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1992

**TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
RESPONSIVENESS PROJECT**

**Local Labour Environments and  
Further Education and Training  
(FET) Colleges:  
Three Case Studies**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The much-vaunted relationship between technical colleges 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 available institutional programmes. In the past technical colleges 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. 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.

Very little is known about the progress of FET colleges in responding to these concerns presently, nor about the number of skills programmes being provided at individual colleges, though the latter point was not directly addressed in the project. The purpose of this component of the project was to understand particular relationships between technical colleges and their local labour environments and to begin the process of unpacking the key requirements or obstacles that inform the ways in which learners move from colleges to work. Crucially, the study focused on the labour environment aspect of college development given the attention given to this issue by both the Department of Education and the Department of Labour in recent policy documents.

Changes in the technical college sector involve a large number of different role-players and social factors that constantly develop and redevelop the ways in which colleges mediate their function in their respective localities. For the purposes of this study I refer to this interaction and meshing of social actors and factors as local labour environments. The idea is to understand the various issues in localised spaces to develop a rough map of what is emerging in the sector.

One of the key observations from the study is that the ways in which FET policy outlooks are understood at local levels have not yet come to terms with the articulated notions of demand, specialisation and inter-linkage, or that such requirements are not yet possible in the current environment given the massive challenges presented to individual FET Colleges in responding to their individual needs. Issues of what to do, how to do it and where to get the resources are significant challenges for individual colleges, and this has led to particular and some have argued sometimes narrow approaches. Importantly, the new FET policy landscape provides a critical beginning for the establishment of formal and informal networks within college environments to effect the kinds of teaching and learning that will produce the requisite skills needed by our society.

The current landscape of FET colleges reveals a mix of past technical colleges that have distinct histories with particular kinds of links to local labour environments. To this end, the research team chose three FET colleges as case studies to illuminate particular and localised local labour environment challenges. We made a number of basic decisions in choosing the three FET Colleges, decisions that are explored in Botshabelo Maja's presentation on the methodologies of the project. Importantly for this presentation, colleges are identified here simply as (past) state or state-aided colleges linked to a particular province. The three chosen FET Colleges are in the Kwazulu-Natal, North West and Free State provinces.

# Findings in the provinces and their colleges

## North West

### *Economic statistics<sup>1</sup>*

The North West Province is a mineral-rich province and contains about 21% of South Africa's arable land. The total population of the province is 3,6 million people. About 65% of the inhabitants of North West inhabit non-urban areas. Industries provide up to 62% of jobs to the economically active. In 1996 there were four key industry groups in the province that provided 76.3% of formal employment to the roughly 450 000 workers.

The economy of the North West Province is dominated by mining and agriculture, though both are in decline according to Erasmus (2000). Different regions employ particular kinds of employees related essentially to the level of industrial operations in that region. In this regard certain regions dominate (economically) in the province, especially with commercial activities being more prominent in the new economic environment. A new focus on tourism, a shift in mining focus to platinum, and the recent increased international interest in gold does suggest possible economic growth for certain regions in the future. However, new opportunities will probably predominate in the low-skill occupations and not be sufficient to satisfy the expected supply of labour.

### *Technical Colleges*

In 2000 the 11 technical colleges were spread across five regions, with an estimated 5500 learners:

Region	Population of North West	Formal employment per region	Number of technical colleges	Names of Colleges	Technical college student percentage (full-time) in NW
Far eastern (smallest region)	27%	29,2%	3	Temba Manpower Centre	11%
				Brits	4%
				Odi Manpower Centre	16%
Southern	20%	28,1%	3	Klerksdorp	15%
				Jouberton	6%
				Potchefstroom	14%
Central	20%	14.4%	3	Lichtenburg	5%
				Lehrutse College of Education	3%
				Mafikeng Manpower Centre	7%
Eastern (second)	17%	20.6%	1	Rustenburg	13%

<sup>1</sup> All statistics are drawn from Stats SA. 2001. *Labour Force Survey*

smallest region)					
Western (largest region)	15%	7.7%	1	Taung College of Education	6%
<b>Total</b>			<b>11</b>		<b>5 488 FTEs</b>

### The FET College

The chosen North West FET College comprised two former state-aided institutions and two state institutions. The state institutions are not located in a town, while both state-aided institutions are. The tables below describe the most recent count of learners. The student headcounts of the four institutions are as follows:

FET COLLEGE	Students	Staff
<b>State-aided</b>	775	46
<b>State-aided</b>	760	49
<b>State</b>	345	22
<b>State</b>	313	11
<b>Total</b>	2190	128

Table 2: The staff composition of the four institutions

Staff composition (percentage)	White	African	Coloured	Indian
<b>State-aided</b>	100%	0	0	0
<b>State-aided</b>	92%	4%	4	0
<b>State</b>	77%	23%	0	0
<b>State</b>	9%	91%	0	0
<b>Total average</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 3: Breakdown of student headcounts by vocational fields for four institutions

FET College	State-aided college	State-aided college	State	State	Total
<b>Further Education (N0,N1,N2,N3)</b>					
Arts and Music	0	0	0	0	0
Business Studies	84	232	105	47	468
Engineering	263	108	106	29	506
General Education	0	0	0	0	0
Utility Studies	1	9	0	0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>984</b>
<b>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</b>					
Arts and Music	0	0	0	0	0
Business Studies	327	319	115	231	992
Educare and Soc Services	0	23	18	0	41

Engineering	100	50	0	6	156
Utility studies	1	19	0	0	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>2193</b>

*Key findings about FET College:*

- The majority of staff (almost 80%) in the FET College is white, and white males represent almost 90% of the management structures of the three campuses. African staff members predominate in administration positions.
- Most of the available staff are qualified at the N6 level and above, though very few have degrees. Very few staff members have experience of working in industry, and prefer teaching theory courses.
- The surrounding labour environment is dominated by the mining and service industries. These and other industries and businesses are predominantly owned or managed by white Afrikaner males.
- The population of the area is predominantly Afrikaans-speaking and hence much of business and industry links are conducted through networks that are culturally exclusive. This is a critical issue with regard to the forming of partnerships between employers and colleges since most of the agreements are verbal and may be sustainable only if particular personal relationships are maintained. Diploma ceremonies, golf days, and other social activities are but a few of the networking events where staff meet industry, government and business leaders.
- While the state-aided institutions have established training programmes that focus on engineering and business courses as well as extensive computer training initiatives, the state institutions focus on survivalist courses.
- The one state campus is situated on the periphery of a town and is the newest of the established institutions. The majority of the staff is white. Because of its location the college is only able to develop partnerships of a community development nature dictated by the needs of poor and rural clients. Ironically, the institution boasts the best workshop facilities of the four institutions. The workshops are significantly underused. At the other state institution there exist no workshop facilities.
- The one state college was previously a teaching training college and only introduced further education and training courses in 1998. The staff is 80% African and mostly well qualified. Further education and training staff have minimally N6 and above, while many teacher trainers have honours and masters degrees. The FET staff members represent only 25% of the total staff complement. The remaining staff members continue to focus on teacher training activities.
- The management structures of the two state colleges are not keen on or geared to pursue partnerships with industry. They have adopted a wait-and-see approach during the process of the merging of the four colleges. This is contrary to the approach of the state-aided institutions, which pursue very entrepreneurial pathways. Staff members there actively engage with industry in attempts to encourage learner enrolment. Where demand is recognised and such courses are not available, procedures are put in place to provide them as non-Department of Education programmes. Examples of entrepreneurial activity are the establishment of computer training franchises and entrepreneurial training centres on the premises of state-aided colleges.

### **College number 1**

It was established in 1939 for the training of mining apprentices. It was converted to a technical high school in the 1950s and began to function as a technical college in 1977.

The college has redeveloped a relationship with a gold mine in the area. However, in the contemporary period their partnership is primarily framed around the skills training needs of the mine rather than technical education requirements. Their relationship was severed in the 1990s but because the mine seeks to recoup its skills levy, its relationship with the college has been revived. The mine uses the college to provide refresher-training courses for mine apprentices and labourers. In return the college uses the mine's training centre for its private learners enrolled in trades like boilermaking, electrical engineering, fitting and turning, and millwright. The college has thus been able to redefine its role in the region as an institution that can attract private further education and training partnerships.

The college was also awarded two learnerships in 2002, namely the Engineering Maintenance and Repairing for Underground Hard Rock Breaking Learnership and the Sport, Recreation and Fitness Leader Learnership.

The college has entered into agreements to supply

- Nestle with millwright artisans
- Bond Industries with fitting and turning and plumbing artisans
- Sherwood Pumps with electrical motor pump artisans
- Local panel beating shops with mechanical artisans.

Importantly, although a number of partnerships have been secured, the number of learners involved as a percentage of college population is still very low. The college also continues to profit from informal and unwritten partnerships, though here too numbers are very low.

### **College number 2:**

It was established as a state college in 1983 and is the newest of the four colleges. It is located in an impoverished area which impacts on the number and types of partnerships that the college is able to secure.

The college could not identify any formal or informal partnerships with industry or other role-players. The only partnerships that were identified were with community partners that involved them using the college facilities and available expertise. Other programmes included sewing classes, vegetable growing, and leather work and pottery involving local small business members.

### **College number 3:**

The college began as a teacher college of education in 1979 in an ex-homeland area. It has a number of links with non-governmental organisations and tertiary facilities, though most involve such institutions using the college's premises and staff expertise. No partnerships with employers exist given the history of the institution as a teacher training facility. There is in any case a lack of qualified FET staff to provide programmes that industry partners require. Importantly, the college is located in an isolated rural area.

**College number 4:**

The college claims the highest pass rate in the North West locality. The college has firm links with a host of other educational institutions in the area and uses collaborations to inform particular niches for the college. The college has secured a number of partnerships with local industries though most involve the provision of ABET-type courses for employees of the local industries. All the partnerships are either not formal or long-standing and very few learners are attached to the programme links.

The college has set about establishing firm links with local industries though in short-term programmes and in fields such as hoteliers and catering. Also focuses on computer training skills programmes, which it markets with local municipality and other businesses. The college have historically not had formal workshops and is presently engaged in building a number of workshops for trades such as motor mechanics, electronics, and basic welding. The learner composition at the college is as follows:

<b>Learner background</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
School drop-out that enrol at college	30%
Matriculants	49%
Employed/working learners	20%
Adult learners	1%

There is very little evidence of developing partnerships with businesses and communities and no indication of enduring relationships. Most of the supposed links seem to be projections of present college initiatives.

## **Kwazulu-Natal Province**

### *Economic statistics*

There are roughly 9 million people in Kwazulu-Natal, which represents about 20.8% of all the people living in South Africa. About 57% of the province's inhabitants are resident in non-urban areas.

With regard to the predominant industries in Kwazulu-Natal, almost a third (30%) of the workforce are employed in elementary occupations. A further 26% are employed in production, mining and similar occupations, while 23% are employed as legislators or senior officials, in managerial and professional occupations or as technical and associate professionals. About 19% work as clerks, service workers, and shop and market sales workers, and 4% of workers in Kwazulu-Natal are employed as skilled agriculture and fishery workers. Kwazulu-Natal contributes substantially to the total wealth created in South Africa (it is the second largest contributor) and employs about 17% of all the workers in formal employment in the country. Industries in Kwazulu-Natal provide jobs for an estimated 1.6 million workers. This amounts to about 61% of the economically active population of the province.

The Durban/Pietermaritzburg area currently drives the growth of the province's economy. KwaZulu-Natal is fast becoming one of the most popular domestic and international tourist destinations in South Africa, with Durban as the key nodal point. This will undoubtedly create further scope for tourist-related growth in the commercial sector. With regard to prospective growth in the province, there will probably be an increased demand for clerical/sales/service workers and artisans in the future.

The FET College of Kwazulu-Natal comprises three campuses, all situated in the industrial area of a city. Two of the institutions are state colleges and one is a state-aided institution. The following tables indicate the staff, student and programme statistics of the newly-merged institution.

*Table 1: Student and staff numbers*

<b>Kwazulu-Natal FET COLLEGE</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Staff</b>
State-aided	1089	53
State	1102	66
State	894	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>3085</b>	<b>179</b>

*Table 2: The staff composition of the three institutions*

<b>Staff composition (percentage)</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>African</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>
State-aided	79%	4%	7%	10%
State	71%	11%	13%	5%
State	23%	73%	2%	2%
<b>Total average</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>

*Table 3: Breakdown of student headcounts by vocational fields for three institutions*

<b>FET College</b>	<b>State-aided</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Further Education (N0,N1,N2,N3)</b>				
Arts and Music	0	0	0	0
Business Studies	0	342	51	393
Engineering	699	587	584	1870
General Education	0	16	0	16
Utility Studies	10	68	0	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>1013</b>	<b>635</b>	<b>2357</b>
<b>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</b>				
Arts and Music	0	0	0	0
Business Studies	0	0	120	120
Educare and Soc Services	52	0	0	52
Engineering	328	89	139	556
Utility studies	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1089</b>	<b>1102</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>3085</b>



*Key Findings about FET College in KZN:*

- About 75% of staff members in the FET College are white, while roughly 13% are African. Only 4% of staff members in the province are Indian.
- Most of the courses offered at the three institutions are theory-based, though one state institution does have a number of workshops and thus provides practical training.
- The urban and industrial environment of the city dominates the kinds of employment that college learners acquire upon leaving the various institutions. Most of the surrounding industries are large multi-national or local companies that employ learners with divergent industrial and trade skills and backgrounds.
- The areas surrounding the state institutions are reportedly unsafe, which apparently discourages learners from enrolling in them. Learners are supposedly hesitant to attend certain state colleges even though the facilities in many cases represent the more practical orientation aspect of the FET College. The abiding legacy of race should not be underestimated in this regard. In the South African context issues of quality, merit and value for money remain framed by what is understood about education and training provision of the past. Thus in many instances learners of colour tend to enrol at previously white institutions like state-aided colleges for reasons that have nothing to do with particular college programmes or provisions.
- The one state institution has very well resourced workshops for engineering and large kitchens for home cooking courses and large scale catering. Local industry and business has reportedly donated much of these resources.

**College number 1:**

The college is located in an industrial area close to a city and was previously a state institution. It was originally conceived as an orientation school that provided practical training and tuition to African learners from surrounding areas.

The college has a number of formal and informal linkages with industries, businesses and local government. Most programmes are informal and demand-based. Many of the industry partners are large and well-known industries that have their own training centres and employ college staff to teach programmes on their premises. There are industries that send their staff for training at the college, but most negotiate with the college to focus on particular needs. The college has firm links with the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) as well as with government agencies that promote small enterprise growth.

Many companies have invested large amounts of money in the erection of college workshops and the purchase of equipment. This has enabled the college to provide specialist kinds of training to employees of noted sponsors. Nonetheless, most sponsors do not employ college graduates because the high levels of skill required in the industry context. Most college programmes focus on employer needs and responding to employment positions. The college in this regard has not only provided a number of non-curriculum skills programmes, but has also diversified national education department curricula courses or focused on particular curriculum pathways deemed necessary for institutional success.

**College number 2:**

The college is situated in the second largest township in the country. It was previously defined as a state college, established in the 1970s.

The college has a history of links with industries, businesses and the small medium and micro business sector. This involved the placement of learners in work-experience programmes or of graduates in employment. The link remains a limited way of securing employment for learners and has always involved a very small number of learners. The college claimed that the current economic environment makes it impossible to secure partnerships with industries or assist learners to finding employment in a depressed labour market.

The college has a number of links with SETAs, and has been awarded a number of learnership programmes. The college focuses considerably on community links and on serving as a community facility for various extra-mural activities. The college has managed to develop courses that companies can use to train their employees in areas where they themselves are not skilled. This partnership involves considerable contestation with other colleges and institutions, indicating the kind of energy required to secure further partnerships.

### **College number 3:**

The college is a previous state-aided college that focused almost exclusively on curriculum-based courses. Given that the college has to annually turn learners away, the college has not seen the need to either market itself or develop specific partnerships. The demand for enrolment has meant that the college programmes have remained theory-based. Also, a great number of learners enroll at the college from companies and thus do not require practical training.

The college has a number of long-standing links with prominent industries and businesses. Most interactions are informal and are based on traditional ties rather than agreed upon programmes. The theoretical focus of the college does not encourage the forming of partnerships, internships and practical experiential interaction. The close proximity to the city centre seems to inform learner enrolment patterns, given the perception of possible nearby employment after graduation.

## **The Free State province**

### *Economic statistics*

The Free State province population is about 2.8 million people, which represents 6.5% of South Africa's population. The majority of the population are spread out across the predominant rural environment. The Free State is strongly dependent on mining and agriculture. Mining is the main contributor to the national economy (20%), while the agriculture sector employs 26% of all workers in the Free State. In recent times, the province's share in the GDP has declined as a result of a drop in the price of gold. Mining remains the dominant sector for the province however, employing almost 47% of the working population.

Prospective employment growth is expected mostly in the manufacturing and services sector, and in the professional and managerial categories. The economy is expected to become more investment driven and less dependent upon mining and agriculture. The FET sector in the Free State comprises 11 technical colleges, of which three are studied for the project.

Table 1: Student and staff numbers

<b>FREE STATE FET COLLEGE</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Staff</b>
State-aided	2010	95
State	2004	118
State	289	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>4303</b>	<b>238</b>

Table 2: The staff composition of the four institutions

<b>Staff composition (percentage)</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>African</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>Indian</b>
<b>State-aided</b>	91%	8%	1%	0
<b>State</b>	62%	38%	0	0
<b>State</b>	20%	80%	0	0
<b>Total average</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>0.004%</b>	<b>0%</b>

Table 3: Breakdown of student headcounts by vocational fields for four institutions

<b>FET College</b>	<b>State-aided</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Further Education (N0,N1,N2,N3)</b>				
Arts and Music	6	0	0	6
Business Studies	369	78	61	508
Engineering	320	515	81	916
General Education	0	324	0	324
Utility Studies	57	0	12	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>1817</b>
<b>Higher Education (N4, N5, N6)</b>				
Arts and Music	21	0	0	21
Business Studies	1120	898	133	2151
Educare and Soc Services	16	0	0	16
Engineering	63	189	2	252
Utility studies	38	0	0	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>4303</b>

Observations about the FET College:

- About 78% of staff members in the FET College are white, while roughly 22% are African. There is one coloured and no Indian staff member in the entire region.
- Given that the Free State is predominantly rural and the main economic activity is mining, it is notable that the Departments of Public Works and Labour and other local industries provide the most jobs in the Bloemfontein area;
- The FET college will struggle to survive in the new legislative environment that expects FET colleges to have a 60% further education and training focus

and a 40% higher education focus, especially given the number of schools, community colleges and private providers that provide similar programmes in the area;

- The differences in fee structures between institutions that now comprise the FET college will continue to inform the facilities where learners enrol should a common fee structure not be implemented;
- Notwithstanding the success of most of the FET college facilities, most continue to provide theory-based programmes that are not adequately aligned to the new economic and skills-focused environment.
- This theory focus is especially prevalent in the state-aided college, which focused in the past on providing programmes that prepared learners for further learning. With the reduced focus on higher education learning, the facility will be required to adapt its programmes quite drastically and in innovative ways.
- One of the state colleges has adopted very innovative and aggressive programme responses to the needs of the local environment. In this regard, the state college has inverted many of the institutional stereotypes associated with state colleges or with previously disadvantaged learners and their resources.

#### **College number 1:**

The college was one of the first colleges established in South Africa and served mainly agricultural requirements in the early twentieth century. It also built up firm links with SA Railways and the gold and diamond mines. These links have been somewhat severed in the past decades. Also, the college has traditionally served learners who have used their college diplomas to study further at higher education institutions. This meant that the college did not focus much on marketing or developing industry partnerships. However, with the changed demographics since 1994, the college is presently struggling to come to terms with the new FET requirements.

Also, given the theory focus of its programmes, the college does not have workshops or practical training facilities. In the past practical training occurred in the workplace. Traditional links with industries have been largely severed.

#### **College number 2:**

This college was established in 1981 and was moved to the periphery of the city to a township in 1990. It was established as an institution of the Department of Education and Training (DET) and was formed to serve African children in an urban area. The college is mostly a community-based college with a particular focus on life skills and knowledge aimed at building self-sufficient learners able to find employment in the current labour market.

The institutional programmes focus primarily on engineering studies and adult basic education and training courses. An evaluation of college programmes in 2000 indicated that while the institution had at least 2004 unweighted full-time equivalent learners (1087 in higher education programmes and 917 in further education and training programmes), when part-time learner headcounts were included at the time of the evaluation, the overall headcount was 7300 learners.

The majority of learners at the institution enrol in Department of National Education (DoE) programmes. This implies that the college continues to rely heavily on a

national syllabus that is theory-based. There were only 312 enrolments in non-DNE programmes in 2000, located largely in the engineering workshops.

Recent evaluations of the institution have noted that the facility is well positioned to take up the challenges presented by the new FET dispensation, especially with regard to its flexible programme delivery, learner support, partnerships, quality assurance mechanisms and adult learning programmes. In this regard, the institution supposedly only has the capacity to respond to the needs of about 900 learners at any one time (as noted earlier) yet annually enrolls about 7300 learners in various forms. This not only indicates a large part-time learner contingent, but also calls for the institutional capacity to respond to learner needs in innovative and flexible ways.

Also, notwithstanding the predominant theory-focus of its institutional programmes, the facility has a number of workshops. Given the high growth potential of the surrounding region, these workshops provide a very sound basis for the college to respond to industrial developments around manufacturing in the area. The institution's present provision of part-time programmes (particularly skills programmes), combined with existing partnerships with industries and businesses, also provides further opportunity to draw more adult learners to the facility.

### **College number 3:**

The college was established in 1991 as a manpower center in an ex-homeland. It is situated in a densely-populated district far from the city. The college's key partnership is with the Department of National Education, which has chosen the institution as a science and technology centre. The college is regarded as a key internet-based training center and serves a number of local high schools in developing computer training skills. The college does not have formal industry partnerships because of its distance from industrial areas and given its reliance on particular large projects that frame institutional programmes. The institution offers a variety of programmes that seek to link learners to employment opportunities. However, given the large number of private learning competitors, the college struggles to attract learner enrolment or interest.

## **Conclusion**

The studies of the three FET colleges indicate quite a few key trends emerging in the sector. Findings have exploded a number of myths about college provision:

Indeed, the kinds and number of partnerships that presently exist between colleges, industries and local businesses paint a very worrying picture. Where partnerships do exist, they involve very few learners and are also mostly concentrated around low skills training programmes. Encouragingly, institutions that have taken initiative (whether state or state-aided colleges) have been rewarded by both employer and learner interest. This suggests key pathways for the growth of the FET colleges. It was particularly surprising that the popular colleges of the past have not shifted their approaches substantially and are presently struggling to sustain their existence. Colleges with theory-based biases are also struggling to attract employer and industry interest and will have to shift their approaches considerably if they are to remain sustainable.

A key concern remains the dominance of white educators in the college sector. While the learner demographics have changed substantially, almost no change has occurred with regard to educator ratios. The move to protect staff positions is placing

significant obstacles to further change in the sector, given that most energy and time need to be focused on how to radically shift the focus of programmes and approaches.