college graduates as they enter the labour market. Finally, Simon McGrath draws together some of the key agreements and disagreements of the separate analyses to show the multi-faceted implications of the study for policy, practice and research.

This volume will, I believe, make a valuable contribution to the restructuring of technical college education in South Africa as the new FET Colleges take their rightful place as the primary developers of high-quality technical and vocational skills at the intermediate level.

Dr Andre Kraak
Executive Director, Research Programme on Human Resources Development,
Human Sciences Research Council

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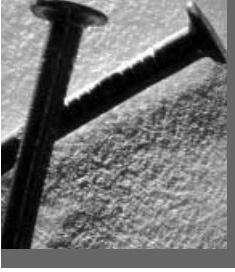

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Michael Cosser
Project Manager

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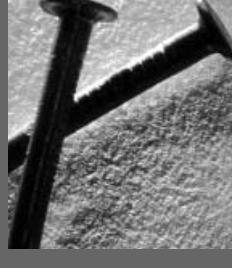

List of acronyms

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoVEs	Centres of Vocational Excellence
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
FE	Further education
FET	Further education and training
FTE	Full-time equivalent
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
GET	General education and training
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
HE	Higher education
HET	Higher education and training
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JET	Joint Education Trust
LEAs	Local Education Authorities
LFS	Labour Force Survey
M-TEC	Michigan Technical Education Center
NBI	National Business Initiative
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NIC	National Intermediate Certificate
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NTB	National Training Board
OHS	October Household Survey
SETAs	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
SMMEs	Small, medium and micro-enterprises
SOC	Standard Occupation Classification

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Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VET	Vocational education and training
WGICSD	Working Group for International Cooperation in Skills Development

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