

CHAPTER 4

Increasing educational opportunities for post NQF Level 4 learners in South Africa through the FET college sector

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Introduction

In this chapter a case is made for increased HE and FET college interaction, as well as for expanding the present mandate of FET colleges in South Africa as one of a number of means of increasing educational opportunities for post NQF Level 4 learners – i.e. post the National Senior Certificate (or Grade 12) level for the schooling sector and post the NC (V) NQF Level 4 for the FET college sector.

An analysis performed by Sheppard (2009) using Statistics South Africa's Community Survey (StatsSA 2007) shows that during 2007 there were nearly 700 000 young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were unemployed and in possession of a school-leaving certificate or an FET college certificate which allowed them to continue with further studies at post NQF Level 4 (including formal HE studies); but they were in fact not engaged in any such further studies – these young people were neither working nor studying, and fell into the NEET category (not in employment, education or training).

Clearly the reasons for the existence of such a large pool of young people in our society are complex and probably multidimensional. The following could however contribute towards an explanation of this phenomenon:

- The low absorption rate of such young people into formal economic activity.
- The high cost associated with HE study and, despite the success of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the limited availability of financial aid for large numbers of potential students.
- The relatively limited number of student places available at South African HEIs.
- The demise of the so-called N4–N6 HE learning programmes formerly offered by some FET colleges (this matter is covered fully later in the chapter).

Apart from the negative social impact of such a large group of young people, the skills needs of South Africa's developing economy clearly demand a creative solution to this undesirable social phenomenon.

Why involve the FET colleges as a partial solution to this problem and not simply increase student places at our HEIs while increasing student financial aid?

There are a number of reasons for following the route proposed in this chapter:

- By common consent, South Africa's skills crisis is particularly acute at the lower-middle, middle and higher-middle skills levels – which are covered by FET colleges to a far greater extent than our HEIs, which concentrate on higher skills levels.
- Involving FET colleges in a partial solution to the problem of large numbers of non-working and non-studying young people, would ensure that any further study is undertaken in more applied and work-oriented study programmes – precisely the areas in which South Africa is desperately short of skilled person power.
- The educational unit cost associated with FET colleges is likely to be considerably lower than that of universities due to the absence of postgraduate teaching and the research function in these colleges. This means that involving FET colleges in some forms of further learning should make it more affordable for prospective students to continue with post NQF Level 4 studies.
- At present South Africa's youth have very limited choices available to them if they wish to study further at a public educational institution. Their choices are: HEIs, nursing colleges and agricultural colleges. Involving FET colleges would add to the options available to young people for further study and introduce greater flexibility as well as differentiation into our education system for advanced studies.
- FET colleges are geographically better distributed across our nine provinces (including campuses in some smaller towns) than our HEIs and would thus make any further study by young people more accessible to them at a lower cost as accommodation costs would be reduced significantly.
- In 2007 a National Plan for FET colleges (DoE 2008) was announced by the Minister of Education. Involving FET colleges as part of a solution to the problem of large numbers of unemployed and non-studying young people would in many instances build on this National Plan and advance its aims.

As a partial solution to finding viable alternatives for such large numbers of unemployed and non-studying young people in South Africa, this chapter proposes a FET college sector characterised by greater levels of coordination between the various role-players involved in FET college learning programmes, by a more flexible approach to the scope of learning programmes which FET colleges can offer, and by a differentiated FET college sector in which not all FET colleges will of necessity offer post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes or HE learning programmes.

Once again the goals of such a coordinated and differentiated FET college system are contained in the 2007 National Plan for FET colleges, but they are taken considerably further in this chapter. The extensive development of policies in the HE as well as the FET college sectors over the past decade or so by the DoE, together with the above-mentioned 2007 National Plan for FET colleges, forms an important base for the development of a FET system which is coordinated, flexible and differentiated.

The South African HE and FET college sectors

Governance arrangements for HEIs and FET colleges

In South Africa HEIs are classified as a national competence and while enjoying a considerable amount of institutional autonomy, resort directly under the Minister of Education as far as any interactions with government are concerned. In addition, universities are certification authorities in their own right.

FET colleges, in contrast, are regarded as a provincial competence and resort under the various provincial education departments, although the Minister of Higher Education is responsible for determining national policy for FET colleges. In one sense, the provincial education departments are thus the providers of FET college education and fulfil this responsibility through the FET colleges under their jurisdiction as sites of educational delivery. Furthermore, FET colleges as far as the learning programmes leading to the new NC (V) are concerned, are not certification authorities in their own right; the certification function being performed by Umalusi, the successor to the former South African Certification Council.

The governance arrangements for these two sectors are similar to those found internationally and represent serious challenges to any enhanced HE–FET college interaction; as on the FET college side two parties (provincial education departments and the FET colleges themselves) with very different levels of decision-making autonomy are involved, while on the HE side only one party (the HEIs) enjoys near full decision-making autonomy. In addition, in South Africa, unlike in some other countries with similar governance arrangements for these two sectors, the provincial education departments in general are sorely lacking in understanding, expertise and capacity in respect of the place and role of FET college education in our country.

Institutional landscape of the HE and FET college sectors

Both the HE and FET sectors have been subject to incisive restructuring programmes launched by the government in the past few years. These restructuring programmes have definitely had an impact on the scope of choices available to young people considering post-school or post-initial FET college studies.

In the case of HE, the government in 2002 embarked on a process aimed at reducing the then 21 universities and 15 technikons to 23 universities (with the technikons being renamed universities of technology [UTs]) and two national institutes for HE – one in the Northern Cape and the other in Mpumalanga. The reconfigured HE institutional landscape was to represent a more differentiated HE system consisting of: six comprehensive universities which represented the merging of universities with technikons and/or the expansion of the mandates of traditional universities to include erstwhile technikon programmes, six UTs (former technikons) and eleven general universities as well as the two national institutes.

This restructuring programme was preceded by an equally significant but more limited restructuring exercise which started in the late 1990s, in which upwards of 120 colleges

of education were incorporated into universities and technikons; making all teacher education a national competence rather than being both a national as well as a provincial competence as it had hitherto been.

In practice such restructuring reduced advanced educational opportunities for young people, as about 140 HEIs (i.e. universities, technikons and teacher education colleges) were reduced to 23 universities. One of the more immediate outcomes of these mergers and incorporations was that non-viable campuses were closed or used for other purposes. This meant that young people who previously would have had easier geographical access to some form of HE within their more immediate living environment – especially teacher education colleges – now had to cope with the increased costs which studying away from home inevitably brings.

The FET college sector was also subject to incisive restructuring in that in 2002 the number of lone-standing FET colleges was reduced drastically in favour of establishing larger FET colleges with a number of campuses. In this way approximately 150 former technical colleges were reduced to 50 FET colleges, with geographical distribution as follows: Eastern Cape – 8, Free State – 4, North-West – 3, Gauteng – 8, Mpumalanga – 3, KwaZulu-Natal – 9, Limpopo – 7, Northern Cape – 2, and Western Cape – 6. This distribution of FET colleges includes colleges in urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

An important facet of this restructuring was that no existing sites of learning were closed.

In 2007 headcount enrolments in our HE sector amounted to about 761 000, while for the FET college sector headcount enrolments amounted to about 320 679. In many countries with stronger FET systems these figures would be reversed.

Part of the DoE's strategic plan for the FET college sector involves a dramatic increase in these enrolment figures and increases of about 40% per annum have been mooted for some provinces in order to attain the target of one million students in FET colleges by 2014. To date such increases have not materialised – partly due to insufficient funds available to provincial education departments to fund such increased enrolments, and partly due to the fact that in the provincial education departments school education normally enjoys a much higher priority than FET college education (additional provincial funds would thus tend to be allocated to the school system and not to the FET college system).

Despite these difficulties, a government strategy aimed at reversing the 'size' of the FET college system relative to that of the university system should be supported.

Learning programmes in the HE and FET college sectors

Both sectors also experienced considerable change and renewal in the area of learning programmes. In general these changes have established a very positive base from which the scope of choices for advanced study for young people can be expanded.

For HE a system was introduced whereby each new learning programme needed to be approved for funding purposes by the DoE (the so-called programme qualification mix

[PQM] process), accredited for quality assurance purposes by the CHE (HEQC), and the related qualification registered by SAQA. This system, although somewhat cumbersome, resulted in much needed clarity of functional responsibilities of structures such as the DoE, CHE (HEQC) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Another significant change affecting HE in particular was the announcement of the new HE Qualifications Framework towards the end of 2007 for implementation in 2009. The HEQF has the following structure: Higher Certificate (Level 5, 120 credits); Advanced Certificate (Level 6, 120 credits); Diploma (Level 6, 360 credits); Advanced Diploma (Level 7, 120 credits); Bachelor's degree (Level 7 or 8, 360 or 480 credits); Bachelor Honours (Level 8, 120 credits); Postgraduate Diploma (Level 8, 120 credits); Masters (Level 9, 180 credits); PhD (Level 10, 360 credits).

The HEQF formed part of a new ten-level NQF in which HE would be involved at Levels 5 to 10 and FET colleges at Levels 2 to 4. In addition, the new NQF Act 67 of 2008 was promulgated, in which three quality councils for quality assurance purposes were established: Umalusi – the quality council for all general and further education at NQF Levels 1 to 4; the CHE (HEQC) – the quality council for all HE at Levels 5 to 10; and the Quality Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO), the quality council for trade and occupationally directed learning as defined in the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998. Trade and occupationally directed learning could, in theory at least, take place on any of the ten NQF levels.

This arrangement established a clear quality assurance protocol for the various types and levels of education and training and, as will be seen later, forms the basis for establishing a more flexible FET college system which is better linked to the HE sector.

From 2007 onwards FET colleges started offering learning programmes developed and designed on the basis of covering a number of specific career areas in which, in each case, a NC (V) could be obtained at NQF Levels 2, 3 or 4. The career areas in which an NC (V) can be obtained are: Civil Engineering and Building Construction; Electrical Infrastructure Construction; Engineering and Related Design; Finance, Economics, and Accounting; Hospitality; Information Technology and Computer Science; Management; Office Administration; Primary Agriculture; and Tourism.

As part of the introduction of this new NC (V) programme dispensation, the FET College Act, Act 16 of 2006 stipulated in Section 43 that:

A further education and training college may only provide higher education programmes under the authority of a higher education institution or the Minister...

and

'Public colleges which are offering the programmes under the authority of a public higher education institution must a) apply to the Minister after the

*commencement of this Act, for permission to offer such programmes; and
b) may only offer such programmes if they are published by the Minister in
the Government Gazette.'*

In terms of these provisions, FET colleges have been informed that the previous HE-level programmes, known as N4, N5 or N6 diplomas, are to be phased out from 2009 over the next three years and, barring any unforeseen circumstances, will have disappeared from the menu of learning programmes offered by FET colleges by 2012.

What are the implications of this ruling for the scope of study choices available to young people who wish to undertake higher education study?

- In the publication *Quantitative Overview of the FET College Sector* (DoE 2002), it was reported that at that stage, approximately 44% of all enrolments at FET colleges were in N4–N6 programmes – which equated to about 60 000 students. This figure in turn constituted 12% of all public HE enrolments at that stage. This report also reflected a higher pass rate for N4–N6 students – 63% compared to 53% for N1–N3 students; as well as a higher throughput rate of 57% for N4–N6 students compared to 47% for N1–N3 students. Although no firm data could be obtained, it has been reported that the past few years have seen a decline in the number of enrolments in N4–N6 programmes at FET colleges. In the present NC (V) dispensation these 60 000-odd students would not be able to continue any studies in the HE band at any FET college nor would they be able to enrol at a university, as no arrangements which translate an NC (V) college qualification into HE admission criterion exist yet.
- Many former technikons, now UTs, allowed students in possession of N4–N6 qualifications admission into their diploma programmes – particularly into their engineering programmes. Although the numbers of such 'transfer' students were probably not large, the demise of the N4–N6 programmes at FET colleges seems to present a further curtailment of educational opportunities for some students wishing to pursue studies at a UT.

A contributing factor to the demise of these N4–N6 learning programmes has apparently been the fact that these programmes, from a quality assurance perspective, 'fell between the cracks' in that they were not quality assured via the CHE (HEQC) or Umalusi. The establishment of three new quality councils, each having a clearly defined area of responsibility, creates opportunities to explore a possible re-establishment of such learning programmes at FET colleges. This option is explored later in this chapter in greater detail.

In addition, some FET colleges do offer post NQF Level 4 non-HE learning programmes such as a Diploma in Early Childhood Development on NQF Level 5 under the auspices of the ETDP SETA. If these learning programmes are to be continued, they would in future be quality assured by the QCTO.

The DoE has, however, indicated in its National Plan for FET Colleges (DoE 2008) that

student headcount enrolments in such trade and occupationally directed programmes, including adult education programmes, community projects, etc. which are not funded by the DoE but via other structures such as SETAs, should not comprise more than approximately 20%, or at most 30% – the other 70% to 80% being made up of student headcount enrolments in NC (V) programmes.

Presumably this restriction was introduced to ensure that FET colleges would primarily be involved in structured NC (V) programmes at NQF Levels 2, 3 and 4. In addition, the provision for some leeway by providing for between 20% and 30% of student headcount enrolments in such non NC (V) programmes meant that some form of institutional differentiation would be possible in that in some FET colleges this figure would amount to 20%; while in others to a figure between 20% and 30%; and in others to a figure of 30%.

From the National Plan for FET colleges (DoE 2008) it is, however, not clear whether such differentiation will be managed purposefully by the DoE or simply allowed to happen ... if it does in fact happen.

Interaction between HEIs and FET colleges in South Africa

A survey of a number of instances of existing interaction and collaboration between HEIs and FET colleges in South Africa has shown that:

- Few examples of actual articulation pathways for FET college qualifications into HE exist at present – of eight case studies, only two represent an arrangement where learners are able to carry some credits from their FET college studies into the university. In the one case this arrangement is likely to come to an end with the demise of the N4 to N6 learning programmes offered by FET colleges in the past.
- Most HE–FET college collaboration projects are centred on individuals who have driven the process. When these persons leave the institution, the collaboration often falters and, more often than not, comes to an end.
- When push comes to shove, academic faculties/schools or departments of universities often present admission and other academic requirements that are way beyond those contained in the initial articulation agreement structured at institutional level.
- Cases of in-principle agreement on articulation frameworks between HEIs and FET colleges exist which have not been taken further and implemented. In most cases this was due to a lack of funding and/or doubts within the university academic community on the feasibility of such articulation frameworks working in practice.
- Existing collaborative programmes have not focussed on building FET college educator capacity to offer programmes at HE level.
- Due to the differing governance arrangements for HEIs and FET colleges, articulation agreements are not translatable across provinces or across HEIs. This limits the extent of such agreements to the participating institutions only.
- External funding to initiate collaboration projects appears to be necessary as neither FET colleges nor HE institutions are prepared to commit their own resources to initiate such collaboration processes.

The case studies of existing HE–FET college collaboration reveal that the required social capital, norms, networks, trust and dynamic power equilibriums to sustain the partnership arrangements cannot be assumed. All of the cases showed the significance of a champion to drive and nurture the collaboration, and the discontinuity that occurred when the champion/driver left the partnership. In the absence of any policy framework that guides and standardises such arrangements, existing institutional arrangements have proven fragile and have relied strongly on external human and financial resources to sustain them.

A national framework that affords FET college–HEI collaborative initiatives the necessary affirmation and encouragement is necessary to sustain such interventions into the future in order to significantly expand opportunities for advanced study for young people.

Interaction between the HE and FET sectors internationally

Internationally four broad categories of barriers to students transferring between the FET sector and the HE sector have been identified (Lynch et al. 1994; Buckley 2006):

- *Attitudinal barriers:* Perceptions of the professional status of FET academic staff by their university counterparts often lead to unwillingness to accept each other as peers.
- *Institutional barriers:* The differing missions of FET (or VET) colleges and those of universities resulting in differing institutional characteristics, institutional cultures and identities, and institutional practices, often present strong barriers to cross-sectoral institutional collaboration.
- *Curricular barriers:* These barriers include fundamental differences in learning (integrated curriculum compared to outcomes and competency-based programmes) and assessment (graded marks compared to a non-graded, competent/not-yet-competent framework) between the two sectors.
- *Structural and financial barriers:* These barriers are usually the result of the differing governance arrangements applying to the two sectors.

From the above it is clear that the boundaries between the FET and HE sectors are multidimensional and require specific boundary-crossing strategies. Examples of some boundary-crossing strategies that have been developed internationally are:

- *Governance structures and funding:* An important boundary-crossing strategy between the FET and HE sectors consists of establishing better integration and coordination in terms of the national governmental structures, funding arrangements and quality assurance agencies responsible for the two sectors. In South Africa this could be achieved in a number of ways, such as:
 - Declaring FET colleges a full national competency.
 - Umalusi, the CHE (HEQC) and the QCTO establishing a more formal collaborative understanding.
 - HESA and the organised FET college principals establishing a forum for discussion and debate.

- Establishing a council of ministers and senior departmental officials for policy formulation on HE–FET college interaction, etc.
- *Credit transfer and articulation arrangements:* Some overseas governments initiated formal investigations into credit transfer arrangements between the FET and HE sectors. Apart from producing broad credit transfer frameworks, these investigations created an overall awareness in the HE and FET college sectors of the importance of finding more flexible ways of ensuring more satisfactory levels of articulation between programmes/qualifications.

In South Africa the DoE, in the HEQF document, has already committed itself to initiating ‘systematic work on the development of a national HE credit scheme...’ – this investigation could easily be expanded to include the FET college sector.

- *Curricula (including admissions, teaching, learning and assessment practices):* To address these barriers it is important that academic staff from FET colleges and HEIs work more collaboratively on curriculum design and teaching/assessment techniques in related fields of study to ensure that students can make the transition from one sector to another more easily. Some countries have established cross-sectoral professional learning councils (PLCs) to achieve such collaboration.

In South Africa it would be important for HESA and the organised structures for FET college principals to spearhead the development of such professional learning councils in a few selected fields. Staff exchange programmes whereby some HEI staff do some teaching at FET colleges would assist in overcoming these barriers.

- *Institutional partnerships:* Although models vary, there is a trend internationally towards developing more systematic institution-to-institution and multi-institutional partnerships under the auspices of a nationally developed partnership framework. In South Africa this would probably imply that the DoE would have to take the lead in developing such a broad cross-sectoral and inter-institutional partnership framework, which could then be used by individual HEIs and FET colleges in establishing their more detailed partnership arrangements.

The South African HE and FET policy context

Apart from the policies on learning programmes which were discussed earlier, policies for HE and FET colleges in certain areas were analysed in order to determine the extent to which policy cohesion which would support the goals of expanded FET college mandates and increased HE–FET college interaction existed. Analysis was undertaken in the areas of:

- Student enrolment planning.
- Funding of the HE and FET college sectors.
- Academic staff issues.

The analysis of these policy areas identified a number of consequences which policies in these areas may have for any HE–FET college interaction, and showed:

- That the two sectors display very similar policy development tracks. From the perspective of strengthening HE–FET college interaction, this could be seen as a positive factor.
- That the post-1994 period of radical and intensive policy renewal in these two sectors is likely to be followed now by periods emphasising the consolidated implementation of all these policies. This is vital for achieving greater levels of institutional effectiveness and efficiency, which is necessary for any HE–FET college interactions to succeed.
- Indications exist that many of the policies developed in the areas listed above may have been developed in a mode of relative ‘sectoral isolation’. While this is not necessarily the case for the FET college sector, it certainly seems true for the HE policies analysed. HE–FET college interaction could have been enhanced through constructive policy interaction within the DoE during the policy development stage for these two sectors.
- The impact which the various facets of the policies in the areas listed above is likely to have on any model seeking to strengthen HE–FET college interaction shows very little consistency – some policies will seemingly strengthen such interactions, while others will not.
- In the case of the FET college sector, the provinces seem to have a dominant influence on how policies for FET colleges are actually applied and implemented, leading to many inconsistencies of application. This is problematic as it makes the development of a cohesive FET college sector more difficult.
- The HE and FET college sectors both operate under a funding framework that broadly encompasses block grant and earmarked funding. Both sectors are subject to enrolment planning, which includes not subsidising over-enrolments. Enhancing HE–FET college interaction will probably require allocating some earmarked funding for this purpose for a limited period of time, as well as exempting any student enrolments in collaborative HE–FET college learning programmes from enrolment planning targets for a specified period of time.
- Of great value in strengthening HE–FET college interaction is the fact that national plans have been developed for both sectors – for HE in 2001 and for the FET college sector in 2008. These national plans set out goals and objectives as well as accompanying strategies, which should form a sound basis for the development of a more interactive HE–FET college system.

Models for increasing advanced educational opportunities for young people through the FET college sector

In this section a number of models aimed at enhancing HE–FET college interaction and at expanding the mandates of FET colleges will be explored as ways of increasing advanced education opportunities for young people. The models presented fall into two categories: those within the framework of the new FET College Act of 2006 (Model 1 and possibly Model 3), and those which would require some amendments to this Act and possibly to some other education legislation as well (Models 2, 4 and 5).

However, before presenting these models, a number of issues are listed which would require some steps to be taken (in most cases to be initiated by the DoE) in order for any of these models to have a reasonable chance of success.

General steps required for strengthening the FET college sector

- Ways have to be found to make collaboration between FET colleges and HEIs less susceptible to the departure of individuals championing such collaboration from the participating institutions. This is best achieved by means of formal inter-institutional agreements, which, as was shown in the analysis of international trends in HE–FET collaboration, are in turn based on a set of broad national guidelines and policies advancing HE–FET college collaboration. Such a set of broad national guidelines needs to be developed.
- As has already been mentioned, collaboration between FET colleges and HEIs in South Africa is hampered by the lack of coordination between the various role-players involved with FET colleges and HE. This lack of coordination occurs within and across government departments, between provinces in the case of FET colleges, as well as between potential role-players such as HESA and the organised structures of FET college principals. Declaring FET colleges a national competence would go a long way towards resolving the problem of a lack of coordination in all aspects of the FET college system. If this is not attainable, other means of achieving greater levels of coordination would have to be investigated.
- Proposals on minimum admission requirements for higher certificate, diploma and degree programmes requiring a NC (V) Level 4 were made in late 2009 by the DoHET and published for comment. Finalisation of these proposals will go a long way in advancing HE–FET college interaction.
- One of the most important hindrances to establishing greater collaboration between the FET college sector and HE is the absence of an academic policy for HE. Such an academic policy, together with the HEQF and the standards set by the CHE for HE qualifications, as well as the policy governing the design and nature of NC (V) programmes, would constitute a composite academic framework against which articulation possibilities for FET college qualifications could be developed.
- The establishment of the PQM approach for HE by the DoE, together with the recently announced HEQF, provide meaningful opportunities for collaboration between HE and the FET college sector. The DoE could consider attaching some riders that programmes in terms of the new HEQF such as Higher Certificates (and possibly even Advanced Certificates) must be offered by a HEI in conjunction with a FET college.
- In terms of the new NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, three quality councils which could all have an impact on FET colleges have been established. It may be necessary for the three quality councils to establish a memorandum of understanding regulating their interactions in this regard.
- At present, HEIs are subject to a system of enrolment planning administered by the DoE. The FET colleges are similarly subject to a more complex form of enrolment planning due to the ‘in-between’ role and function of the provincial education departments. However, in both cases over-enrolments are likely to lead to some form

of financial penalty for the institutions concerned. If possible, all students involved in any HE–FET college collaborative learning programmes should be excluded from the student enrolment system and regarded as ‘over and above’ for at least say five years until the uncertainties associated with such cooperative ventures have lessened significantly.

- Stimulating any form of HE and FET college collaboration may require the allocation of some earmarked funds specifically for the support of such collaborative ventures. Such earmarked funds could be allocated within the HE budget under the category ‘Earmarked Funds’ as part of the Annual Ministerial Statement and under the category of ‘Earmarked Recurrent Funding’ as part of the Funding Norms for FET colleges. This approach could be followed for around five years before being replaced by funding through normal block grant allocations to HEIs and FET colleges.
- Student tuition fees in the case of collaborative HE–FET college ventures are likely to present complex financial, managerial and social challenges to participating institutions. Leaving such complex arrangements to the institutions involved could lead to considerable inconsistencies in the manner in which such arrangements are set out. A set of guidelines to assist collaborating institutions in the area of arrangements concerning tuition fees would be very helpful to provide for a system-based approach to this issue.
- One of the major areas of concern in promoting greater levels of collaboration between HE and FET colleges concerns the quality of the academic staff in FET colleges. In many FET colleges large numbers of their academic staff only possess a three-year post-school qualification. It is very important that the draft national policy on a Framework for Lecturer Qualifications and Development for FET colleges be finalised and implemented as soon as possible.

As such a policy will only start having a material effect on the quality of lecturing staff at FET colleges in a few years from now, it may be necessary to investigate the feasibility of developing staff exchange programmes between HEIs and FET colleges; in which academic staff from HEIs are allowed, as part of ‘private consultancy work’, to engage in limited teaching activities in FET colleges in learning programmes falling within their area of expertise. Such staff exchange programmes would probably require some form of a multi-career path system to be adopted by HEIs, in which academic staff who concentrate more (but not exclusively) on teaching activities could participate in such exchange programmes.

A number of benefits, for the individuals as well as for the institutions concerned, could emerge from HR policies at HEIs and FET colleges which are specifically designed to foster this kind of exchange of academic capacity.

The various steps mentioned above probably point to the fact that an overall strategy and plan acknowledging that a strengthened FET sector is a formal priority needs to be accepted at government level.

Specific models for HE–FET college collaboration and expanding the mandate of FET colleges

Model 1: HEI franchising of FET colleges to offer certain HE programmes on their behalf

Nature and characteristics of the ‘franchising’ model. In this model a FET college would be given a ‘franchise’ by a HEI to offer a particular HE learning programme leading to a HE qualification(s) awarded by the HE institution. The delivery of education relating to the associated learning programme(s) will take place on one of the campuses of the FET college. This model is in accordance with the provisions of the FET Colleges Act, 2006.

Such a franchise function by an FET college will need to be regulated by a comprehensive franchise agreement between the HEI and the FET college, which would need to cover issues such as the following:

- Which learning programmes form part of the franchise agreement, the period of time envisaged for the agreement to hold, the regular review of the agreement, as well as renewal and cancellation of the agreement.
- DoE’s PQM approval, HEQC accreditation and whether any conditions have been attached to such accreditation, as well as SAQA registration for the learning programmes/qualifications covered in the agreement.
- The administration of applications for the franchised learning programme(s) and the management of the registration of such students with the HEI through the FET college, the management of late applications and late registrations, and the levying of ‘penalty’ fees in this regard (if any).
- Any quality assurance standards which the educational delivery of the programme must comply with – including matters such as admission requirements, teaching methodology, desired academic qualifications of lecturing staff, student:staff ratios, timetabling, learner support such as tutorial classes, assessment approaches, rules for certification, etc.
- The administration of examinations and examination results as well as of certification (graduation) and of study records.
- The position of students in the franchised programme who wish to transfer to another programme in the HEI before completing the franchised learning programme.
- The way in which the HEI will be enabled to comply with its Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) reporting responsibilities to the DoE and what the role of the FET college would be in this regard.
- The setting of tuition fees for the franchised programme and the retention of such income (or portions thereof) by the FET college.
- The basis for the distribution (if any) of government subsidies received by the HEI for students in franchised programmes to the FET college.
- Funding arrangements in the two-year pre-period before government subsidies are generated by students in the franchised programmes.
- The administration of all aspects related to applications to NSFAS for support and for the payment and financial control of such allocations to students.

- Student matters such as rules and disciplinary codes for students, student support services, and management of student complaints regarding the franchised programme.

Incentives for HEIs and FET colleges to enter into franchising agreements. On the face of it, there do not seem to be strongly persuasive reasons for a HEI to follow the route of a franchise agreement with a FET college, given the long list of arrangements that would need to be made in the inter-institutional agreement – a list which would be made even longer if provincial education departments have to be included in such agreements. Compared with doing it themselves, the HEI is likely to suffer a loss of income through a franchising agreement with a FET college.

The only reasons that could induce a HEI to follow such a route could be reasons such as:

- The HEI recognises the need for a particular learning programme, but does not have the academic staff capacity to offer such a programme.
- The HEI does not foresee qualifications such as a Higher Certificate (or even an Advanced Certificate) forming part of its formal menu of programmes that it wishes to offer, but is not averse to including such programmes in its PQM provided someone else is responsible for the educational delivery.
- The HEI is concerned about access and throughput issues and sees such a franchise arrangement as a way of increasing access for successful students into its own higher level programmes.

Concluding views on the franchising model. From the above analysis it is apparent that entering into such franchising agreements will present formidable challenges to the participating HEIs and FET colleges. At this point in time it is an open question whether HEIs will feel that doing so is worth all the trouble – particularly if they can offer such programmes themselves without having to cope with many of the difficulties brought on by a franchising agreement. The reluctance of HE institutions to enter into franchising agreements is likely to be heightened by the prospect of a third partner having to be included in such agreements in the form of the various provincial education departments. In fact, it is probably true that without very specific government incentives and specific policy interventions from government this franchising model is not likely to take off in any significant measure.

Model 2: Granting selected FET colleges the right to offer a limited number of specific HE qualifications in their own right

The most immediate form of moving towards incorporating some of the aspects of a community college model such as that in the USA, would be to consider the introduction of selected HE programmes for some FET colleges. As has already been pointed out, the new HEQF provides for nine qualification types, ranging from NQF Levels 5 to 10. In particular, the HEQF provides for the following qualifications which could be appropriate for FET colleges:

- Higher Certificate. This is a 120 credit, NQF Level 5 qualification which, according to the HEQF, is primarily an industry or vocationally oriented qualification. Normally the study programme would include a period of work integrated learning (WIL). Completion of the Higher Certificate would enable students to proceed to an Advanced Certificate (discussed next) or to a diploma on the basis of accumulated credits in the Higher Certificate being recognised for diploma study. The minimum entry requirement for the Higher Certificate is a National Senior Certificate.
- Advanced Certificate. This is a 120 credit, NQF Level 6 qualification which follows on the Higher Certificate and which, according to the HEQF, is primarily an industry or vocationally oriented qualification. Normally the study programme would include a period of WIL. Completion of the Advanced Certificate would enable students to present their accumulated credits for diploma or even degree study.

The industry and vocational orientation of these qualifications, together with the provision made for WIL, make them potential candidates for being offered at FET colleges, provided these FET colleges satisfied certain requirements.

Since FET colleges across the country encompass widely divergent institutions in terms of location, academic staff orientation, organisational and management strength, state of facilities, etc., not all FET colleges will be able to offer selected HE programmes such as a Higher Certificate. A set of criteria needs to be developed which have to be satisfied by FET colleges wishing to apply for the right to offer some of the above qualifications.

The following criteria could be considered for FET colleges wishing to obtain permission from the DoE to offer Higher Certificates (and possibly Advanced Certificates):

- No FET college will be permitted to offer any other HE qualification except the Higher Certificate (and possibly the Advanced Certificate).
- Only Higher Certificates (and possibly Advanced Certificates) which are directly linked to one of the NC (V) programme areas in which an FET college is active, will be considered.
- No FET college will be allowed to offer more than a limited number of Higher Certificate (and possibly Advanced Certificate) learning programmes with the proviso that not more than two such HE learning programmes may be introduced simultaneously in any academic year.
- The FET college must already have entered into a collaborative arrangement with a nearby university regarding the use of some of the academic staff of the university in assisting the FET college in the offering of these learning programmes.
- An FET college wishing to offer Higher Certificates (and possibly Advanced Certificates) should have a minimum proportion of its academic staff with a minimum of a M+4 qualification in the NC (V) programme area in which the higher education programmes are to be offered.
- Any higher education programmes may only be offered on one of the campuses of the FET college, which must have an enrolment in its current NC (V) programmes on this campus satisfying a minimum threshold value.

- FET colleges may only offer Higher Certificates (or possibly Advanced Certificates) if granted formal permission by the DoE to do so and if such learning programmes have been accredited by the CHE (HEQC) and the qualifications in question registered with SAQA.
- FET colleges offering HE learning programmes will be funded at the relevant NC (V) programme cost per student plus a percentage to be determined by the DoE. FET colleges would be free to set their own tuition fee levels for students in such higher education programmes provided that these levels are not more than a set percentage higher than the tuition fee levels for the relevant NC (V) programme.
- No FET college that has been operating in financial deficit for any two consecutive years during the past number of years will be allowed to offer any HE programmes.
- The curriculum and design of any HE learning programmes offered by FET colleges would have to satisfy the standards set for such qualifications by the CHE.

It stands to reason that a large number of prospective students for HE programmes offered by FET colleges would come from the FET college's own NC (V) cohort. This would require a speedy resolution to the issue of admission to HE studies on the basis of having an NC (V) Level 4 qualification. In respect of quality assurance, the Level 5 (and Level 6) HE qualifications would be accredited by the CHE (HEQC).

FET colleges are currently not certifying authorities in their own right and it would probably be premature to consider granting them such rights in respect of the HE learning programmes that they may be offering. A suitable way of managing this facet of educational delivery could be for all FET colleges which are given the right to offer some HE learning programmes to enter into formal agreements with a university such as UNISA which would act as certifying authority for such programmes.

In conclusion it must be stressed that Model 2 is not simply a re-introduction of the previous N4–N6 dispensation. The N4–N6 programmes were not common to any other educational institution in South Africa, except FET colleges. The model proposed here introduces HEQC-compliant HE qualifications into FET colleges, provided such FET colleges satisfy a number of criteria which will contribute towards the offering of such learning programmes having the desired quality in terms of the CHE (HEQC's) quality assurance criteria.

Model 3: Allowing a greater number of post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally oriented qualifications to be offered at FET colleges in South Africa

Together with the present NC (V) programmes dispensation for FET colleges (which means that FET colleges are involved in NQF Level 2, 3 and 4 programmes certified by Umalusi), some FET colleges should be given permission to offer a larger number of post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes than is the case at present.

As was pointed out previously, some FET colleges do currently offer trade and occupationally directed programmes above NQF Level 4 under various SETA *Education and Training Quality Assurance* (ETQA) bodies; such as qualifications in the field of Early Childhood Development which are at NQF Level 5. The recently published National Plan for FET

Colleges (DoE 2008) does not, however, foresee that headcount enrolments in such programmes as well as those in adult education programmes and in community-based projects would amount to more than 20% or 30% at the most.

As was the case with Model 2, a set of criteria should be developed for FET institutions wishing to offer trade and occupationally oriented NQF Level 5 and Level 6 qualifications. The criteria developed earlier could serve as a basis for this set of criteria, but would obviously be different in certain respects. On the basis of these criteria some FET colleges should be given the right to have a larger number of headcount enrolments in such trade and occupationally directed programmes than the present figure of 20%–30% of all learning programmes. In pursuit of creating a more flexible and differentiated FET college system, it should be possible for some FET colleges to have at least 50% of student headcount enrolments in non-NC (V) programmes.

The admission requirement of such NQF Level 5 or 6 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes would be possession of a NC (V) Level 4 certificate. As the curricula for the learning programmes in the various NC (V) areas leading to this certificate are standardised, students in possession of a NC (V) Level 4 qualification should be able to continue their trade and occupationally directed studies at any FET college which is offering post NQF Level 4 non-HE qualifications.

In terms of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, such post NQF Level 4 trade and occupational oriented learning programmes will be quality assured by the QCTO. At this point in time it is not clear who will award the certificates associated with the post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes. Current practice is that these certificates are issued by a relevant ETQA such as a SETA. In all likelihood the QCTO will probably act as a quality assurance body as well as a certification body for these qualifications.

As far as implementing the offering of such post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes is concerned, some advantages for articulation occur if FET colleges who are given permission to offer such programmes are also given permission to offer some HE learning programmes in selected NC (V) programme areas. This follows since arranging the articulation of qualifications within a single institution is always easier than doing so across institutions. In this case some students would then be permitted to continue with Higher Certificate studies at the same FET college as the one at which they had completed post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes.

The problem in the past with the former N4–N6 programmes as well as with some of the current post NQF Level 5 trade and occupationally directed programmes (such as those in the field of Early Childhood Development) is that no systemic and consistent articulation arrangements for students into HE studies exist. Some HE institutions are willing to grant some recognition of credits for such learning towards a formal HE qualification, but some are not.

Model 4: Introducing fully fledged community colleges in South Africa

The USA community college system is characterised by a great amount of variety, and in terms of the 'transfer' component of these colleges is heavily dependent on a sophisticated and extensive system of accreditation within the USA which supports portability or transfer of credits.

This means that in most cases a student at a community college in a particular region would know in advance which transfer credits would accrue to him/her for studies completed at a community college. This prior knowledge forms an indispensable component in the success of community colleges, which in many cases have already been recognised as bona fide providers for the first two years of a four-year liberal arts degree at a college or university. A similar approach in Scotland has resulted in a marked increase in their HE participation rate.

It is difficult to see how South Africa could move into such a system directly. In any event, if the Model 2 and Model 3 configuration set out earlier were to be accepted, the few FET colleges who would be given the right to offer a limited number of HE programmes and possibly some non-HE trade and occupationally oriented programmes on NQF Levels 5 and 6, would for all practical purposes be fulfilling the role of a type of community college. The only component of a community college such as those in the USA that would only be partially accommodated would be the so-called 'transfer student' component of such colleges.

It may therefore be expedient at this stage to concentrate on exploring the implications of introducing Model 2 and Model 3, as set out earlier into our FET college system. A proper development and implementation of these two models would bring South Africa's FET system into the more flexible learning environments characterising many international FET systems.

Model 5: Supporting the establishment and existence of some form of private FET colleges

The quantitative analysis developed as part of the overall project into educational opportunities for post school/FET college youth clearly shows that the number of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who could benefit from expanded study opportunities at post NQF Level 4 is of such a magnitude that introducing Models 2 and 3 for public FET colleges, while making a difference, will not bring about an appreciable solution to the problem of 'unemployed and non-studying' young people in this age bracket. To do this, more FET colleges – possibly in the form of private FET colleges – would have to become involved in presenting post NQF Level 4 learning programmes.

The difficulty is, however, that many of the incentives in the form of community and civil society mobilisation around the creation and establishment of private schools are absent in the case of private FET colleges. It is extremely difficult to see how such private FET colleges, however necessary they may be, could ever be financially self-sufficient, as the tuition fees they would have to charge would make their education unaffordable for the vast majority of potential students.

In this regard it may therefore be necessary to visit alternative models of state support for such private FET colleges akin to the former model of 'state aided' schools. In this model, state aided schools received some form of government financial support, but did not enjoy equivalent levels of autonomy compared to more independent private schools. In this way, state aided schools occupied a position in-between public schools and private schools.

Summary

In this section a number of steps were outlined which need to be taken irrespective of which model is ultimately developed for increasing HE–FET college interaction. The main role-player in taking these steps forward is the DoE through its HE and FET college branches.

A number of HE–FET collaborative models and models expanding the mandate of FET colleges, depicted as Models 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, were considered:

- Model 1 (the franchise model) concerns a HEI giving a FET college a franchise to offer a HE qualification (such as a Higher Certificate) on its behalf.
- Model 2 concerns some FET colleges being given approval, subject to some stringent criteria, to offer a limited number of HE qualifications such as a Higher Certificate (and possibly an Advanced Certificate) in their own right.
- Model 3 concerns some FET colleges being given approval, subject to them satisfying a number of requirements, to offer post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally directed learning programmes which would take them beyond the present threshold values applied by the DoE for enrolments in such programmes.
- Model 4 concerns the possibility of establishing fully fledged community colleges in which students could complete a portion of their studies towards a first degree.
- Model 5 concerns the possibility of establishing some Government supported private FET colleges akin to the former 'state aided' schools which were neither full private nor full public schools.

The view was expressed that the many complexities associated with the franchise model, Model 1, made it unlikely that many HEIs would follow this route. From this perspective this approach was unlikely to achieve the goal of an appreciably strengthened FET college system which offered 'second-chance' educational opportunities to large numbers of young people.

In addition it was felt that establishing fully fledged community colleges such as those in the USA, which are accredited to offer the first two years of a four-year university degree, remained a long-term goal and presented as too ambitious an undertaking for South Africa given the relatively underdeveloped state of our FET college system at present.

If these views were to hold, it would leave Models 2, 3 and 5 to be explored in greater depth. Taking these models forward would establish a FET college system which is far more in keeping with international trends for the FET sector. It would result in a FET college system which would be better positioned to contribute in a meaningful manner to

the resolution of our country's skills crisis at the middle and the upper-middle skills levels by offering large numbers of young people alternative opportunities into post NQF Level 4 education and training.

Such a FET college system would be characterised by a greater measure of coordination between all the role-players involved in HE and FET, by a significantly enhanced flexibility in supporting increased levels of access to further learning opportunities for post school/post FET college learners, and a large measure of differentiation in that:

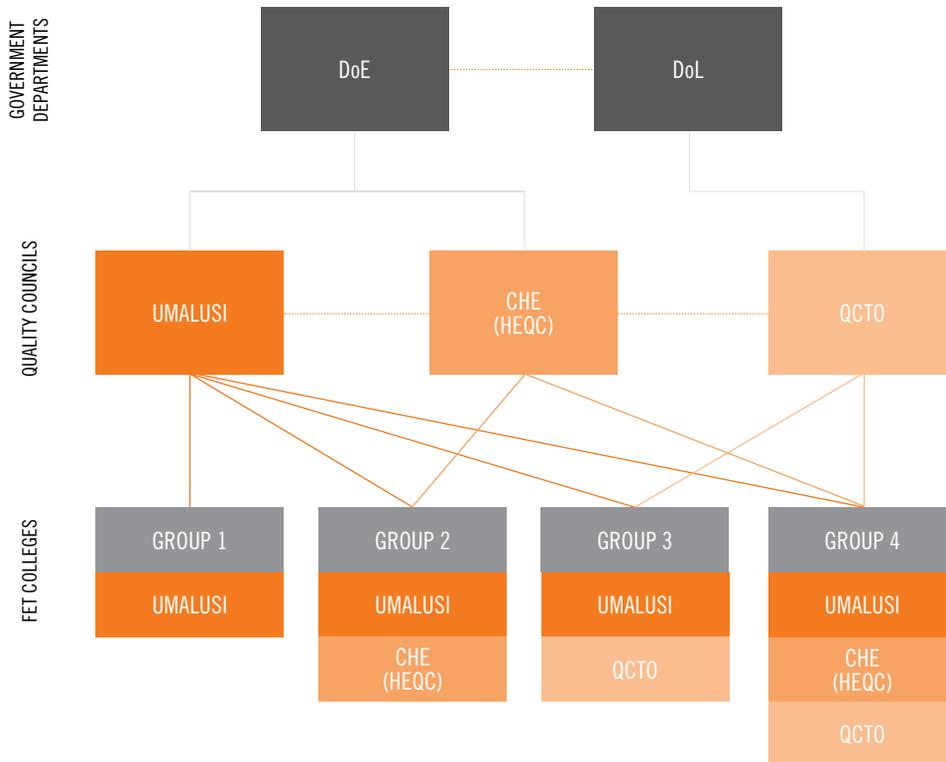
- All FET colleges would offer NC (V) programmes up to NQF Level 4, which would be quality assured by Umalusi.
- Some FET colleges would be given approval to offer appropriate post NQF Level 4 trade and occupationally oriented learning programmes, which would be quality assured by the QCTO and which would take their student headcount enrolments in such programmes beyond the threshold values suggested by the DoE.
- Some FET colleges would be given approval to offer a limited number of HE learning programmes, such as those leading to a Higher Certificate, which would be quality assured by the CHE (HEQC).
- In addition some FET colleges operating at post NQF Level 4 in the trade and occupations field would also be given approval to offer a limited number of HE qualifications such as Higher Certificates, which would be quality assured by the CHE (HEQC).

In terms of quality assurance arrangements, all FET colleges would thus have a formal relationship with Umalusi. In addition, some would have a further quality assurance relationship with the QCTO, some with the CHE (HEQC), and in addition some would have a quality assurance relationship with both the QCTO and the CHE (HEQC). Figure 4.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the various stakeholders in the quality assurance framework.

It must be stressed that, all in all, the establishment of such a FET college sector would be made considerably simpler by making FET colleges a national rather than a provincial competence. In fact, it is difficult to foresee the successful establishment of such a FET college system under the present dispensation where the DoE is responsible for policy formulation for FET colleges, but the implementation of these policies as well as the FET colleges themselves resort under provincial education departments.

Figure 4.1

Diagrammatic representation of quality assurance relationship between significant stakeholders



Conclusion

The analyses presented in this chapter reveal a number of ‘positives’ which could serve as a springboard in the establishment of such a coordinated, flexible and differentiated FET college system in South Africa. As can be expected, some ‘negatives’ also exist which would have to be countered in the building of such a system.

The following would constitute some positives on which to base such a system:

- Comprehensive sets of well developed policies for the HE and FET college systems which include national plans for both sectors.
- Completion of incisive institutional restructuring exercises for the HE and FET college sectors.
- Movement to greater levels of institutional autonomy for FET colleges.
- Establishment of three quality councils as part of the new NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008 – each having clearly set out areas of responsibility.

- The development and implementation of the HEQF.
- Improvement of infrastructure in HE and FET colleges systems.
- International examples of strengthened HE–FET college collaboration.
- Recognition of the need for greater levels of articulation between qualifications in HE and FET college systems.

The following could constitute some of the negatives that would have to be overcome in establishing such a system:

- Lack of harmonisation between some HE and FET college policies.
- Lack of sufficient scope for differentiation in present threshold values for headcount enrolments for FET colleges in non NC (V) programmes.
- Low levels of academic staff capacity and quality in FET colleges.
- FET colleges as a shared national/provincial competence rather than a national competence only.
- Generally low levels of capacity in the provincial education departments to provide strategic leadership for FET colleges.
- Inadequate levels of coordination between all role-players involved in the FET college and HE systems.
- Present inflexible approach towards the composition of differentiated menus of learning programmes for FET colleges.
- Delay in the establishment and functioning of the QCTO.

Based on these positives and negatives, arriving at a strengthened but flexible and differentiated FET college system which operates in a coordinated manner within South Africa's overall education and training system would involve investigating a large number of issues, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Doing so in an effective manner will in itself require a considerable amount of planning and coordination. The best way to proceed would probably be for the DoE to consider defining the project of developing a strengthened FET system in South Africa, and doing the related investigation on a project basis.

Doing this leads to two different possible project approaches in respect of sub-projects.

Approach 1: Establish sub-project teams for each of the models mentioned in the report

This approach would yield model-related sub-projects which would each cover the following issues for their particular model: pros and cons of the model, legal and regulatory issues, student admissions, programme approvals, quality assurance, certification, funding, educational delivery, etc.

The overall project team would be responsible for bringing the work of the various sub-projects together and for any matters which are of such a nature that they should best be investigated by the overall project team and not by a sub-project team.

In this approach one would have to ensure a reasonable spread of knowledge in each model sub-project on the various educational issues to be resolved. As an example, each of the sub projects would have to include someone who could make some inputs on funding issues, or on quality assurance matters. etc.

The advantage of this approach is that while the overall project team could assume responsibility for certain cross-cutting issues, such as whether FET colleges should remain a provincial competence or not, the various project teams would each explore the proposed models in very much greater detail. Once completed, these sub-project reports would allow the overall project team to make some informed recommendations on which models should be pursued further.

It may not be necessary to establish a project team for each of the models, as some may be ruled out in advance by the overall project team, while in other cases two models could be combined under the auspices of a single sub-project team.

Approach 2: Establish sub-project teams for the various themes involved in strengthening the FET college system

This would yield a number of theme-related sub-projects covering areas such as the following across the various models: legal and regulatory issues, student admissions, programme approvals, quality assurance, certification, funding, etc.

This approach has the advantage that one would concentrate knowledge and expertise in a particular theme area (such as funding) in one single sub-project team. The disadvantage would be that this funding project team would have to develop funding perspectives for each of the models in isolation from work being done by any of the other theme-related sub-project teams. It would then become the task of the overall project team to pull the various themes together into the various models.

In this case one could also combine some of the themes under the auspices of a single project team, as could be done, for example, with quality assurance and certification. Although both approaches would probably work, the first approach seems to hold greater promise of actual delivery on whether some of the proposed models should be taken further or not.

If this were to be the case, the following actions could be considered:

- The DoE could appoint an overall project sponsor and project manager. The sponsor could typically be a high-ranking DoE official responsible for FET colleges, while the project manager should be DoE-appointed but preferably be available full time for the next year or two to manage this project.
- Once this has been done, a detailed project plan needs to be developed by the project manager for approval within the DoE. This could possibly to act as basis for securing funding for the project.

- As part of the project plan, an overall project team and sub-project teams should be established. These teams should involve at least the following role-players: the DoE, DoL, CHE (HEQC), Umalusi, QCTO, SAQA, HESA, provincial education departments, the FET college principals' structure, industry, and persons knowledgeable on FET college and HE matters.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the DoE, as part of a solution towards solving the problem of young people who are unemployed and not involved in any post NQF Level 4 studies, formally establishes a comprehensive project on strengthening the FET college system through increased HE–FET college collaboration and by expanding the present mandate of FET colleges. This project should have a project sponsor from within the DoE and be driven by a DoE-appointed project manager, who should be able to devote full-time attention to this project for a number of years. The project should be conducted on the basis of establishing an overall project team as well as sub-project teams for the models to be explored.

The project team could use the following as background information and resource documentation: the National Plan on FET Colleges (DoE 2008), this chapter and its accompanying research report and any other reports on our FET college system that have been produced recently.

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