



Beyond ABET

An Umalusi/UKZN/Umsobomvu Colloquium

UMALUSI



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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The document offers an overview of the proceedings of the Beyond ABET Colloquium, followed by an account of the rationale for the colloquium and the process of setting it up. This is followed by a full record of the proceedings, given as summaries of the presentations. The PowerPoint notes with which many presenters spoke are available on the Umalusi website. Points raised from the floor and in the various discussion and feedback sessions were captured and are included. Appendices provide various sets of additional information.

A NOTE ON THE TERM 'ABET'

In the 1980s the term ABE (adult basic education) started to gain currency internationally. It was meant to be a corrective to the broadness of 'adult education', the apparent limitations of 'adult literacy work' and the unsatisfactory nonentity of 'non-formal education'. The term was viewed with suspicion by those committed to the alternative values of adult education; they saw it as an attempt to impose a schooling model on what they did.

Nonetheless, in the early 1990s the researchers and planners of a new system of education and training in South Africa decided to adopt ABE, and to add to it the T, to express their intention to promote the integration of education and training. This position was especially promoted by policy intellectuals in Cosatu; surveys of worker opinion had persuaded them that workers were suspicious of what they saw as soft options and wanted structured delivery, related certification and potential linking to job grading of achievement found in formal education—though with an adult focus.

The official adoption of the term was not without controversy, but ABET was enshrined in national education policy and in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) after 1994. The ABET levels (1-4) were meant in principle to take adults from illiteracy through to an adult General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) equivalent to—but not the same as—the completion of Grade 9 in the schooling system. The need for and the nature of equivalence have been matters of some dispute

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Section One

The event in overview

The proceedings in summary

Convened by Umalusi, the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centres for Adult Education and Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the Beyond ABET Colloquium of 1-2 September 2005 aimed to look especially at the relationship of regulation to provision in adult education and training. The colloquium was designed in the interests of communication, thoughtfulness and understanding, and there was a deliberate avoidance of premature or simple solutions.

The event drew together over 100 people concerned with adult education and training. Participants came from government, NGO and private providers, national authorities, Sector Education and Training Authorities (Setas) and universities. Many expressed the feeling that the occasion was overdue and welcome. Since the days of participative policy consultations in the 1990s adult basic education and training (ABET) had fallen into a depression because of underachievement against high expectations. Links and communication had become relatively strained.

The running of the colloquium was marked by the high quality of inputs and interaction. The colloquium had been carefully planned in collective meetings and processes at Umalusi. Four opening presentations were made by speakers from organizations concerned in different ways with the regulation or quality assurance of adult education: Umalusi, the Department of Education, the South African Qualifications Authority (Saq), the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) and the Chemical Industries Seta (Chieta). These were followed by presentations from providers chosen to reflect different orientations: the Department of Education, Project Literacy, the Expanded Public Works Programme, the Umsobomvu Youth Trust and Ditsela (an agency for training in the labour unions).

The key questions to be addressed were:

- What are the different kinds of provision that are needed and that are currently being offered?
- Which of them would be improved through quality assurance?
- Where can people work together and share more?
- What kinds of systems support can be provided?
- What kinds of quality assurance would help the sector?

The presentations were comprehensive in their coverage of the themes and the programme allowed ample time for discussion and the formulation of positions. Various speakers articulated an awareness of the huge difficulties of achieving the ideals of adult education and there was virtually no either-or positioning in the discussions. Serious problems and even anger were aired at moments in the colloquium, but they were expressed in terms of a quest for workable alternatives. The challenges were seen to go well beyond questions of policy and regulation. The most intractable problems arose from the apparently insuperable gulf separating people with low skills from the possibility of significant jobs and well-being. This was seen by some as an effect of the globalized knowledge economy.

A notable feature of the colloquium was agreement about the sheer diversity of adult education. This consciousness of a complex array of different needs, approaches, systems, requirements, styles, and challenges in adult learning was sustained through the colloquium. The acceptance of multiplicity—sometimes even a delight in difference—ran through all sessions.

The title of the colloquium was explored in various ways but remained multivalent. Its most obvious meaning was related to progression after the completion of an ABET General Education and Training Certificate (GETC), at the Grade 9/ NQF 1 level. One might call this Adult Further Education and Training, although there was clearly an emerging preference for the simple term Adult Education and Training (AET). AET strengthens the sense of the unity in diversity of a beleaguered field.

However, as suggested by the note at the start of this document, the terminology itself raised questions. For some delegates the generalized use of the term ABET is misleading: adult learners may be engaging in gaining literacy skills, or in broader general education, or in work skills training, or in community education, or in a combination of these, and may not even be following a path towards a GETC at all.

The term *Beyond ABET* therefore acquired a number of other resonances as well:

- Beyond the formal frame signaled by 'ABET' to non-formal modes and a renewed responsiveness to adult-learners' felt needs (especially for sustainable livelihoods)
- Beyond the acknowledged failures of delivery to less ambitious but more achievable goals than those posed by the comprehensive curriculum entailed by ABET
- Beyond a restrictive view of ABET regulation to one which encourages and supports the best practices in what is needed in adult education
- Beyond personal limits: the idea of education as a transcendence of where one is now, the excitement of learning, the value of growth, the satisfaction of practical—but also cultural and spiritual potentials—was touched on by various speakers.

All the speakers were committed to creating a constructive relationship between regulation and provision. Everyone agreed that systems of regulation were necessary. But it was not necessary to regulate everything. Some sectors of provision could be self-regulating, and the system should offer 'different strokes for different folks'. The current system is inadequate and incomplete. Umalusi made it clear that it was deliberately moving slowly through the complex issues before establishing final processes of accreditation, in order not to damage already fragile provision.

The tougher problems that recurred in the colloquium included:

- Problems with the GETC for Adults: According to one participant, the eight learning areas demand so much time that they give an ironic twist to the idea of lifelong learning. Another asked whether the fundamentals should not be sufficient for access to FET. The Department of Education blamed the heavy demands of the GETC on the NQF's requirement of 120 credits for a qualification. Saqa pointed out that this is a flexible requirement and could also include ABET credits at lower levels. The establishment of the GETC was seen as an impressive achievement with growing quality in some respects, while suffering serious inadequacies in other respects. The need for a national curriculum and not just a curriculum framework has become clear, but this is by no means unproblematic. Some training has been included, but on the whole the T is still missing from the GETC and ABET.
- Problems with accreditation: Umalusi representatives argued that they were hampered in developing accreditation systems by the fact that most provinces had not acted on their responsibilities for registration of providers, and by the 'deemed accredited' status of provincial provision. Beyond that, there is the cost of accreditation, the need to keep the approach simple, yet creative and fair, and to be clear about where accreditation will be useful and where not.
- The relationship between quality assurance, curriculum and qualifications: The entangled set of relationships reflected here could be captured in some of the following

questions. Can we have quality assurance that is not linked to certification or achievement on the NQF? How do we resolve tensions between curriculum development and qualifications design? Does the NQF's emphasis on qualifications rather than modular credits not work against the responsiveness of adult education? Are examinations not the most workable tool for quality assurance, at least where cognitive achievements are claimed? (Strong reservations were expressed about the reliability and the burden of site based assessment and continuous assessment)

- The relationship between general education and skills: For example, should literacy and numeracy come before or after or between skills? And how do they link with the skills? What about cases where there is no relationship? Can skills be recognized in themselves, without additional complex demands?

It was clear at the end of the colloquium that the light that had been cast on the problems was valuable, even though it showed that there were no quick or simple solutions. Umalusi was very upfront in explaining the limits of its capacity and powers—and of the potential of quality assurance—to contribute to the process beyond ABET. Every agency had a role to play in a complex endeavour.

Why the colloquium was convened

The awareness that all is not well in ABET, and in adult education more broadly, was given official recognition in the Minister of Education's consultations in 2005. The Centre for Adult Education (CAE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) has been articulating this awareness for some time, while Umalusi has needed to construct a vision for adult education to help it to shape its developmental mission of using national quality assurance to promote adult education. The Umsobomvu Youth Fund has been developing a Youth Service Model, and has been struggling to find a way of bringing together the on-the-job training that youth obtain, with some kind of provision of formal general education. Many individuals and institutions concerned with adult education in South Africa have been asking fundamental questions about provision: Why is adult education provision perpetually in crisis, in spite of thoughtful education legislation and the existence of the National Skills Development Strategy? Are the officially endorsed notions of adult education the basis for what is really needed? Has the emphasis on formal structures that gave birth to the concept of 'ABET'—as opposed, for example, to non-formal notions of adult literacy and development—been positive, or has it led provision on an unfortunate deviation from what is really needed? What is really needed? Are different kinds of provision and legislative systems needed for, for example, out of school or pre-employed youth, and for older adults, either employed or unemployed?

Within this constellation of questions, the questions of how the regulatory environment is affecting provision, and of how regulation might be used most positively, loom large, especially for Umalusi. Umalusi is responsible for the quality assurance of the national GETC for adults, for the accreditation of private providers of general and further education, and for nurturing quality in public providers. These tasks raise profound questions about the purposes, roles, appropriate practices and inter-relationship of provision and the regulation of provision.

For over half a century South Africa has had official provision for the regulation of adult education. On the one hand this was regarded as part of the machinery for closing areas of freedom in the era of apartheid education. As a result it is still seen with some suspicion. On the other hand, even when framed with the best intentions, regulation has often constituted an empty gesture in adult education. The most clear current expression of national regulation is found in the ABET Act of 2000 which focuses on public providers, governance structures and the responsibilities of provincial departments of education to register all private providers. On the whole, provisions of the Act are not addressed proactively because of more pressing priorities.

Since 2000 the national examinations for the GETC have been instituted and developed by the Department of Education into a significant—and contested—feature of the adult education landscape in South Africa. These examinations could provide a vivid depiction of the expectations of ABET in South Africa—and a motivation for the fulfillment of those expectations. In reality they draw on a rather awkward combination of the schooling tradition (and the limits posed by the realities of public adult learning centres) with the standards and outcomes-based requirements of the NQF. The examinations are powerful in giving status to a particular approach, in spite of the unresolved questions that they raise. These questions range from practical questions of timing and frequency of assessments and the manageability of quality assurance, to tough curriculum issues, such as the question of whether all ABET learners should aim at the GETC, how the curriculum for adults should differ from the curriculum for children in school, whether all learning areas and credits must be completed for certification, and how training and experience can be factored into the qualification. The largest current issue relates to the demand for more prescribed content (and perhaps also approved materials) to allow for meaningful achievement and assessment of achievement against the required outcomes.

For over a decade the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) has offered a unique centre of research, information and

teaching regarding ABET. Professional staff at the centre are stern critics of the provision of ABET. Some espouse a radical critique of the political economy and its impact on adult education provision. This would include a critical view of certification or ‘credentialism’. Yet they recognize the inevitability of structures of regulation, assessment and accreditation, and work to make these as constructive and developmental as possible. The CAE has therefore provided valued guidance to Umalusi in the ongoing creation of its roles in ABET quality assurance. The Beyond ABET Colloquium has its roots in this long-standing partnership, and the UKZN was the obvious academic host in the making of the colloquium.

A more immediate stimulus to the running of the colloquium lay in the concerns of the Umsobomvu Youth Fund about post-ABET opportunities—or the lack of them—for young people. Umsobomvu was set up to enable young people to access economic opportunities. A key component of that is access to learning opportunities. The Youth Service Programme was specifically set up to enable young people, generally those without a complete Senior Certificate or other FET qualification, to access opportunities for study, training, and service. The organization had been experiencing a range of impediments with regard to the Youth Service Programme, because of aspects of the regulatory environment, most specifically in relation to the lack of coherent pathways and articulation problems. Lack of flexibility in certification models, problems of integration of education and training and inadequacies in quality assurance (if it was available) were some of the issues that led Umsobomvu to engage with Umalusi and ultimately to co-host the colloquium.

How the colloquium was constructed

The colloquium was constructed through a series of consultations and a workshop at Umalusi involving various stakeholders. The final programme was structured through a process of iterative consultation between the host partners, and various other identified specialists. The final structure had the following features:

- The inputs should be selective and illustrative rather than comprehensive, in order to allow sufficient time for interaction.
- An opening session would set up the discussion, with the theme ‘Recreating an imagination for adult education in South Africa’. It would aim to encourage participants to use the same language with key concepts like formal and non-formal, but also to think ‘out of the box’.
- The next session would invite a number of perspectives on the current regulatory and quality assurance environment from a range of organizations.

- The third session would aim to build a more nuanced picture of provision through case studies. This would give some idea of who was doing what and would focus on how they related to and experienced the system of regulation.
- The MEC for Education in KZN would be invited to discuss the proposed KZN literacy campaign at a social gathering on the evening of the first day.
- At the start of the second day the plenary presentations would offer a synthesis of the models and issues from day one in preparation for the break away groups.
- The colloquium would close with report backs, a synthesis of issues to be taken forward and closure.

What follows is a capturing of the key points of the various presenters, as well as the discussions from participants. Presentations varied quite substantially in relation to length, formality, level of detail in use of visual aids such as power point presentations, and interaction. The aim of this document is to present a summary record of the presentations and debates, rather than trying to reproduce them.

Section Two

Opening address

Peliwe Lolwana, Umalusi: *What is adult education?*

Peliwe Lolwana opened her address by engaging participants in a symbolic action. All members of the audience were invited to write down five of their deepest concerns and strongest gripes about adult education—and then to throw them away in order to participate in the colloquium from a fresh perspective.

She then gave an overview of the various models of adult education. The literacy model focuses on teaching a formal skill; the emancipatory model is about the discovery of one's capacities and limitations; the compensation model involves bringing in those who were denied opportunities for mainstream credentials; the further education model offers multiple ways of enriching and developing oneself in a personal or professional capacity; and the vocational model involves skills linked to job requirements. All are valid and legitimate education discourses, but each one puts forward a paradigm that raises its own questions and challenges.

She made it clear that we have huge challenges to face, but we also have achievements to mark. Research shows improving levels of literacy especially in urban areas among younger people. Edusource research puts the illiteracy figure at 11% nationally, while other put the figures higher. 74% have completed 7 years of education. But this masks high rural components of illiteracy.

Lolwana then drew participants a broad picture of adult education worldwide, and commented on the challenges of these different forms. She noted that the literacy paradigm as put forward by Paulo Freire challenges the functional notion of literacy, and claims literacy for empowerment—literacy goes beyond reading and writing, and should enable people navigate their worlds with ease. Adults are political, cultural, religious, work seekers, and so on.

She also argued that there are false assumptions about the adequacy or sufficiency of literacy programmes for adults. Provision in a schooling paradigm is often constraining and alienating for adults. The credentialing system does not take into account the diverse needs of youth and adults, and assumes too readily the need for qualifications. At the same time, however, those who did not access mainstream schooling tend to want and need the foundational schooling base later on.

Lolwana proposed that broader or enrichment adult education needs special conditions to thrive, as in Sweden, with a large range of classes, and recognition of these studies, or as in countries with abundant resources, such as the United States with its range of adult opportunities such as those offered by community colleges. Most Western countries tend to offer extra-curricular options, dealing more with lifestyle needs than basic skills. In countries dealing with political conflict, this factor itself can mobilize adult education, as in some Middle East countries, where community capacity building in basic services becomes a need. In East and West Africa there is a tradition of community-based artisan training, which we lack. There one does not find the influence of the schooling model. But these work best in countries with a long tradition of informal economies. It can prove difficult to factor in this kind of knowledge to a more formal economy.

Other countries have found that one needs a consensus among political parties for adult education to work towards a certain direction. Trade unions have a leading role in many countries. Without them workers' education won't take off.

Skills development programmes are key in most countries. One problem in countries with low levels of basic education is that it is difficult to enter these programmes even at a low skills level if general education is lacking. The relationship between general education and successful skills training needs to be carefully thought through.

In some instances basic skills education for people is pitched much lower than the demands of the formal economy (for example, Botswana, with an excess of brigades.) A dual economy develops, which can entrench poverty at the lower end of the scale. Here at home the Extended Public Works Programme is trying to address this tension, as China did, although there were specific reasons for its success.

In South Africa adult education needs are extremely varied. Young adults are looking for opportunities to advance their interests and their life chances, as are many other adults who want to enter the mainstream economy. Yet there are also personal

needs, such as life skills for reading the bible or using an ATM, and community development needs. These should not be made inaccessible through an over-demanding, or over-regulated, single focus adult education system. While effective adult education is happening all over South Africa in response to these different needs, it tends to happen in silos, and in small and fragmented interventions. Government is still the largest provider of adult education, in spite of its limitations.

Lolwana then noted some of the requirements for a working adult education system, such as coordination and collaboration between various sectors and organizations; consensus among political parties about the needs of all adults; the role of trade unions in the education of workers; the acknowledgement by government of the breadth and depth of adult education needs; flexible regulatory mechanisms to support rich provision; and the linkage of adult education to the real needs and wants of adults.

Umalusi's interest in this colloquium lies in its statutory responsibility to promote quality in adult education, accredit providers, ensure that standards and curriculum are acceptable and quality assured and certificate qualifications at exit points. At the same time, the regulatory environment needs to be flexible enough to create the space for rich and varied provision.

Lolwana said that Umalusi has been very cautious about intervening in adult education, anxious not to break what is already fragile by prematurely fixing things. Umalusi wants to work with the sector in trying to find the best way to regulate, in ways that do not break but support, in order to advance and develop the sector.

Lolwana ended with a plea to participants to think beyond our current paradigms, listen to other people and share with them. We need to imagine and dream towards a better, yet practical and simple system, supported by sensible regulatory mechanisms. The goal is to encourage creativity, responsiveness and relevance, to allow rational and quality programmes to flourish. She supported this statement by quoting Federico Mayor, Director General of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) (1997):

Education is an indispensable strategic instrument for sustainable human development. It is a tool. But it is also the right of every person – the right to become an active and creative citizen. Lastly, learning is a joy: in it each person may discover a sense of freedom, self-realization and independence. Once experienced, the joy of learning can never be forgotten; it repeats and returns throughout and it is inexhaustible.

Section Three

The regulation and quality assurance of adult education

Eugene Rabe (Umalusi): *Umalusi and the quality assurance of adult education*

Eugene Rabe outlined the relevant requirements of the GENFETQA Act (No 58 of 2001), which governs Umalusi. She emphasized that the Act required Umalusi to quality assure assessment and to accredit private providers and assessment agencies (but not public adult learning centres, which are deemed accredited as they fall under provincial departments of education). The Act focuses on institutions, not on individuals as providers.

In addition to the GENFETQA Act, the ABET Act (No 52 of 2000) sets out the registration process for accreditation. There is still debate about what and how to accredit: Do public adult learning centres provide a benchmark? Can Umalusi operate in the absence of registration? Do the Acts need review and amendment? (There is some consensus that review is necessary.) The parameters of accreditation still need to be determined: while progress has been made on institutional accreditation linked to formal qualifications, where, for example, do individuals, or those offering non-formal programmes, fit? Should there be a single accreditation process for all adult education providers, whether they are ABET or FET providers offering different forms of learning and training for different purposes? Or should Umalusi define its responsibilities in terms of specified qualifications, programme types or levels?

Currently Umalusi's key role in adult education is to look at the quality of qualifications and their assessments at exit points only, that is, the GETC (ABET) and the FETC. Rabe raised the issue of the need for a national curriculum for the 'formal education' paradigm for both ABET and FET adult learners. There is a strong move for an adult 'alternative' to a Senior Certificate at FETC level—an adult

‘Matric’ such as Aseca, which is not a vocational qualification but that is not quite the same as the school senior certificate.

Umalusi (working with the national Department of Education) currently safeguards the standards of formal adult education qualifications at GETC level, the N1-3 levels and FETC (vocational) through the monitoring and moderation of external national examinations. Some of the issues that Umalusi is currently grappling with include inconsistency of the site based assessment components of ABET qualifications, and the effect of the lack of a national curriculum.

Rabe then summarized Umalusi’s current thinking regarding quality assurance. Umalusi aims to build on existing models of quality assurance, which includes retaining some form of external assessment together with a site-based component. There is a move towards the notion of a central curriculum for formal adult education (including ABET) in order to promote coherence of provision and standards. At the same time, however, Umalusi recognizes the need to allow for a differentiated adult education sector, which supports alternative forms of adult education to meet diverse needs.

David Diale (Department of Education): *The Department of Education and quality assurance of ABET*

David Diale pointed out that the national Department of Education was mainly interested in formal education, in which capacity it has a regulatory role. This includes a strong monitoring role, in that it is the Department of Education’s responsibility to manage, measure and monitor progress in the adult education sector.

He reflected both on the achievements in the official provision and regulation of adult education and of the problems and challenges. He said that the lack of external assessment for ABET Levels 1-3 has two negative effects: firstly, the Department of Education has no way of measuring the success of their programmes; and secondly, lack of formal assessment is leading to less internalized learning at ABET 4/NQF 1.

A particularly interesting consideration was the emerging need to move to greater specification of content in the ABET curriculum, but also of the threat of losing the gains of outcomes-based education in terms of flexibility in the possible integration of skills. The GETC examination showed some improvement but many shortcomings. He also stressed that though the legislation set the public adult learning centres as the benchmark for private provision, this should be seen as a

minimum requirement. The Department of Education was engaged in debate about the relationship between formal and non-formal provision, among many other questions of concern—especially that of curriculum relevance.

While noting that there has been progress in the state system—there are policies and procedures in place, there is functioning provision, the regulatory role is being partially fulfilled, and resource allocation is monitored—Diale made the point that implementation and co-ordination of the sector needs more attention. In particular, the Department needs to develop an approach to the mobilization of more adult learners.

Diale noted the following aspects of the state's intervention strategy:

- Strengthen integration of adult basic education into other government programmes, including those based in multi-purpose community centres.
- Turn adult education centres into centres of information.
- Explore the link of adult education programmes to markets in the first economy, thereby, reducing reliance on social grants.
- Integrate adult basic education into community life, and build it as a vehicle for co-operatives.
- Increase the cadre of adult education practitioners, in line with the labour-intensive approach.
- Improve the status of adult education practitioners through incentives and appropriate compensation.
- Bring finality and stability around the funding of adult basic education.
- Ensure that literacy programmes are based on the conception of literacy as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and meet the basic learning needs of adults.

Diale closed by cautioning against over-expectations, quoting Torres to this effect:

ABLE (Adult Basic Learning and Education) in the South continues to be trapped between overly ambitious expectations and meagre attention and resources. Adult Literacy is expected to produce miracles among the poor—self-esteem, empowerment, citizenship building, community organization, labour skills, income generation, and even poverty alleviation ... While pedagogical and specifically methodological issues are important, ... one must not forget that poverty is not the result of illiteracy but very much the contrary. The most effective way to deal with poverty is dealing with the structural economic and political factors that generate it and reproduce it at national and global scale.

Joe Samuels (Saqa): *Viewing adult education through an NQF lens*

In a very brief address, Joe Samuels touched on three questions:

1. What is adult education from an NQF perspective?
2. How is adult education regulated in the NQF system?
3. How does the NQF accommodate adult education?

Samuels stressed the developmental intent of the NQF. Where the NQF was perceived as restrictive and over-complicated, this was usually a function of misunderstandings enacted in the implementation process. The NQF was in fact rooted in a concern to promote the best values and practices of adult education. It should be stressed at the same time, though, that not all adult education needs to fall within the NQF. The NQF is specifically concerned with education where claims to supporting progression up its levels need to be recognized. Where adult education is subject to such regulation, it must follow the same requirement as any other education and training provision in terms of quality assurance. Apart from demanding the fundamentals at the level concerned, the NQF allows considerable flexibility in the combination of unit standards in the construction of adult education qualifications. Although the ABET levels 1-3 have no status as qualification levels, credits from these levels can contribute to a level 1 qualification. It should be remembered that the GETC for adults had been designed by the Department of Education broadly in line with NQF principles, but that it did not constitute the only NQF Level 1 qualification available for adults. A range of NQF level 1 qualifications were available and were quality assured by various Seta ETQAs.

Ayesha Itzkin (Chieta): *Seta-ETQAs and the regulatory environment*

Ayesha Itzkin sketched the landscape of relationships between Saqa, Seta ETQAs, and the Department of Labour. She reflected upon some of the lessons learned by Chieta through implementation—for example, the need for integrated delivery has led to previously separate departments (learnerships, standards generation, and quality assurance functions) being brought together into one new division, the Chieta ETDQA. This ensures that there is collaboration on areas such as qualifications design and review, quality assurance and monitoring. The Chieta has made good progress in reaching targets such as registration of learnerships, assessor training and registration, certification of learners and accreditation of providers.

Itzkin then talked about some of the challenges facing the Chieta. In the context of this colloquium, the key issue was that of equivalence between the schooling

pathway and the adult learning pathway. Can skills development and vocational training, which is the primary mandate of the Seta, address general education needs? Many in the business world question whether it is the responsibility of industry to educate the citizenry more broadly—the world of production has its own priorities. At the same time, however, industry recognizes the need for well-rounded individuals, and training with breadth and depth. Should training in the critical cross-field outcomes be mandatory in order to address this? If so, questions relating to implementation and costs arise. In the context of these debates, Itzkin noted the importance of the Fundamentals in industry qualifications, and reviewed some of the structural confusions which affect delivery in these components – for example, lack of clarity in the Seta world on the quality assurance of the fundamentals and on curriculum issues, and questions regarding the competency of industry trainers to address these areas.

Qualification design issues and the duplications that arise out of overlaps in primary focus areas assigned by Saqa to ETQAs is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Itzkin proposed that the manufacturing and engineering related Setas should be encouraged to work together on qualification design and also on quality assurance of provision. ETQA Regulations are open to interpretation, and all ETQAs do not focus equally on quality. She also proposed that Umalusi and economic sector ETQAs need to collaborate far more, as FET Institutions (providers under Umalusi’s quality assurance systems) are key agents of delivery for learners in industry and far greater cooperation is required to align the requirements of band ETQAs and economic sector ETQAs in order to give real meaning to the term ‘integration of education and training’. This also needs to happen in the area of the trades, as the trades are very important to address the skills shortages experienced in South Africa.

Itzkin ended with a reminder of our ideals regarding adult learning, and a plea not to forget these ideals.

Melissa King (IEB): *The IEB’s commitment to adult examinations*

Melissa King opened by saying that her role in this colloquium was to argue in support of examinations for formal ABET programmes. To do this she would glance back at the recent history of ABET, and trace some of the dynamics informing assessment debates. She reminded participants that many of those present were closely involved in this era of development.

The late eighties/early nineties was a period in which adult learners could find themselves in various situations: in the state night school system, which mimicked the formal school curriculum and used a system of DET-‘school-like’, recall-based examinations for adults to progress up to Matric; or in the industry-based programmes which aimed at providing literacy suited to the needs of the job, with little general standardization or quality assurance; or in the NGO sector, which often offered alternative or emancipatory literacy, again with varying general standards and no quality assurance.

In this context the movement towards examination-based assessment in ABE in fact emerged in support of alternative processes of needs-driven adult education, in opposition to school-focused, narrow curricula that relied on rote learning. How did this happen? As many colloquium participants would know, the IEB began a consultative process in the early 90s on the development of an assessment framework for ABET. Most of those involved held strong positions against formal assessment, as is made clear from the IEB’s Evaluation Report of 1995:

Formal, structured and generalized modes of assessment have been unpopular in adult education. Adult education discourses internationally—non-formal education, popular education, emancipatory praxis, opposition to ‘banking education’, community-centred needs-based life-skills approaches—tend to be strongly on the side of de-schooling and anti-credentialism. The intense sense of mission in much adult education, the demand for authenticity and the moral high ground of being ‘alternative’ to conventional formal systems of education all go towards a particularly powerful dislike of ‘the diploma disease’.

So what were the factors at work that led a very broad-based grouping of ABET players (not just the IEB), to support the notion of a national framework of examinations? Briefly, some of these were:

- The desire of the learners themselves for certification that had value and recognition.
- The growing feeling that there was very little evidence of success in the majority of non-formal or commercial programmes running at the time. While some adult education programmes were attempting to foster alternative curricula that included relevant knowledge, life skills and learning processes, many of these did not go beyond the rhetoric of alternative education. Evaluations were hampered by lack of agreed curriculum aims or national standards and levels in ABET. Funders of large-scale NGO projects in particular began to demand some form of accountability from providers, and some way of measuring achievement against a common standard.

- Stakeholders in ABET, in particular Cosatu, began linking the demand to greater provision of ABE (rather than just literacy) in the workplace to accountability and certification that would enable progress.
- There was a great deal of concern around the facilitators, their subject matter expertise and assessment expertise. There was a high turnover of staff, and people had concerns about how comparable individual standards of teaching and assessment were.

It was against this background that the IEB, in consultation and partnership with a number of stakeholders who were searching for alternative approaches to serving the needs of South Africa's adult learners, began developing outcomes for formal assessment in the context of a system of certification. The outcomes related to literacy in eleven languages, and numeracy. It was agreed that these outcomes needed to be assessed by a common, external instrument—that is, an examination. And a lot of energy was spent in debating 'the right kind of examination' as opposed to the 'wrong kind of examination'. Promotion of the right kind of examination was seen as one way of supporting the broader and more relevant programmes, ensuring that they delivered tangible and concrete skills and knowledge and encouraged process skills and critical thinking.

In the meanwhile the National Training Board Task Team deliberations led to the setting up of Saqa and the NQF. There were many debates around the place of ABET in the context of the NQF. One major trend was the strong demand from even basic literacy providers for some national clarification of outcomes, a position that was reflected in the IEB's stakeholder consultation and assessment pilots. The IEB's project became merged with standard-setting exercises for ABET undertaken by the Department of Education, and the registration of ABET unit standards in various learning areas on the NQF took place. The examinations model became formalized for NQF Level 1 in the public system.

In the present, examinations for ABET learners continue to play a role. Firstly, the factors noted above which led to the development of formal certification for ABET still hold sway. Secondly, examinations conducted by a reputable agency are often seen as the most efficient way to carry out quality assurance, by entities such as Setas who may be disbursing funds to numerous providers, or by local municipalities who need assurance that various providers are performing to the same standard. Thirdly, in the industry context, both management and unions demand some form of accountability for expenditure on ABET. Examinations and certification provide an assurance that money and time has not been wasted. And fourthly, well-set examinations that abide by the principles of relevant assessment, fostering useful and

appropriate skills for adult learners, are still seen to have a positive backwash effect on both the development of materials and on facilitator skills.

This does not mean wholesale advocacy of examinations to the exclusion of all else, or that examinations are always the best option. The issue of formal versus non-formal ABE/T, and questions around national certification, should not lead to a polarization of either/or options for ABET. Where ABET is delivered in the context of the NQF (for the purposes of progress through levels), skills levies, and in support of learnerships, there is a need for recorded achievement of unit standards with accountability. As external assessment is a quick and efficient way to quality assure across different providers and workplaces, examinations would seem to be appropriate in this context. Also, those progressing into formal pathways beyond ABET, need to be habituated to the conventions and modes of examination-based assessment. However, for ABET provision that is highly localized in response to specific community needs, it may be that a non-formal model which is not linked to national certification is more appropriate. In addition, distinctions must be made between initial literacy provision, ABE, ABET and skills programmes, with clarity about the purpose of provision. Whatever programme is offered, assessment should of course be fit-for-purpose: but the implications of being in or outside a formal system of certification, and their consequences for access for further study or training, must be clearly spelled out to learners.

King ended by suggesting that debates on regulatory frameworks need to be closely linked to purpose in adult education.

Carmel Marock (Umsobomvu Youth Fund): *The regulatory environment—summing up and leading discussion*

Carmel Marock was discussant for the panel presentations of the previous five speakers. She summed up the main themes as follows:

- Qualifications: what kinds, who sets them, how are skills and education balanced?
- Curriculum: what is the relationship between curriculum, standards and qualifications?
- Assessment: roles and types?
- Quality assurance: does the same kind apply to formal and non-formal programmes?
- How do regulations support what we are trying to do?

She queried whether enough attention had been given to how to take ABET further—how to get progression into the system—and whether we are striking the

right balance between skills content and pedagogical and curriculum expertise. She also asked a number of questions about how well we understood assessment, and described the issue of registration as ‘a niggling confusion in the regulatory system’. Keeping it simpler is a priority. And it is important to ask who could carry out all the things expected of regulations and how we will measure the success of the regulatory system.

After lively discussion from the floor, Marock closed the discussion with the observation that we need to get away from an either/or perspective, and look at how the different parts of the system could relate to one another. Most of the questions arise out of the confusion of navigating the systems—describing the system and its component parts in a useful and responsive way would be useful for all.

Section Four

Provision of adult education

Marongwa Ramarumo (Department of Education): *The Department of Education and ABET provision*

Ramarumo outlined two models of provision by the Department of Education, formal and non-formal, and briefly outlined their origins. However, she admitted that provision was mainly of an academic nature and did not directly help those whose main concern was putting bread on the table, and that distinctly non-formal provision had fallen away with the ending of the South African National Literacy Initiative (Sanli). Nonetheless, four Setas were involved in helping to provide skills based curriculum elements. The linking of skills with basic literacy remained a major challenge.

Ramarumo spoke about the growth of enrolment in the public adult learning centres, and the take-up of different learning areas. While there was progress, she noted that two problem areas remain: linkage into skills development and articulation with other pathways; and the issue of funding at a provincial level.

The department was developing a concept paper setting out a re-vision of ABET delivery. This would be open to participation by stakeholders, with the emphasis on partnerships between the state and other players.

Andrew Miller (Project Literacy): *Project Literacy's view in and beyond ABET*

Andrew Miller spoke of Project Literacy's experience. Project Literacy offers mainly general and some occupational ABET, with about 80% of provision being formal.

Miller noted that their collaboration with the South African National Literacy Initiative (Sanli) in the Western Cape showed that many learners wanted things that were outside of the strictly formal curriculum. Like other speakers he stressed that it

is obvious that people want or need adult education for different purposes, and that variety of provision is therefore required.

Miller said that it would appear that accreditation is not working. He gave various examples to illustrate this view. He spoke of Project Literacy's frustration in relation to programme approval processes. He said that accepted paths for programme approval do not exist. He outlined what he described as 'a game of ping pong' between Umalusi and the ETDP Seta in relation to ABET. Cross-Seta accreditation is not being achieved. More troublesome is that some Setas are giving recognition to any training that merely exists. For example, the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) has apparently accredited a course using outdated textbooks in Fanakalo. Also, there are many examples of 'fly-by-night' providers without professional credibility or track records winning contracts for ABET-related work, even from the state. And there is no capacity to follow up on the delivery. Finally, while there is externally quality-assured ABET assessment through the IEB and the state, some Setas use Unisa, which is in effect against their own rules.

Another problem area noted by Miller was the fundamentals: there was a lack of national standardized outcomes in various life skills and knowledge areas, aside from Communications and Mathematical Literacy. He noted in addition that the teaching of English and Mathematics for the GETC is a national crisis.

The cost of provision and assessment is problematic for NGOs and learners without generous employer support. The GETC places enormous pressure on people, who then go to unprofessional providers who claim that they do the GETC in twelve days. Adults should be able to move easily into further education and training with only the fundamentals, not the GETC.

Under these conditions, Miller felt that Umalusi might well aim to play a more distinct policing role.

Deborah Byrne (Development Institute for Training Support and Education for Labour): *Ditsela's model of provision*

Deborah Byrne offered a detailed description of Ditsela's provision, which is a mixed model balancing demand for formal education and qualifications with the primary purpose of worker education, that is, to strengthen the organizing power of labour. To this end, formal education takes the form of partnership with universities directed towards the development of a set of trade unionist qualifications, while non-formal involves various short courses at national and provincial level addressing

knowledge and skills needs of union members (e.g. labour law, workplace re-organization, handling disputes, IT skills and so on).

In the context of the colloquium, her most telling points related to the position of an innovative, highly contextualized provider of (mainly) short courses in relation to the regulatory framework. Ditsela has not thus far experienced the NQF and its related systems as an enabling framework—processes for qualification development, and for provider accreditation, are onerous, time-consuming and expensive, most especially for a non-profit sector such as unions.

Byrne made the following observations to illustrate her points. First, Ditsela's formal partnerships are university based. This has happened because, although they designed their own qualification, involvement with a standards generating body in order to achieve registration proved very difficult. Their experience suggests that it is better to enter into partnership with an established provider. The university route seems to be more feasible and marketable than creating their own qualification. In addition, she questioned whether a Ditsela (or any other union endorsed) NQF Level 4 or 5 certificate would have the same market value as one from an established university. However, she also noted that partnerships are expensive and tough. Progression cannot be built automatically into programmes and can only be achieved by negotiation.

Byrne ended by re-iterating that the system should be more flexible and that it should take into account provider context. For organizations such as Ditsela, the NQF needs a more enabling process, and the development of quality assurance systems needs support from ETQAs.

Busani Ngcaweni (Umsobomvu Youth Fund): *The National Youth Service as a Case Study*

Busani Ngcaweni began by outlining the objectives of the national Youth Service curriculum. Youth development aims to instil a sense of worth, purpose and direction. It should assist young people to conceive of themselves as worthy and responsible citizens, empowered agents with a sense of purpose, critical thinkers and compassionate community members. Youth development is located in various contexts, such as family, community and workplaces. He also described the learning principles on which National Youth Service programmes are based. These include active participation by learners (both physically and conceptually), security and respect for learners to enable risk-taking, and extended use and application of new ways of thinking or doing so that learning can be internalized.

The national Youth Service curriculum has various elements. It includes occupational training through work projects in a sector; transversal skills for personal development; enterprise education; and service activities, providing practical experience in the context of community service, among other elements.

In relation to the theme of the colloquium, Ngcaweni noted that young adults found it very difficult to attain a formal qualification such as a National Senior Certificate. Components of the national Youth Service programmes lead to some NQF-registered credits, but there are still barriers in the way of equivalence. The key questions for national youth service are how do the different pieces of training that their learners have undertaken fit together, and how a full qualification can be obtained through a combination of national youth service programmes, resource-based learning and other certification young learners may have. Linking national youth service skills to exit opportunities is the challenge.

Scuduzo Simelane (Expanded Public Works Programme): *The Expanded Public Works Programme and Adult Education*

Scuduzo Simelane opened with a definition of the expanded public works programme as 'A nation-wide cross cutting programme which draws significant numbers of the unemployed into productive work, so that workers gain skills while they work, and increase their capacity to earn an income'. The two linked aims of the expanded public works programme are to create work opportunities and transfer skills.

Essentially the expanded public works programme is a government initiative that increases the labour intensity of government-funded projects. Public bodies must draw significant numbers of unemployed into productive work, and provide them with training. The employment experience must take place within the legislative framework gazetted by the department of labour.

While training is skills related, expanded public works programme initiatives also include life skills training related to registered unit standards (e.g. HIV/Aids awareness, personal finance, environmental awareness). ABET standards might also be part of a particular programme, with the departments of education and labour working together in order to integrate publicly provided ABET into expanded public works programme programmes.

The most immediate challenges relate to implementation issues, such as limited time and availability of learners for training, and practical difficulties regarding attendance at night school.

Sandra Land (UKZN Centre for Adult Education): *Need and Resources in ABET*

Sandra Land spoke passionately but briefly about the need for adult learning and the failures of provision. She then circulated copies of *Learn with Echo*, a weekly multilingual newspaper supplement for adult new readers, and *Asifunde*, a resource for adult learning, both produced by the Centre for Adult Education (CAE).

Land discussed the importance of these kinds of accessible and relevant publications for adult learning in the broadest sense. *Learn with Echo*, for example, may reach 250 000 people. 50 000 copies are distributed each week, and it is estimated that five people read each copy. This makes it a very good vehicle for circulating information on public issues, especially health. Articles on ARV (anti-retroviral treatment for HIV) are popular, as are general health and community concerns. A cartoon character called Mkhize is used a vehicle for English and Zulu dialogues on various situations—his views are not necessarily ‘educational’ or ‘improving’; the aim is to encourage reading. The newspaper has had a lot of feedback on his popularity. *Asifunde* deals with basic skills for adults, and is a useful resource for both learners and practitioners.

Land stated that more investment in these kinds of vehicles is needed, as at least they reach their intended audience. She noted that it is misleading to talk about people falling through the net and missing out on provision—many people don’t even get near the net, let alone fall through it. The statistics indicate a huge need in KZN. At the same time, many people don’t want to be in classes. But their prejudice is against formal teaching for themselves. They really value education, and often say, “I don’t want my children to be like me.”

This implies that the kinds of interventions that are needed go beyond formal ABET. In closing Land suggested that Umalusi undertake studies of what kinds of learning are being taken up in the country, and how these opportunities are working.

Section Five

Syntheses

John Aitchison (UKZN School Of Education): *Taxonomies of Adult Education*

John Aitchison opened his presentation with the statement that we are faced with a problem, not a challenge. The problem lies in the numbers of people with limited education and the high proportion of the population which can be categorized as functionally illiterate (if defined as attaining less than Grade 7, then about 32% of the population is illiterate). In the face of this, State, NGO, and business provision for adult literacy has been inadequate, and has failed to reduce the illiteracy rate. Illiteracy is closely related to the huge inequalities in income distribution in SA.

Aitchison noted that the vision for adult education, in terms of providing a good basic education as a foundation for work, training and career progression, has not been realized. Neither formal nor non-formal provision had succeeded, and the minister of education recently criticized what had been done as excessively utilitarian (at the ABET Roundtable in April 2005).

There has been no real policy for adult education because of concentration on ABET and the late arrival of FET. This is serious, as certificates in a situation of high unemployment have enormous value.

Aitchison then went on to unpack a detailed taxonomy of types and forms of adult education, which he linked to Lolwana's opening presentation.

He argued that within the sheer range and variety of adult education, there is a certain confusion of terminology. It is important to talk the same language. People use formal and non-formal in different ways. 'Formal' relates to programmes that are designed, assessed and certificated in a way that is recognized within a system. 'Non-formal' relates to planned and intentional programmes that are not certificated.

Informal education is learning that happens in a way which is unplanned, accidental, or incidental.

Referring to the MEC's presentation of the previous evening, he noted that she viewed literacy as a pre-requisite for further training. This works when there is adequate investment in it. But it is not the only way, and Aitchison set out various configurations of literacy with livelihood training and work. These included valuing literacy in itself, and providing parallel but separate literacy and livelihood training, or integrating literacy and numeracy into livelihood training.

Programmes that combine learning with income generation and/livelihoods, adapted to the conditions and needs of learners, have been found to be the most successful. Literacy training can include components of occupational training, or vice versa. Training in savings and credit has been of enormous benefit. But it needs to be recognized that there are necessary conditions for success, for example, competent and supported instructors. Most important is the recognition that learning leading to significant new competence in reading, writing and calculating needs a bare minimum of 360 hours. It is vital to recognize that there are no quick fixes, and that to become adequately literate is cognitively demanding and takes time to develop.

The problem of fundamentals and how to integrate them into skills programmes without the instructors and time to really handle them remains intractable.

The problem of being context bound needs to be stressed. Poor people are essentially context bound. Yet the real world of education is about unhooking ourselves from that context—an observation that finds its ultimate expression in the training of mathematicians and engineers.

Aitchison noted that many of the programmes developed in South Africa have not been 'mere literacy' but have been cognitively demanding and difficult to develop. He gave examples of a whole range of courses and interventions along those lines, in which ABET was relevant to people's lives, integrating life skills, money management and textual skills for real life applications.

He then made some propositions in relation to assessment. Regular national testing of reading, writing and numeracy needs to take place if there is to be any measurement of progress and maintenance of standards. Good national ABET examinations, and a good adult Senior Certificate is needed. Quality control is best served by external testing. At the same time, providers need to show that learners

can prove that they can apply their skills in context-bound situations such as the bank.

Aitchison closed by asking participants to reflect on the extent of regulation required. Too much regulation could be self-defeating. He suggested a Bureau of Standards model in which certification was optional: for certain things formal recognition is needed, in other respects it is voluntary.

Lyn Slonimsky (For Umsobomvu): *An outsider's reflections on going 'beyond ABET' and on regulation*

Lynne Slonimsky presented thought provoking and highly individual reflections on the themes of the colloquium. She explained that although she was representing Umsobomvu she was not usually a part of the adult education world. In other words, she was very much an outsider. But she reflected that this could be a virtue—the world of adult education is full of its own acronyms, which develop around a common history. The presence of a stranger could bring some new insights and perhaps some fresh ways of seeing.

She pointed to the phrase 'beyond ABET' and asked "What do we mean by 'Beyond'?"

One sense is that it goes beyond the here and now, to new places and spaces in the future. A magnificent dream in this country is to promote access and equity, to enable people to access a better future, and new worlds. We cannot step out of this in South Africa

As educators we want to take those we educate beyond where they are now both in their minds, and in their lives, and open up access to better futures. She pointed out that there are some incredibly creative things happening on the ground, but some programmes or courses being offered do not take people beyond where they are now in either their thinking or in their life chances. Some programmes enable people to be more functional and empowered in their day to day lives, sometimes we seem to have one-dimensional senses of 'they' when we decide what they want, and what to teach. We forget that hungry people also have dreams and aesthetic needs, so we offer them functional literacy but not enough other forms of literacy and learning. And sometimes we forget that deep and systematic learning takes time and sustained engagement and practice. She pointed out that colloquium had noted on a number of occasions that there are providers who are not able to offer their learners the kind of resources and quality they demand and thirdly, and more seriously, there

are disreputable providers who make impossible promises (e.g. literacy in 20 hours). Then they cannot keep their promises and ‘cheat’ learners.

In her view, the colloquium had focused on questions and issues of quality, quality assessment and the legislative framework for promoting and ensuring this. She confessed that she had not always seen the significance of monitoring and regulation, but that she now understood that the quality assurance mechanisms are crucial. What learners are able to learn, depends very much on the quality of the programmes that are offered, so quality assurance is necessary. But it is crucial that the regulative framework and the quality assurance mechanisms serve to promote the vision of taking learners ‘beyond’. On the other hand, providers and educators must also have a clear understanding of how the measures may serve to promote their work towards the achievement of this vision

However she noted that in her experience in education more broadly, all too often there are regulators and bureaucrats who do not properly understand an educational enterprise and therefore exercise bad or inappropriate control. Poor regulations or the logic of bureaucracy can override the very aims they are intended to promote. So it is crucial for all—providers and regulators—to hold on to the vision of where we want to get to and that measures are appropriate to promoting it.

Discussions in this colloquium had pointed to a maze of frameworks, regulations and procedures that did not mesh. Her experience in this colloquium was one of seeing pieces in place for quality assurance but not seeing the whole frame. Much had been said in the colloquium about mismatches and gaps between different regulations and regulative bodies. Providers have also suggested that this lack of coordination can lead to ‘running up the stairs only to be told you have to go down again’. Many felt that they were not adequately supported to meet regulative requirements. There is no doubt regulation is important but it must be accompanied by development. Development and regulation must go together. Providers must be properly supported to meet the regulative requirements.

Rights and responsibilities are another issue. As providers who are trying to offer education for people we often fail to see our responsibilities beyond our learners. One of our rights is development, and transparency and accountability on the part of the policy makers and regulators. Many people are doing inspired work to put the dream in place, but we need to iron out the levels of accountability and transparency. Regulative requirements must promote the vision of taking adults

‘beyond’. She suggested that another colloquium was needed with the specific intent of coordinating the regulative and quality assurance framework.

She noted that another issue that came up was funding and access to funding, and the question of what can be quality assured and what cannot. Slonimsky referred to Land’s presentation, and referred to the wonderful work being done in developing resources, and asked whether it would be appropriate to quality assure such resources. While on the one hand accountability for funding is required, on the other it is not, in terms of Aitchison’s presentation, formal education. Neither is radio, for example, with all its inputs on public issues which extend the world of the listeners. Is that something that Umalusi should be quality assuring? She did not believe so.

In addition, there are not infinite funds. So where should funding for quality assurance be coming from? This is part of a broader project of education in the society, which many ministries and other funders should be contributing to and which should not be regulated by Umalusi.

She argued that the term ‘beyond’ is also about taking people beyond the here and now and helping them to develop a better future. In other words, it is not only about space, but about time. The issue of time came up in a range of different ways in the workshop. One of them was about disreputable providers who promise people they will become literate and achieve qualifications in a period of time that is clearly impossible. It is impossible to guarantee that people can learn literacy in a 20-hour course. The other was a constant litany about how adults do not have time, and the curriculum demands too many notional hours. She argued that there are aspects of learning, and particularly systematic learning that are fundamentally linked to time. She noted that knowledge is not a possession but a way of doing things, it is the outcome of one’s activities. She stressed that coming to know takes time and practice. Coming to know, learning systematically (which takes one beyond the here and now) is based on sustained activity, interaction with new ways of thinking and doing, and on extensive practice. Literacy is a practice in both senses of the word—it involves particular kinds of activities (sometimes with knowledge and activities that do not seem to be immediately relevant to people’s lives) and extended practice. She suggested that this was an issue which had not been explored enough in the colloquium.

How do we help our learners to access higher education? How can we access what people know, identify what they do not know, and then enable them to learn. She noted that systematic learning couldn’t always be immediately relevant to every day

life. There may be activities for which learners cannot see the immediate point but which are the building blocks for relevant learning. She noted that there are no miracle routes to systematic learning. The whole question of what we should teach and how we should teach and how to address the problem that adults often do not have enough time to learn, was not explored in the colloquium. She noted that where there are persistent and widespread problems of teaching and learning then the problem is not simply in the providers, there is a much broader and deeper problem related to the nature of knowledge and the learning process. It does not help to think that you can regulate away a problem that cannot be regulated away. So in many ways people have been looking for solutions to these issues in the wrong place. She proposed that another colloquium is needed to look specifically at issues of knowledge and learning and what this means for programme design and teaching. Such a colloquium could also promote sharing of best practices that are promoting deep learning and life changes.

She ended by asking the gathering to think about how to reach an understanding of what is not working and why, and how adult educators can strengthen what they are doing right.

Section Six

Participants' voices

The colloquium was called a colloquium, and not a seminar, because the three hosting organizations wanted to emphasize debate, discussion, and sharing of ideas. There were various ways in which participants' views and ideas were captured. Firstly, there were discussion sessions after each of the panel presentations. After all presentations there was vigorous debate and discussion from the floor. Secondly, there were discussion groups, in which participants were broken into four groups, in which they had more focused discussion on one of two themes:

- Provision and accreditation,
- Curriculum and assessment.

The questions posed were:

- How do you think the system should look?
- How could it fit together as it should be?

Finally, participants in the colloquium were invited to paste comments onto the walls of the conference venue. The facility was enthusiastically used. The comments showed a broad scatter of concerns. Recurring features include the need for support, resources and materials, the role and status of providers, the perceived sidelining of community-based organizations and small providers, numerous questions about the curriculum framework, and considerable confusion regarding the nature and structures of official provision and regulation.

The themes of the conference clearly touched on areas that were burning concerns to many involved in adult education, and many of the concerns expressed by participants echoed those of the various speakers. On the other hand, participants used the event to raise other concerns. Much anger and frustration was voiced, as well as enthusiasm, passion, and desire to improve adult education. There was much disagreement and lively debate, and many participants disagreed with the speakers and with each other. The text below captures some of the key concerns expressed by participants in plenary discussion, in groups, as well as through pasting comments on

the wall. Many of the concerns need to be addressed by all involved in adult education.

Beyond ABET

At various points in the colloquium, participants reflected on the colloquium title, ‘Beyond ABET’. One argued that ABET does not deliver enough, and that ‘beyond’ should signify that there is a need to expand adult education, and do more, as well as thinking about what comes after basic education for adults. Various participants emphasized the need for a clear pathway for learners. It was also felt that there is no support system in place for learners that have completed ABET level 4. In particular, there was a need for programmes for young adults who want to further education outside of mainstream general education. A suggestion was made that there should be partnerships with the FET colleges to develop programmes for adults which integrate academic and practical training in the curriculum post-ABET. It was also suggested that in the FETC there should be two qualifications: one focused on facilitating progression into HET, and one more occupational. At both levels there should be assessment which is quality assured by Umalusi, in collaboration with the Setas.

One participant reflected that they had hoped that beyond ABET would mean beyond the current ABET paradigms, to models that better meet the needs and desires of learners, and another argued that the framework of ABET marginalized some people—hence a need to move ‘beyond’.

There was general agreement that adult education has been stuck, with people involved thinking about their old problems, and that what was needed was a fresh perspective.

Quality assurance and state regulation

Much discussion in all sessions of the colloquium focused on the role of quality assurance bodies, and how the state, through various agencies, should regulate adult education. There was a general agreement that South Africa needs a regulated system, but there was continual emphasis that on user friendly, clear, and simple, regulations, as well as feedback to providers.

Some participants argued for less quality assurance. “Lighten up on all the regulations and mechanisms” argued one, and instead, enable delivery. Non-formal programmes, it was argued, should not be subjected to accreditation. Other differed, arguing that Umalusi should quality assure education materials, and should accredit

non-formal education programmes. There was a clear divergence of views about whether quality assurance assists or hinders delivery. One participant argued that a new body needed to be in place to accredit non-formal programmes.

There was disagreement about the role of regulation and quality assurance versus provision. Some participants emphasized the need for a developmental approach with providers, arguing that policing facilities would undermine low resourced organizations. Others argued that there were many unscrupulous providers taking advantage of learners, and that state organizations should be policing them. There were strong arguments about the need to curb fly-by-nights and to protect learners. Some participants felt that Umalusi should not have anything to do with non-formal ABET provision. Others supported the idea that there is a whole lot of other learning that has other social purposes, and that should be quality assured but not certificated. Still others felt that the quality assurance system ‘put adult education into boxes’ and needed to be more responsive, and should respond to other ways in which people were learning things, such as Operation Upgrade teaching hydroponics. It was extremely clear that there are many different needs within adult education, and that quality assurance should respond to them. This should include not quality assuring things that will not benefit from quality assurance. For example, some participants felt that basic literacy programmes should not be policed if the intention is not certification. Umalusi representatives argued that heart of the questions Umalusi is facing is how to keep openness, but also how to protect people against bogus organizations or disappointment.

Many questions were posed to the regulatory bodies, and it was clear that more information must be made available within the system—many of the questions and concerns reflected a simple lack of information about the policies and procedures of the various regulatory bodies. For example, participants asked for Umalusi’s accreditation requirements. Some participants also argued that the requirements of the system made it impossible to function: for example, one argued that if the credits that an organization offers don’t add up to a national qualification, the organization can’t get full accreditation, which was felt to be extremely confusing.

Much frustration was expressed at what seemed to be lack of communication amongst the regulatory bodies, as well as what was experienced as over regulation, and lack of flexibility. One participant spoke about the problem of having one accrediting agency (in this case, the ETDP Seta) to accredit providers and another (Umalusi) to provide programme approval. This, they felt, needed attention or some form of alignment. Participants argued that differences between quality assurance bodies had hindered them and delayed implementation of their programmes.

Frustration in the adult education sector was vividly captured in the following comment that a participant pasted on the wall of the colloquium venue:

Let us regulate Umalusi—you are here to serve us and not us to serve you! We pay your salaries—you don't pay ours. I am tired after struggling for ABE, the poor and the unemployed, and only going backwards—never 'beyond'—thanks to politicians, parastatals and regulatory bodies. I want to commit suicide by setting myself alight on the front steps of Umalusi's offices. (I will invite Jonathan Jansen and the Mail and Guardian to witness the spectacle.) My epitaph—'Goodbye cruel ABET world—Good luck to Tannie MEC!')

Representatives of community-based organizations particularly expressed frustration. They argued that registration and accreditation processes may be too complicated and excessive for community organizations wanting to run ABET programmes, and called for assistance.

Another specific problem that was raised was the relationship between the ETDP Seta and Umalusi, as the former organization was accrediting educator training within adult education, and it was felt that Umalusi should then accredit the same providers for their programmes.

Many participants called for a review of the system. As one participant argued, 'We would like to see a simplified but rigorous process. Providers go to all the Setas and end up at Umalusi, angry and confused, and communication breaks down'. Many argued that there needs to be a closer interface between the regulatory framework, the quality assurance system and the dynamics of provision, so that there is an overall system with different component parts that speak to one another. There needs to be much more communication across the sectors and the regulatory bodies such as Umalusi, the departments of Labour and Education, and the Setas.

There was useful debate and reflection about how the system could work better. One participant suggested that the quality assurance of adult education either needed its own unique agency, or should be done entirely by Umalusi.

Some participants argued that it is necessary to develop quality in ways other than regulation. One argued that a variety of NGOs used to do good work in supporting community based organizations in delivering ABET, but had closed because of lack of funds. The former Natal ABET Support Agency (NASA) and the Zenex Adult Literacy Unit at Wits helped considerably to develop quality but were not

supported. The Guinness Awards did this too, but had been closed down. A suggestion was made that Umalusi should employ retired teachers to assist with monitoring and evaluation of ABET providers on a voluntary basis

Provision, finances, and the state

Some participants argued that although regulation was important, more important was more systematic support from the government in the delivery of adult education. Many participants called for the government to lead curriculum and materials development. There were also calls for more state provision, and more state involvement in the development and delivery of materials.

There was much emphasis on the need for the state to provide adult education, and to respond to the needs of poor communities. There were repeated calls for greater financial assistance to community-based organization, and for the need for free and accessible adult basic education. Setas were also called on to promote community-based adult education provision, and there was criticism expressed that large providers were always given contracts because they could meet the complicated requirements of the Setas. Other participants argued for capacity building for community-based organizations that were doing good work but lacked formal recognition and capacity to meet regulatory requirements. Many community-based organizations needed urgent support with regard to teaching facilities and materials.

Many spoke about desperate need for funds for their programmes. This was contrasted with the urgent need for a range of different kinds of ABET provision, and the need for 'regenerative energy'. Many participants emphasized that good provision and good assessment are expensive. Some participants requested training about what Setas do and how to make things happen in the Setas, for which one might get funding from the National Skills Fund.

A feeling was expressed by many participants that there was a lack of political will with regards to adult education. Some participants felt that government officials, and in particular ministers and MECs, constantly ignored the knowledge of those with long experience in adult education. Others argued for a thorough investigation to understand what went wrong with Sanli.

Another perceived problem was confusion about the roles of different government departments.

Examinations and curriculum

Some participants argued strongly in favour of examinations in adult education, some argued vehemently against examinations, and some felt that examinations were appropriate and necessary in some situations but not in others. For example, one participant argued that quality assurance of lower levels through national examinations is essential.

While some supported the decentralized assessment approach of the Setas, they also felt that there should be one integrated approach assessment used by all Setas. One argued that Seta assessment should include external and internal assessment, following the Department of Education model.

Many concerns were expressed about the current examinations system. For example, one participant argued that typically, all learners passed the June IEB examinations with good results, and most of them fail the November examinations.

A number of participants argued that the ABET level 4 examinations are simply too hard, and that many people who are 'beyond ABET' would not pass them. This, linked to high examination fees, meant that in many instances educators would not let learners register unless they were very sure that the learner would pass, and thus, they argued that that the examinations were being used to exclude people from the system.

Some participants felt that Umalusi was over-emphasizing the need for specifying curriculum, which they thought would be a step backwards from the gains of outcomes-based education, although they agreed that it was important to look critically at the use of site-based assessment. Others thought that centrally prescribed and regulated syllabuses would be very helpful, but that they should not be too rigid.

The formal/non-formal/informal education and qualifications

Much discussion at the colloquium returned time and again to a debate about formal, non-formal, and informal education for adults. The notion of differentiated provision, and accordingly, differentiated regulation, was emphasized by many participants. However, some participants also emphasized the need for co-ordination across different kinds of provision. One argued that we should start by looking at what is similar, instead of labouring the differences.

Formal, non-formal, and informal education provision were all seen as important. Adult education was seen as having various aims, including assisting adults to obtain qualifications, to raise literacy and numeracy levels, and to alleviate poverty, and create jobs and employment. However, some participants argued that adult basic education is unlikely to lead to employment in a society with very high levels of unemployment, and that it should be valued for other reasons.

It was argued that South Africa needs to look more closely at the tensions between formalizing provision, and what should perhaps fall outside the formal frame. The value of qualifications was contested. One delegate argued that worker education is about building the capacity of organizations. Offering individuals credits puts them on a career path, which can undermine organizational capacity building. Further, it was argued that the system of formal assessment and accreditation poses difficult dilemmas for many organizations. Even university accreditation increases dropout rate. 90% of learners are in informal work, and it is a huge challenge for unions to organize casual workers. In the extended public works programme logistics is a special problem—getting people to the training when it is happening is difficult. The workers are largely employed, and in the social sector they are working as volunteers, which is even more difficult.

Qualifications and certification were a major issue in this debate. Some participants argued that people want to get recognition for what they have learnt, regardless of whether this is classified as formal or non-formal, while others were vehement that we should be less obsessed with formal qualifications, and that there are meaningful alternatives. Passionate arguments being made to the effect that focusing on qualifications meant that the needs of adult learners outside of the system were being ignored, and that regulatory bodies need to think of people who don't want qualifications.

The key questions that emerged in relation to qualifications were:

1. What kind of qualifications?
2. Who should issue them?
3. How could articulation be formulated?
4. Who designs curriculum? Who designs qualifications? What is the relationship?
5. How can we standardize?
6. What are the pitfalls of standardizing and not standardizing?

One participant argued that whole qualifications should never have been the starting point in adult education, where credits and credit accumulation would have done

better. They referred to the ‘supermarket basket model’ (accumulation of credits over time), which seemed to have broken down, but which was better if the difficulties of implementation could be overcome. Many disagreed with this view. The point was made that within the formal context, the pathways (even to credit accumulation) are intrinsically so complicated and include so many barriers and preconditions that we are not able to really massify the supply of them. We need to reach those who have no access to ‘supermarket’ (i.e. accredited) provision. A pre-ABET definition might help in terms of helping adults to take their first steps into the system. Adult education around the world, some argued, is not certification bound. What you take home from an organized programme is what you get, not a certificate of currency. The exchange value is not necessarily the end goal of all kinds of learning. It was also pointed out that Umalusi does offer certificates for individual subjects, so there was in fact a credit accumulation model in the current system.

There was considerable discussion about the GETC in specific. Some argued that there is a need for a GETC that is foundational and facilitates learning. Many concerns were raised about the duration of the full GETC for adults, and the number of learning areas. One participant argued that this policy gives lifelong learning an ironic meaning for a 35 year old! It was pointed out that early in the NQF there were extensive debates about smaller numbers of exit-level subjects for ABET—doing the two fundamentals thoroughly was seen as sufficient by some. In addition, it was also pointed out that smaller qualifications should be possible within Saqa’s policies, and that credits from lower ABET levels should be able to contribute to qualifications. Saqa officials argued that the NQF could be interpreted more flexibly than what has been the case. Others emphasized that there is huge disappointment among learners about the complexities of the pathway to a GETC, and many speakers emphasized that current policies made it almost impossible for adults to obtain a qualification.

Many argued for the need to reduce the number of learning areas for GETC qualification. One participant felt this should be achieved through a process of recognizing prior learning of adults. It was also suggested that alongside the GETC at ABET levels there should be occupational standards and electives. These would not necessarily count directly towards the GETC, but learners may need these for various reasons, such as grading in the workplace. Most participants agreed that there was a need for a review of the current form of the GETC.

A few participants argued vehemently for a flexible non-unit standards-based curriculum, and the scrapping of learning areas.

Curriculum issues were also addressed, in the context of the formal/informal debate. For example, one participant argued that there is a need to integrate formal adult education with survival skills, especially in the work environment. Another participant suggested that young adults require specialized curriculum designed for schools dropouts, but older adults need less theory and more practical work through simulation for survival. Another argued that non-formal education was vital to deal the needs of rural communities, including with livelihood education, basic literacy and numeracy, HIV/AIDS, and small business management. A suggestion for informal education was the wide distribution of state-subsidized (or advertiser subsidized) easy-to-read material relating to health, public information, and so on.

Some participants felt there was sometimes a conflict between learners' interests and the interests of the country.

Policy problems and the NQF

There was fierce debate about outcomes-based education, the NQF, and the general education policy environment. One participant argued that the marginalized are more marginalized by the NQF, and went on to say that consultants are getting richer writing more and more unit standards, learning programmes, materials, and so on. Another argued, in relation to the NQF and outcomes-based education:

It's not about people not working together.
It's not about partnerships not happening.
It is about a flawed system

Another argued,

Throw OBE away! Paulo Freire would not approve. Focus on process,
not product

Others simply called for speedy resolution on the future of the NQF.

Language

There was some reflection on language issues, with various participants arguing that adult education should be available in the eleven languages, and others emphasizing that adult education should include more than one language, although it was acknowledged there is no quick fix in this regard.

There was an unresolved debate about the extent to which language courses should be standardized or contextualized. One participant argued that the IEB should work with the Setas, to ensure that there were generic language courses across sectors. Others argued for the need for contextualized courses that were specific to each sector.

Concern was expressed about the quality assurance of language courses. For example, concern was raised that regulatory bodies were not engaging with the anomalies of having assessors for language courses register with bodies for which these areas are not their core business. While Setas seemed quite happy to register assessors for these 'fundamental' courses, it was felt that very often these assessors have subject matter expertise in technical areas, but not in languages.

The 'T' in ABET

Some participants commented extensively on how the 'training' component of ABET seems to have got lost, although others disagreed, arguing that adults need more basic general education, and not narrow skills training. A Chieta representative pointed out that they have established ABET learnerships. One participant said that access to training and qualifications through Setas was working in some sectors in rural areas, but it was still not reaching the unemployed. However, some participant felt that the requirement for literacy was preventing adults from acquiring skills, and one argued that money was 'thrown' at learnerships which were bypassing ABET. One participant proposed that the skills levy should be used to subsidize one day a week of ABET study throughout the year for full time workers.

A few participants felt that it was a problem to base adult education delivery on the needs of the individual, and rather, the needs of the labour market should dictate provision. Others disagreed with this, and felt that the system was already geared too much towards skills development, ignoring the emancipation of learners.

General

A few concerns were raised about educators in adult education. One participant emphasized the need for the Department of Education to standardize remuneration for educators. Another argued that the department should recognize educators with lower qualifications than was currently the case. It was felt that there was some degree of lack of alignment with the educator training and the curriculum that they were expected to deliver. Concern was also raised that some providers of core and elective programmes seemed to think they could teach and assess language and mathematical literacy without the required subject matter expertise.

Questions were asked about the role of schools and FET colleges in ABET provision, as well the options available for young people between fourteen and seventeen years of age who had not had any education.

There was clear tension in the sector between large and small providers. Representatives of small providers argued that Setas make policy decisions regarding ABET that are based on the ‘power of influence’ of larger providers—who squeeze out small providers in the provinces, and charged exorbitant fees. This was seen as unethical. Large providers rejoined that they were able to ensure quality, and that many small providers were fly-by-nights or lacked capacity. There was some debate about the registration of private individual providers with the Department of Education.

One participant suggested that instead of maintaining a notion of using volunteers to train in ABET, the government should use volunteers to raise funds. These volunteers could go out in the streets fundraising—a job, it was argued, which does not need sustained expertise—so that the departments can get a budget for a planned literacy intervention with (paid) professional expertise and local materials.

In general it was agreed that the question we face in South Africa is how to dramatically improve the quality and quantity of education available to adults. There will always be a need for a balance—between relevance, the needs of communities, and so on, and a recognition that the learner’s wants and the demands of the qualification are not necessarily the same thing.

In addition to the lively discussion that ensured throughout the colloquium, information was shared about different programmes and organizations that participants came from, as well as materials and resources that they had developed.

Section Seven

Closing reflections

Peliwe Lolwana, Umalusi

Peliwe Lolwana began her informal closing remarks with an admission that she did not feel confident that her response would meet the expectations of Umalusi raised by the discussions in the colloquium. She noted that Umalusi is only mandated to carry out specific functions—the organization cannot be the saviour of adult education, it is a ‘small patch’ organization with limited resources. As set out in the annual report, 55% of Umalusi’s income came from Senior Certificate fees, while only R20000 of R10 million (or 0,2%) came from the ABET GETC. She stressed that demands on Umalusi must take the issue of resources into account. While she could outline what Umalusi can do, further action will be up to the sector.

Umalusi wants to see an adult education system that stretches over and straddles formal and non-formal education and training, skills creation and so on. Provision must be a mosaic that honestly and fairly tries to address varied needs. She also pointed out that many of the participants would not be there if all we had had was contextualized learning. We send our children to schools to teach them beyond our own contexts. She reflected on how, in her own life, it was reading that took her beyond the horizons of a village in Transkei—a gift she would like to see shared as widely as possible, not limited by merely contextualized learning.

Umalusi wants to regulate in a way that is supportive. But there is a logic to educational systems. Regulatory bodies cannot have their eyes on every provider at all times. There has to be a level of trust in a number of different elements to ensure quality. There’s a semblance of the pattern even in the poorest system. There are points for intervention—the Matric examination, for example, is only once in twelve years in a learner’s life, and does not test everything he or she has ever learnt. We have to choose the critical moments in a learner’s life for evaluation. We need to

calculate the risks. Quality assurance measures have to be put at a distance, otherwise they are unsustainable.

At the FETC level we have a National Senior Certificate (NSC) (General) and we're going to have an NSC (Vocational). Umalusi has been looking into the question of having adult versions, and has done a lot of work with the ASECA model. By 2008 the aim is to have a framework that absorbs it.

Lolwana further noted that higher education is a demanding sector, with valid reasons for these demands. It has a right to demand a second opinion on standards through Umalusi certification. She also said that Umalusi would strive to achieve quality at GETC levels. The issue of the assessment of multiple qualifications linked to vocational requirements is being discussed with the departments of education and labour.

Our accreditation system is very closely linked to registration by the departments. Umalusi is setting up a process for registration with the GET branch to start carrying out registrations. After that Umalusi can take off with the accreditation.

Once these processes are underway, they require a centre to be accredited. There is a definition of what needs to be put in place. Umalusi's work focuses on institution or centre accreditation, and it cannot look at all the contextualized programmes. Examinations are the only way in which quality can be assured; otherwise we are all setting ourselves up for failure. There are too many programmes to approve. The examination is the essential test.

She went on to say that Umalusi would probably classify emerging and established providers, so that it can support the emerging providers. There's no issue around profit or non-profit organizations, as we are all walking the same path. For accreditation purposes, Umalusi will look at how provision has been organized and managed.

As regards the GETC, she said that it is encouraging to realize that the numbers of people entering the GETC are increasing. While the situation is not as bleak as people perceive, it is still a cumbersome qualification, and Umalusi is looking at an alternative scenario with the Department of Education.

Lolwana observed that, while political lobbying is an option, providers should organize themselves and collaborate in order to make representations to more bureaucratic structures.

In closing, Lolwana said that Umalusi would fulfill its statutory responsibilities in reporting on and investigating the quality and variety of adult examinations. While there were no plans at present to hold another colloquium, Umalusi was always open to hearing from providers. Although the boundaries of Umalusi's interventions are clear, she expressed the hope that what had been discussed at the colloquium may help us all to start steering in different ways to 'beyond ABET'.

Appendix A

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