



Skills development in public vocational education and training institutions

Size, shape and success in the FET college sector

The further education and training (FET) college audit, conducted by the Education and Skills Development research programme in all 50 FET colleges in 2010, provided some fascinating insights into size, shape, and success in the sector. **MICHAEL COSSER** reports.

The 'size' of the FET college sector is measured primarily through headcount enrolments of students. Student enrolments in this sector have remained more or less static over the past decade, registering a 10 percentage point growth from 1998 to 2010 (from 300 000 students in 1998 to 330 000 in 2010). The growth between 2007 and 2009 was more promising (20 percentage points), but there was a 14 percentage point decline from 2009 to 2010, as Table 1 shows.

SHAPE

The 'shape' of FET colleges is based primarily on differentiation by vocational field, or which programme types students are enrolled in. The majority of students in 2010 were enrolled in Report 191, or national technical education (Nated) courses. Nated (N), programmes (51%), were followed by 37% in National Certificate (Vocational), or NC(V), programmes and the balance (12%) in other programmes — predominantly adult learning, skills, and learnership programmes.

N programmes, historically the backbone of the FET college system and the foundation of artisanships, have traditionally been offered in six areas:

- Business Studies;
- Engineering Studies;
- Art and Music;
- Utility Studies;
- Educare and Social Services;
- Other

In 2010, 94% of students were enrolled in two programmes: Engineering Studies (50%); and Business Studies (44%). Of the 169 803 students enrolled in N programmes, the vast majority (86%) were enrolled in post-FET (N4-

N6) programmes, and the balance (14%) in FET programmes (N1-N3):

- Office Administration;
- Marketing;
- Finance;
- Economics and Accounting;
- Management;
- Building and Civil Construction;
- Engineering and Related Design;
- Electrical Infrastructure Construction;
- Information Technology and Computer Science;
- Primary Agriculture;
- Hospitality;
- Tourism;
- Safety in Society;
- Mechatronics;
- Education and Development.

Five of these programmes accounted for three-quarters of enrolments in 2010: Office Administration (21%); Electrical Infrastructure Construction (20%); Engineering and Related Design (15%); Finance, Economics and Accounting (11%); and Building and Civil Construction (9%).

SHAPE AND PLACE

Besides differentiation by vocational field, 'shape' may also signify spatial differentiation in terms of geographical location. The following map, one of 45 generated for the FET audit project, indicates the geolocation of FET college campuses in the Eastern Cape in terms of an index of multiple deprivation.

People are defined as deprived if they lack the

Table 1: Total enrolments, FET college sector 2007-2010

YEAR	TOTAL N ENROLMENTS	TOTAL NC(V) ENROLMENTS	OTHER ENROLMENTS	TOTAL ENROLLED
2007	245 230	31 414	45 449	322 093
2008	178 086	81 742	41 250	301 078
2009	175 999	166 469	42 638	385 106
2010	169 803	122 257	40 520	332 580

Source: N-programme enrolment data: DHET (2011); NC(V) and Other enrolment (Data, HSRC (2011))

Table 2: Size, shape and success at a glance

PROGRAMME TYPE	ENROLMENTS IN 2010		TROUGHPUT RATE 2007-2009
	n	%	%
N	169 803	51.0	47
NCV	122 257	36.8	30.0
OTHER	40 520	12.2	66
TOTAL	322 580	580	100

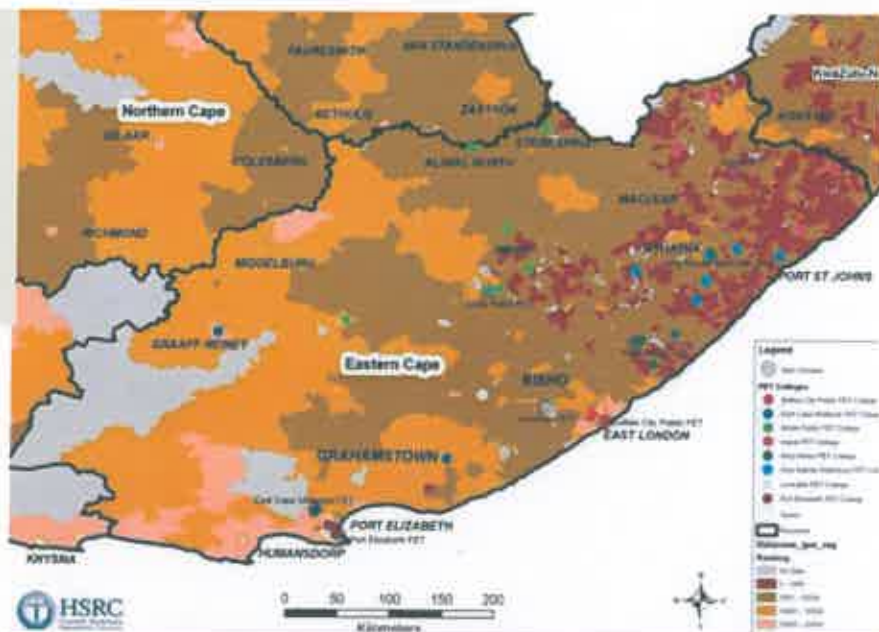


Figure 1: Geolocation of FET college campuses in relation to multiple deprivation in the Eastern Cape

types of diet, clothing, housing, household facilities and fuel, and environmental, educational, working and social conditions, activities and facilities which are customary.

Deprivation therefore refers to peoples' unmet needs. The South African Index of Multiple Deprivation (SAIMD) is a composite index reflecting five dimensions of deprivation: income and material deprivation; employment deprivation; education deprivation; health deprivation; and living environment deprivation.

As part of the FET audit, a geographic information systems (GIS) team at the HSRC calculated the degree of multiple deprivation of each college campus in the country, using the SAIMD to allocate a rank to each campus. As Figure 1 illustrates, a number of the campuses in the Eastern Cape are located in areas with high deprivation: the red areas indicate multiple deprivation scores of between 1 and 1000, which are allocated to campuses of Ingwe, King Sabata Dalindyebo, and King Hintsa FET colleges.

The application of the SAIMD allows us to differentiate college locations in a powerfully graphic way.

SUCCESS

Throughput rate (defined in this study as the number of students passing a course divided by the number who enrolled in that course in the same year) is a measure of college efficiency. Between 2007 and 2009, the throughput rate of students enrolled in N programmes was an average (across the three years) of 47%, that of students in NC(V) programmes 30%, that of students in 'other' programmes 66% – yielding an average throughput rate across the college sys-

tem of 48%. In other words, on average, of every 100 students who enrolled in any programme in an FET college in any of 2007, 2008 or 2009, only 48 students passed. The remainder either repeated the year or dropped out of college.

SLIPPAGE BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

From a shape perspective, the former Department of Education decided in 2006 to phase out N programmes in favour of the NC(V), which it introduced in 2007. The NC(V) was to become the college sector's flagship programme and funding was redirected towards this goal.

In practice, policy has been thwarted. Enrolment targets have obdurately hovered between 300 000 and 400 000 students, and the much-anticipated shift from N programme to NC(V) programme enrolments has not materialised.

Not only do N programme enrolments continue to outnumber NC(V) enrolments – in 2010, as we saw above, half of all students were enrolled in N programmes, while only 37% were enrolled in NC(V) programmes – but enrolments in post-FET N programmes, which were by now supposed to have been phased out, outnumber those in FET-level N programmes (by 86% to 14%) and ironically constitute the bedrock of the entire college system.

Despite the mounting of 14 NC(V) programmes, uptake has been concentrated in only five, with three of those – Office Administration, Electrical Infrastructure Construction, and Engineering and Related Design – resonating strongly, ironically enough, with the top two choices of students enrolled in N programmes – Engineering Studies and Business Studies.


THE FUTURE: SIZE, SHAPE AND SUCCESS

Massive expansion of the FET college system remains the key policy goal of the current administration. The target is to achieve an enrolment of 800 000 learners in the public FET college sector by 2014. We have to ask, on the basis of a largely static enrolment profile over the past decade – around fewer than 350 000 learners – whether the expansion target is feasible.

From a shape perspective, the draft Green Paper acknowledges the policy shortcomings of the past, seeking to reverse the phasing out of N programmes and to achieve an appropriate balance of programme provision according to institutional strength and capacity to expand. These are welcome developments in a sector that has experienced much turmoil over the past fourteen years and desperately needs to settle, if it is to provide a viable alternative to university education. Our research highlights the significance of strategies targeted to address geolocational differentiation, to respond in contexts of multiple deprivation. ◀ ◀

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The full report, Further Education and Training (FET) colleges at a glance in 2010: FET colleges audit: May-July 2010, is available on www.hsrc.ac.za. The report was compiled by Cosser, M; Kraak, A; Winnaar, L; FET Audit Project Team; Reddy, V; Netshitangani, T; Twalo, T; Rogers, S; Mokgalle, G; Mncwango, B; Juan, A; Taylor, V; Garisch, C; Spies, M; Weir-Smith, G; and Mokhele, T (2011).



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