The state of national curricula for Adult Basic Education & Training

Letting a thousand flowers bloom or a disaster of decentralization?

An Umalusi research report

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UMALUSI COUNCIL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN GENERAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

37 General Van Ryneveld Street, Persequor Technopark, Pretoria
Telephone: 27 12 3491510 • Fax: 27 12 3491511 • info@umalusi.org.za

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This report was written by Heidi Bolton and Stephanie Matseleng Allais.

INTRODUCTION

Umalusi has a statutory obligation to monitor the standards of qualifications, curricula, and examinations. There is much concern about 'standards' in our education system, particularly focused on the Matric certificate, and Umalusi has conducted much research into this area (Umalusi 2004; Umalusi 2006; Umalusi 2007a). The same degree of attention needs to be focused on lower levels of the education system. The research therefore aimed to examine the standards of the curriculum offered to adults within General Education and Training—the equivalent of grade 9 in the school system, or level one on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Umalusi also intends to conduct research into the school system at this level.

Despite the obvious need for various forms of non-formal and responsive adult education, Umalusi's mandate is predominantly focused on the formal delivery of adult education. How formal and non-formal education relate to each other, and the challenge of accreditation for organizations providing non-formal education, are important issues, but beyond the scope of this research. This research focuses, therefore, on the formal education system, but considers aspects of non-formal provision where relevant.

Structure of this report

This report is divided into four sections. The first provides provides a very brief look at some of the literature on standards and adult education, and the current state of adult education, including plans for a national literacy campaign. The second section starts by sketching the research questions and aims of the study. It then outlines the methodology and explains the processes followed in assembling curriculum documentation for the different types of ABET qualifications. The third section of this report describes how qualifications and the intended curriculum for ABET qualifications are currently constituted. Descriptions are broad, to give the reader an overall picture of the curriculum landscape. Challenges faced in delivering ABET, as expressed by provincial ABET officials and private providers interviewed for this research, as included. Finally, the report concludes with some recommendations for the revision of the formal ABET qualifications and curriculum system.

1. STANDARDS AND ADULT EDUCATION

Standards traditionally have to do with levels of difficulty in education systems—the breadth and depth of curricula in different knowledge fields. But, in a context in which it is generally acknowledged that education in the ABET sector has largely failed adult learners in terms of their needs for literacy and numeracy, and opportunities for further study and to advance life chances, enter the mainstream economy, and enhance personal life skills, talking about standards is very complex. Standards must also relate to the appropriateness of the curricula being offered to learners. It is necessary, therefore, to examine adult education and training

more broadly first, in order to reach some understanding of how standards can be understood in this context.

Walters (2006) suggests that 'adult education' tends to imply either personal development for the middle classes or literacy and basic education for the poor. She sees 'adult learning' as more broadly embedded in the political, social, cultural, and economic processes of society. Rule (2006) argues that an adult in the context of adult education or adult learning should be seen as someone who is fifteen years and older, who has less education that one would expect from someone with Grade 9.

Standards also need to be understood in relation to the urgent need for skills in South Africa. It is worth noting here, in the context of the need and demand for ABET, and variable success within the sector, the great demand for capacity in some industry sectors in South Africa. An important example is the heavy reliance of the nation's economy and citizens' quality of life, upon civil engineering for the construction, transport, water and sanitation needed to reduce poverty. Yet this industry faces unprecedented challenges in terms of staff shortages: over 80% of consulting practices in the private sector are seeking experienced engineers; 50% seek technicians and technologists; and the shortages at all spheres of government are even more acute (Lawless 2005, p. 4-5). Private engineering provision has doubled its training force between 2000 and 2006, and will need to double it again over the next five years. Challenges for supplying staff to meet these demands—in this and other sectors—are a complex mix of demographic, historical, legal, economic, and educational factors. It takes many years and stages for professionals to reach the levels of competence required in the engineering industry, and there are bottlenecks at every stage in the process (Ibid: 8). Possibly the most serious of these is the first bottleneck mentioned by Lawless (Ibid), namely the need for higher numbers of learners with over 60% in Mathematics and Science at Grade 12 level. The importance of English grades in relation to those obtained for Mathematics and Science is also known. A percentage of ABET learners are potential candidates for supplying the skills needed in this context.

Clearly, the education and training needs of adults are very diverse. The Education Rights Project, in a submission to the Department of Education, argued that, contrary to the impetus of much government policy, including the NQF, there is no conclusive evidence that adults even want qualifications (Education Rights Project 2004). This makes it extremely difficult to develop a notion of what standards in adult education should be.

The current state of adult education

The current state of adult education in South Africa is, despite many policy intentions and interventions, can only be described as dire.

Provision of adult education within the state system is generally allocated less than a percentage of the education budget, and various commentators express despondency about levels of provision. Baatjes and Mathe (2004, p. 407) describe public adult learning centres as 'predominantly dysfunctional institutions with few or no administrative and management systems', and go on to argue that 'the instability of these institutions is compounded by high attrition rates, deterrents to participation, and a high turnover in educators'. Walters (2006) argues that there has been limited progress in terms of increase of delivery, aggravated by a loss of capacity within community based organizations.

Other providers of adult education include the Departments of Labour, Correctional Services, Health, and Water Affairs, and Walters (2006) argues that there are a range of adult learning activities in different areas of life which show that there is a wide range of vibrant activities. As Walters concedes, this broad notion of learning is very hard to evaluate, as the programmes and activities are diverse and hard to delineate.

As Baatjes and Mathe (2004) argue, much adult education in South Africa prior to the democratic elections in 1994 was underscored by a radical tradition for which the idea of social change was a foundational concept: 'the socio-economic and political system that produces and perpetuates conditions of inequality is unjust and must be changed' (Baatjes and Mathe 2004, p. 393). Adult education in this tradition is 'not just a process of imparting and acquiring knowledge … but is a political process of raising critical awareness of injustice' (Ibid.). This approach, they argue, was prominent in non-governmental organizations and activists in higher education. However as Baatjes and Mathe emphasize, this type of provision was non-formal, 'revolutionary, and inclusive' (Ibid.). They argue that there is a tension between this type of adult education and what they call 'instrumentalist' adult education (Baatjes and Mathe 2004, p. 394). The instrumentalist approach, which emphasizes the role of adult education in improving productivity and leading to employment opportunities for adults, started to become prevalent around the transition to democracy, within business and labour groupings involved in the reform of training policy. Baatjes and Mathe argue that instrumentalism permeates government educational policy, programmes, plans, and strategies.

With the advent of democracy in South Africa, and the introduction of outcomes-based education together with the National Qualifications Framework, came the possibility for adults of receiving credit for learning already achieved, and continued quality-assured lifelong learning. It was generally thought that the unit standards and outcomes associated with this system would enable the progressive education that the adult education community needed—through enabling flexibility, but at the same time ensuring formal recognition of learning.

The Department of Education attempted to create policies which would enable delivery of adult basic education and training which is 'flexible, developmental and targeted at the specific needs of particular audiences and ideally, provides access to nationally recognized certificates' (Department of Education 1997).

Between 1998 and 1999 qualifications and unit standards in eight sub-fields of the NQF were developed and registered (Baatjes and Mathe 2004). In 1999, the first certification of adult learners took place, by the then South African Certification Council (Safcert), the predecessor of Umalusi.

In 2001, the Department of Labour launched the National Skills Development Strategy, which aimed at raising the basic educational levels of all workers, with a specific target that 70% of workers would have a General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) by the end of 2005 (Baatjes and Mathe 2004). Baatjes and Mathe point out that this target is easily achievable without altering literacy rates, as employers simply choose to employ those with qualifications.

Baatjes and Mathe (2004), in line with Muller's (2004) arguments about the school system and the NQF, discuss some challenges for the 'centralization' of adult education through the

NQF. They cite, amongst other factors, the institutionalization of adult education through the public adult learning centres, the employment of school teachers on a part-time basis as adult educators, the development of the unit-standards based qualification, the delivery of a national learning programme consisting of combinations of learning areas, and the assessment system, through Umalusi, which mimics the school system. They criticize the way in which public adult learning centres have become 'schools' for adults, assuming that adults' needs are similar to those of children, and argue that the 'pre-packaged curriculum being taught in public adult learning centres reflects the categories of formal schooling (Baatjes and Mathe 2004, p. 414). Rule (2006) also criticizes the formal system as not catering adequately to adult's needs, and emphasizes the need for alternative modes of delivery including building social movements, linking basic education to livelihoods, linking adult education to democracy education, and family literacy programmes.

Government policies appear to have attempted to address these problems. The idea of unit standards was specifically part of this attempt to ensure flexible and incremental delivery. The skills development strategy is an attempt to link adult education to livelihoods. Despite these and other policy intentions however, the policy environment has not been sufficiently supportive of adult education to ensure its success. One clear indication of this lack of success is the very low rate of attainment of qualifications by adults without formal schooling (Aitchison 2003; Baatjes and Mathe 2004).

The high drop-out rate of ABET learners is widely reported (Aitchison 2003) and the inadequacies of the system and of provision are widely discussed (Baatjes 2002; Aitchison 2003; Rule 2006). In the past five years about 18 000 adult learners have signed up for SAQA qualifications under the authority of Setas (information provided by SAQA, 01/11/2007). In contrast, about 60 000 registered for ABET courses at public adult learning centres in 2006 alone (Department of Education 2006, page 5). Of these learners, just over half enrolled for the examinations. While the pass rate for indigenous languages is relatively high (generally between 68.8% and 98.3%, with a couple of outliers in the years 2004-2006), the pass rate for other subjects is far lower (between 51.2% and 53.9% for English; between 18.3% and 40.2% for Mathematical Literacy and Mathematical Sciences; and between 31.3%-35% for the Natural Sciences in the same period, for example)(Ibid.). In this same year (2006), about 20 000 adults enrolled for IEB ABET exams for Communication and Numeracy (information supplied by the IEB, October 2007). The pass rate for Communication varied between 52.3% and 81% over the years 2002-2006, and for Numeracy between 40.2% and 65.8% over the same period (Ibid.). According to some of the providers interviewed, over 200 000 adult learners, assisted by their employers, do modularized courses through individual private providers (see Appendices 4 and 5 for the sources of these figures). Records for pass rates for these learners were not available at the time at which this report was written.

Clearly, there are serious problems with provision, uptake, and achievement. In addition, Baatjies and Mathe (2004) argue that Setas have created barriers to education and training, because of their bureaucratic regulatory systems. As the Singizi Seta Review (2007, p. 18) points out, the unrealistically broad and complicated mandate, and conflicting objectives of equity and growth faced by Setas, is not matched by capacity within these institutions. This report notes that a significant number of Setas have not been able to implement some crucial institutional mechanisms; many have not developed the capacity to facilitate allocation of

skills development funds efficiently, and have struggled to fulfill their quality assurance functions (Ibid, pp. 22, 102-119).

It is worth noting that this supply-related crisis exists in the context of a demand-related crisis: as a recent HSRC report entitled *Human Resources Development Preview* (November 2007) claims, education and training cannot keep up with the needs of South Africa's growing economy.

Basic literacy

In 2000 the Department of Education launched the South African National Literacy Initiative, which targeted 500 000 learners (out of an estimated 3 million) in the first year of implementation (Baatjes and Mathe 2004). Baatjes and Mathe (2004), Baatjes (2002), and Rule (2006) enumerate the failures of various attempts at mass literacy campaigns. They attribute the failures of these government initiatives to what they describe as the state's neoliberal orientation which has predominantly seen adult education as an expense, and not as an investment in social development.

The Department of Education has now planned a new mass literacy campaign to reach the 4.7 million who have never been to school, and the further 4.9 million who dropped out before reaching the seventh year of school, and are considered functionally illiterate (Department of Education 2007). The plan is described by the Department of Education as based on similar campaigns in Cuba, Brazil, and India, and is designed to involve several government departments (Ibid, pp. 13, 15). Outcomes to be achieved include (Ibid, p. 14):

- Reading, writing, and calculating in a sustainable and functional way;
- Alphabetization, functional literacy concentrating on mother-tongue literacy, basic number concepts, and arithmetic operations in everyday contexts;
- Contribution to capacity to function in society in an empowered way that helps individuals to know their rights and responsibilities as members of that society;
- Retention of literacy after the campaign has ended.

Since it is intended that there should be no false dichotomy between initial literacy and post-basic literacy/ adult basic education (Department of Education 2007, p. 5), and since there is an attempt with the campaign, to "strenuously try to link with the various congruent programmes" (Ibid, p. 13), it is worth looking briefly at the initiative here.

The current Mass Literacy Campaign has been designed with specific organizational principles. First, it will be governed by an inter-ministerial committee and be autonomous from existing line functions, but will span and could include representatives from several government departments, trade unions, the business sector, various civil society organizations, and educational institutions. Nine provincial committees will be chaired by the nine MECs for Education. The Campaign's organizational structure will thus have five levels of operation: national, provincial, district, local, and site.

Second, it is intended that Campaign receive extensive support through both digitization and research. A computer network is to be set up to support the "…gear up, development, delivery, and monitoring of the literacy content and campaign…" (Ibid, p. 17). The committee will include representatives from South African Higher Education institutions

and the Human Sciences Research Council, amongst others, to help ensure accurate collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Ibid, p. 20).

Third, there are clearly defined models for curriculum, delivery, and materials development. Curriculum is to be designed on the basis of a single research-validated methodology, according to set principles. Assessment is against specific unit standards. Instruction is face-to-face, supported by media. Instructors will be supported by training and special needs committees at national and provincial levels; district literacy advisors and co-ordinators; and co-ordinators at local level, each of whom will support groups of tutors who do the actual instruction. Learning and teaching materials will be developed according to specification, "…using the best expertise available in South Africa, and where necessary, Cuban consultants…" (Ibid, p. 19). The SABC is supposed to play a critical role, by producing video material which can be broadcast nationally.

Since literacy is most likely to be sustained if there are post-literacy educational programmes, there is a need to revamp the provision of adult education (Ibid: 14). There is also a need to consider the specific challenges faced by the current Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) system, in their own right.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS FOR THE REPORT

This research was initiated to attempt to answer the question*: what is the standard of the intended and examined curricula for adults in the GET band?* However, before an attempt could be made at answering this question, a prior question had to be asked: *how are curricula available to South African adults in the General Education and Training (GET) band constituted?*

The original intention was to start with a clear description of how the curricula are constituted, and then proceed with an investigation of the standards of curricula and examinations in particular learning areas, and how the curricula prepare adults for Further Education and Training (FET). However, the answer to the first question made it clear that it was not possible to answer the second question; given the multiplicity of curricula currently in use in ABET, it is impossible to make clear judgements about the standards of curriculum. This report therefore reports only on how the curriculum is constituted and made available, and the effects of the particular system currently in operation.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESSES FOLLOWED

This research comprised an overview by Umalusi of curricula available to adults studying at ABET Level 1.

ABET provision has been grouped into two categories:

- The GETC issued by Umalusi, and offered by the Department of Education through public adult learning centres, and examined by the Department of Education, or, offered by private providers, examined by the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). This

qualification aims to provide general education and training and potentially lays the basis for further education and training.

- The industry-related ABET qualifications under the authority of Setas. These are mainly obtained via private providers under the authority of Setas or the IEB. These qualifications prepare learners for specific occupations or a relatively small range of occupations, and are referred to as variously as certificates, basic certificates, or General Education and Training Certificates (GETCs) (SAQA 2007). Short employer-specific courses that fast-track learners to particular learnerships are also included in this category.

The process of establishing how the intended curriculum is constituted

This research consisted of three main components. First, attempts were made to gather documents which specify qualification composition and curriculum for each of the types of ABET provision.

For the Seta qualifications, documents for industry-related ABET qualifications at NQF Level 1 were sought on the SAQA website, and analyzed.

For the GETC issued by Umalusi, curriculum documents were sought for the curriculum as taught in public adult learning centres and for the curriculum taught under the auspices of the IEB in private providers. A list of ABET documents developed by the national Department of Education was created by Umalusi officials, and verified by ABET officials in the Department of Education. The documents were obtained from the Umalusi Resource Centre and officials in the national Department of Education. Attempts were then made via telephonic interviews to ascertain which ABET documents were being used in the nine provinces.

It soon became apparent that collecting documents was not a straightforward process. Thus, the second component was introduced—interviews with officials at different levels of the system.

When it emerged that different documents are being used across the provinces, and when follow-up calls were made, that different people within single provincial ABET directorates contradicted each other with regard to documents in use, efforts were made to triangulate within-province information: additional ABET officials within single provinces were interviewed until the information given was consistent.

Attempts were made to obtain all provincial learning programmes, which were not easily available as copies are not electronic, and there were often no spares. Five of the six provinces with provincial learning programmes provided these programmes for the review.

Provincial ABET officials were also asked about directorates across which ABET was spread, and areas they thought needed improving in ABET.

In the attempt to triangulate information supplied by provinces, efforts were made to telephonically interview the centre managers of 10 public adult learning centres in each province, with a view to finding out about ABET curriculum documents they obtained from provinces, and developed themselves. Four provinces provided public adult learning centre

contact details. Contacting public adult learning centres was not straight-forward and involved considerable amounts of repeated phone calls: contact details on provincial lists were often for schools which did not have readily-available contact details for the public adult learning centre managers; sometimes schools for which details were provided were not public adult learning centres at all. Centre managers were asked about which ABET courses were offered at their centres and the approximate number of learners currently registered for their ABET courses.

At least five public adult learning centres (those with numbers of learners between 50 and 2000 and offering the full range of GETC learning areas) in each province were then re-contacted and asked about which curriculum documents they were using. Attempts were made to obtain learning programmes developed by public adult learning centres.

In terms of private provision, a list of private ABET providers was obtained from the IEB, and the managing directors of ten of the largest of these were interviewed telephonically about their ABET curriculum development processes and documents. It emerged that these providers develop course outlines and overviews rather than learning programmes. A difficulty here was that while the directors of the institutions were happy to name their documents and describe their processes telephonically, some wanted confidentiality regarding their courses, which they regarded as trade secrets.

Curricula for short courses

Curricula for what have been variously described as short courses, skills programmes, non-formal programmes, needs-based courses, enrichment courses, or ad hoc courses were not specifically sought in their own right. Some were mentioned by interviewees in the process of looking for GETC documents, and they are thus mentioned briefly in the findings below. Although some attempts were made to obtain documentation for some of these courses, this was difficult, particularly for courses developed to meet the needs of large clients such as private businesses and parastatal institutions, for groups of adult learners in their employ, as providers were reluctant to submit their material.

3. FINDINGS

All the qualifications currently available for adult learners are unit standards-based. The assumption behind the unit standards model is that providers develop their own curriculum, which enables learners to achieve the outcomes stipulated in the unit standards (SAQA 2000b; SAQA 2000a). This means that there are no formally stipulated curricula attached to any of the current ABET qualifications. For the Seta qualifications, the unit standards are the only mechanism which signals the intended curriculum. For the Umalusi GETC, there is a complex and confusing range of documentation which are aimed at supplementing the unit standards in representing the intended curriculum. These documents vary across provinces and public adult learning centres.

In the model of qualifications and curriculum adopted through the NQF in South Africa, learning outcomes are specified at the level of the qualification, but no national curriculum is specified—in other words, there is no syllabus, or other such document which specifies the intended curriculum. The specifications in the qualification are supposed, however, to

specify the standard to which the curriculum should be taught and assessed. Umalusi has elsewhere suggested that this is a problematic model (Umalusi 2007b). The findings here reinforce this argument—the specifications in the qualifications do not seem likely to set standards, and have instead led to a complex proliferation of documents. Because of the role that qualifications play in this system, the discussion below starts by looking at qualification documentation in general, and then considers curriculum specification afterwards.

The qualifications under the auspices of the Setas have no centralized assessment; each provider develops its own learning programme, and its own assessment. We did not investigate further as to how Setas quality assure and certify these programmes, but earlier research by Umalusi (Umalusi 2007b) suggests that some Setas issue certificates for qualifications offered by accredited providers, and some accredit providers, who then issue certificates. This research also suggests that there is very little quality assurance of assessment standards, and that they are likely to be highly varied.

The qualification issued by Umalusi is certified on the basis of learner performance in a centrally set examination (set either by the Department of Education or the IEB). As such, it is possible to comment on the standards of the examined curriculum. However, because of the problematic state of the intended curriculum, and because of the incredibly low learner numbers, it was decided that a detailed evaluation of the standards of the examination would not be useful at this stage.

QUALIFICATIONS

The SAQA *General Education and Training Certificate* (2001) policy document spells out the requirements of the GETC. This document includes details of SAQA's definition of a qualification, articulation, integration, a GETC typology with rules for accumulation of credit and combination, liaison with Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies, rules for learners not meeting requirements to be awarded, maintaining the integrity of the GETC, and recognition of prior learning. All the GETCs available for adult learners, both the industry-related qualifications under the auspices of the Setas, and the GETC issued by Umalusi, conform with the stipulations of this policy document.

Seta Qualifications

SAQA NQF Level 1 (ABET Level 4) qualifications available on the SAQA website (www.saqa.org.za, visited 23/08/2007) are all documented in comparable formats and the ways in which they differ are therefore clear. These differences could affect the quality of the qualifications since they relate to aspects such as the degree to which the qualifications are internationally comparable and the extent to which they articulate with other qualifications. Each has a title and SAQA identification number, and is contextualized in one of 12 learning fields into which SAQA has divided the NQF. The formatting of each is under identical sub-headings. Each of the sub-headings is bolded in inverted commas below, and the way in which entries differ is noted.

- The **"Purpose and rationale of the qualification"** is given, detailing the characteristics of learners for whom the qualification is suitable, what it provides, and potential opportunities for those who obtain it. Purpose descriptions differ in their relative emphases on access for those outside the field, or on further training for those already in

the field; and on specific skills versus laying the basis for further education and training in the field.

- This description is followed by **"Learning assumed to be in place and recognition of prior learning"**, a brief list of course requirements and prior learning for which learners can obtain credit. Requirements range from "no specified prior learning", to Literacy and Numeracy at ABET level 3. In most but not all instances, there is mention of recognition of prior learning.
- **"Qualification rules"** are given in 25 of the 42 qualifications: these rules are over and above general SAQA rules to which all qualifications must adhere.
- **"Exit level outcomes"** and associated **"assessment criteria"** are then listed, and more detail about these is provided in the constituent unit standards listed towards the end of the qualification description.
- General recommendations are made for **"Integrated Assessment". T**hese suggestions are phrased generally, so there is ample room for interpretation.
- Under **"International comparability"** descriptions of comparable qualifications in other parts of the world are provided. Attempts to ascertain comparability differ in the number of countries in which similarity was sought. Comparability differs in terms of the specific countries with similar qualifications, and the degree to which qualifications are comparable. Descriptions differ in their degree of specificity: some list internationally comparable qualifications, while others state generally that there are comparable qualifications.
- **"Articulation options"** are given where horizontal links to related courses on the same level, or vertical links to courses at higher levels, are pointed out. There are sometimes but not always articulation options. Articulation can be horizontal or vertical, or both. Descriptions here differ also in their degree of specificity: some give the particular qualifications for which the current qualification is preparation; others mention very generally, that the current course provides mobility across various fields and levels.
- Under **"Moderation options"** and **"Criteria for the registration of assessors",** general rules for assessment and moderation are given. Assessors and Moderators need to be more highly qualified for some qualifications than others; there are more assessment and moderation rules for some qualifications than others.
- At the end of the qualification, a list of **"fundamental, core, and elective unit standards"** is given. Details for each of these unit standards can be found on the SAQA website. The numbers of fundamental, core, and elective unit standards listed under qualifications differs widely, as do the credit values of individual unit standards. When looking at individual unit standards, it is apparent that their specific outcomes differ in the degree to which they are open to interpretation. The same can be said for assessment criteria: those with range statements are easier to interpret, although even here there is always room for differing interpretations.

A table showing more information for each of these categories for each of the qualifications on the SAQA website is available at www.umalusi.org.za, as an appendix to this report.

The 42 qualifications are spread unevenly across the 12 organizing fields of learning adopted by SAQA: the numbers of qualifications in specific fields vary between one and 14, and in some fields there are no qualifications at all.

These qualifications are generally worth 120 credits each. These credits are made up of a number of different unit standards, worth differing numbers of credit, and organized into SAQA's prescribed categories of fundamental, core, and elective.

The Umalusi qualification

Umalusi issues one qualification for adults: the GETC (ABET). This qualification is obtained by learners in public adult learning centres who write Department of Education examinations, and learners in private organizations who write IEB examinations.

The qualification is comprised of unit standards. Only one province was able to give the date of the unit standards being used, and the date given was 2002 despite the existence of newer versions of these standards.

Umalusi was unable to obtain any document which outlines the qualification as a whole, despite repeated discussions with a variety of officials in the Department of Education. The most official document obtained as a set of minutes of the Heads of Education Committee (HEDCOM), which *recommends* the development of a qualification. Umalusi officials then confirmed that these minutes were used to develop a set of *directives*, which Umalusi uses as the basis of issuing the certificate to adult learners. While both Department of Education and Umalusi officials suggested that there is a qualification registered on the NQF, the only qualification that broadly corresponds with that issued by Umalusi is listed on the SAQA website as quality assured by the Education, Training, and Development Practices Seta, and, the unit standards making up this qualification do not entirely correspond with those in the various documents of the Department of Education discussed below. This state of affairs in itself is reflective of the chaotic state of the intended curriculum for ABET.

It must also be noted that when trying to obtain ABET curriculum documents, there were difficulties at national, provincial and local levels. Not all national officials had copies of the national documents. Provincial officials within single ABET directorates gave differing information, and were not always sure of the exact titles, dates, and availability of documents. It appears that local people are using a variety of materials, and that these are not always what provinces have provided or intended to provide. In addition, there is considerable development of curriculum material: the national Department of Education upgrades and circulates draft documents from time to time; SAQA periodically updates and circulates unit standards; provinces develop extensive documentation around the interpretation of unit standards, and the development of learning programmes; many public adult learning centres develop their own learning programmes.

There are several other national Department of Education documents which underpin the GETC for adults. Four of these documents were obtained for this review.

The first of these documents is the *Department of Education Policy Document on ABET* of 2000, which gives general information such as background information for ABET, good practice, and levels and fields of learning.

The second and third documents are the *ABET Act No.52* of 2000, and the *Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band* gazette (Government Gazette No.6397; Vol. 402, of 1998), which has since been revised for Grades 4-9 in formal schooling, but not for ABET.

Finally, there is the *Learning Programme Guidelines for ABET*, an undated 76-page booklet distributed by the Directorate of Adult Education and Training in the national Department of Education. The latter booklet contains information described in broad terms, including broad definitions of ABET learning programmes; learnerships; learning pathways; notes on designing, planning, and implementing learning programmes; and assessment, with some exemplars of the types of activities that could be used for assessment.

THE INTENDED CURRICULUM: SETA QUALIFICATIONS

In terms of the intended curriculum for these qualifications, as discussed below, there are no prescribed intended curricula attached at a policy level to any of these qualifications. The only mechanism for specifying the intended curriculum is the unit standards. The assumption is that any provider can then design a course, teach a course, and/or assess a course, as long as the provider is accredited by a quality assurance body, the course is approved as one likely to lead to the specified learning outcomes, and the assessment gets moderated and verified against the learning outcomes by a quality assurance body (Umalusi 2007b).

Thus, there are as many curricula as there are providers, and each provider will have its own interpretation of the unit standards and qualification requirements. Umalusi was not able to obtain any of the actual learning programmes offered by providers, as they are regarded as trade secrets.

THE INTENDED CURRICULUM: THE UMALUSI-ISSUED GETC CURRICULUM

The GETC issued by Umalusi consists of 120 credits. These credits are, like the Seta qualifications, organized into fundamental, core, and elective categories. However, unlike the Seta qualification, the unit standards are also clustered into 'learning areas'. These learning areas mirror the 8 learning areas of the GETC offered in schools. This is illustrated in Table 1, on page 13 below.

Public provision

Similarly for this qualification, the unit standards, which specify learning outcomes, were assumed to hold the standard, and thus specify the intended curriculum. There is no national core curriculum for this qualification, as there is, for example, for the GETC offered in schools, or the Senior Certificate and new National Senior Certificate, and the old National Senior Certificate and new National Certificates (Vocational).

There is a small number of national documents which lend the intended curriculum a greater degree of clarity than the above documents, although guidelines within them remain broad and open to interpretation. Most of these documents are only aimed at ABET level four (level one on the NQF).

The array and versions of these national documents used by different provinces varies. Eight of the nine provinces said that they were using national *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* for each of the learning areas. In three of the provinces the date given for this document was

2002; one province had drafts of 2001 and 2003; the other provinces were uncertain of its publication date. Two of the provinces said that they had national *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* for 16 learning areas; the remainder of the provinces said that they had guidelines for "all learning areas"; national officials said that there have always been 23 learning areas. It was not easy to obtain a copy of this *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* document: provinces had no copies to spare, and national officials approached did not all have copies ready-at-hand.

Two provinces are using additional national documents not mentioned by other officials. One of these provinces claimed to be using *Internal Assessment Guidelines* (Draft) although this document was said to be part of the national *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* by national officials. The other of these provinces is using a document entitled *Quality and Assessment System for ABET* (1999). This document was not mentioned by national officials when the original list of documents was taken for verification, and was not available for this review.

The province not using the *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines*, is using another national document entitled *Developing Learning Programmes for ABET* (2000). This document was also not mentioned by national officials when the original list of documents was taken for verification, and was also not obtained for this review.

The document providing the clearest guidance was the widely-used *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines*: this ABET Level 4 (National Department of Education, 2002 (Draft)) document comes in A4 hard copy ring-bound form, and gives roughly 300 pages of national guidelines for summative and formative assessment for each learning area at ABET Level 4. The format and content of guidelines given for different learning areas although relatively clear, differs across learning areas, for instance:

- For summative assessment, examination formats are provided for all learning areas. For some but not all learning areas, a few examples of types of examination questions are included. Specification of content to be examined varies, and is sometimes unspecified.
- For formative assessment selected bits of content or context are listed for some but not all learning areas, but content—where provided—remains broadly specified and open to interpretation.
- Example formative assessment mark-sheets are provided for all learning areas. These recording sheets list specific outcomes and unit standards to be covered; there is little if any mention of content, and no elaboration of evaluation criteria. In a few learning areas example assessment tools such as checklists or rubrics are provided for individual projects: in the former there is space for recording "yes"/ "no" evaluation as to whether items were completed or not, and no space for grading of achievement. In the rubrics, elaboration of evaluation criteria is fairly specific.
- There are portfolio guidelines for some learning areas and where this is the case, sometimes there is elaboration of content to be assessed.
- For some learning areas, the essential curriculum details of unit standards are presented in an easy-to-read format: information provided here is almost exactly the same as that provided in the SAQA Unit Standards, but arranged in a way that lends more coherence to the curriculum, sometimes with additional explanatory notes. In learning areas in which unit standards are provided, unit standard titles are given together with bulleted associated specific outcomes. This list is followed by explanatory notes and assessment

criteria clustered by specific outcome; notes on range and special notes are also given here (see for example Language, Literacy, and Comunication section, pp.1-37). Sometimes brief summaries of unit standards and abbreviated specific outcome content are presented so that the whole curriculum can be seen on a couple of double-page spreads (see Mathematical Literacy and Mathematical Sciences section, pp.3-5). Sometimes tables are presented to link specific outcomes, assessment criteria, type of evidence required from the learner, and credit weighting (see Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMME) section, pp.3-8).

The above *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* are currently in use at provincial level, and in public adult learning centres. An updated hard copy ring-bound version of these Guidelines (national Department of Education *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines*, 2007 (Draft)), was circulated at a national ABET meeting for all provinces, in October 2007. This version of the guidelines, although further clarifying the intended curriculum, still leaves room for interpretation. Examples of clarification include a table delineating requirements for the GETC, which was not as simply and clearly expressed in any of the other documents reviewed. The table is reproduced below (See Table 1).

Table 1: Unit standards-based GETC explained in *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* document

Categories of learning	%	Credit
Fundamental - Language, Literacy and Communication (all 11 official languages) (LLC) - Mathematical Literacy (ML) (Selection to include unit standards from both subfields of learning)	30	20 16
Core - Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences (MMS) - Arts and Culture (A&C) - Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) - Human and Social Sciences (HSS) - Life Orientation (LO) - Natural Sciences (NS) - Technology - An additional language (Selection of unit standards from a minimum of four learning areas, chosen in relation to elective if learner is following that route, out of the specified learning areas)	45	54
Elective - Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (AAAT) - Ancillary Health Care (AHC) - Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) - Travel and Tourism (T&T) (Selection of unit standard from any of the 12 Organising Fields/ Sub-Fields of learning, including other electives developed for ABE)	25	30
Total	**100**	**120**

The learning areas in the above table, for which there are examinations, are offered at ABET Level 4.

The introduction to the 2007 *Learning Area Assessment Guidelines* goes on to describe, giving a fair amount of operational detail, how learners can be assessed, different types of assessment, the recording and reporting of assessment, and some exemplars of assessment tools.

Guidelines for individual learning areas are then clearly and systematically laid out in this 2007 document, each featuring the following components:

- a brief introduction explaining the purpose and rationale of the learning area
- weighting and credits for the required unit standards
- tables showing specific outcomes and associated forms of assessment and types of assessment tool for each outcome
- exemplars of types of site-based assessment and assessment tools, although they are more *names* of examples than *actual* examples.
- the format and mark rating of the exam, as well as the examples of types of exam question are shown in detail, often with a full exemplar exam paper

All of this information provides clearer guidance for designers of learning programmes than previous ABET documentation. There is still however potential for wide interpretation of these guidelines, and learning programmes varying greatly with respect to quality. Different provinces have responded to this absence of clarity by developing differing amounts and levels of guidance for public adult learning centres under their jurisdiction.

It appears that all nine provinces have developed their own ABET documents, some extensively so. Five of nine provincial ABET directorates have developed their own learning programmes, and a sixth has provided detailed guidelines with full exemplars of the types of activities suitable for learning programmes. Four of these provinces compel public adult learning centres in the province to use these programmes. In the fifth province, public adult learning centres are free to choose between using provincial learning programmes, and developing their own. All nine provinces have additional ABET documents for their public adult learning centres, such as *Learning Programme Development Manuals; Portfolios made simple; Facilitators Manual on Understanding the National Guidelines for Assessment*, and others (a summary of documents used by the provinces is available at www.umalusi.org.za as an appendix to this report).

Provinces make different amounts of documentation available to their public adult learning centres. In one instance a province provides learning programmes for all learning areas at ABET Levels 1-3, all eight learning areas at ABET Level 4; learning programmes for electives; assessment documents for ABET Level 1 and 2 Literacy and Numeracy, and Levels 3 and 4 *Structured Pathways* (specified clusters of learning areas); and generic training documents—and the centres use the learning area programmes provided. At the other end of the spectrum, a province provides a single policy guideline on assessment, and centres design their own learning programmes from the SAQA unit standards.

In provinces without provincial learning programmes, centres develop their own. Attempts were made to obtain as many as possible of the provincial documents discussed. There were difficulties in achieving this objective, as many of the documents were in hard copy form only, and officials did not always have full sets at hand. Further, it appears that documents sent have not always been complete: many are mimeos and seem disjointed and incomplete.

Provincial documents are presented by province below. A detailed description of the documents developed per province is available at www.umalusi.org.za as an appendix to this report.

The multiplicity of national and provincial curriculum documents is mirrored by the existence of a variety of local documents developed by public adult learning centres of variable quality. Four provincial ABET directorates provided lists of centres for their provinces, making contacting a selection of these centres and obtaining local documents possible. Of the four sets of responses from centres, information in three roughly matched that given by the corresponding provincial officials (summaries of responses from public adult learning centres to Umalusi interview questions are available at www.umalusi.org.za as an appendix to this report). In provinces where provincial learning programmes are provided, these are being used by most of the centres contacted. In the province with no official provincial learning programmes, many centres were nevertheless using what the department provided, as learning programmes.

Three individual public adult learning centres responded to Umalusi's attempts to obtain learning programmes developed at the level of the centre. One, in the Eastern Cape, sent an example of an integrated learning programme. This document is a single page. It gives the theme of the programme and links by using a table, specific outcomes, content, instructional strategies, learner activities, assessment criteria and strategies, and resources needed. A second centre, in Gauteng, sent eight learning programmes. These are between two and six pages long, and also in tabular form. They link just unit standard titles, specific outcomes, credits, and national (sic) hours. There are columns for activities and dates, but these are blank. None of these centre learning programmes provide enough information to facilitate evaluation of the quality of the programmes.

A third centre, in the Western Cape, appears to be offering learning programmes that are not part of larger qualifications, but are nevertheless accredited. These are dealt with in the section on enrichment courses below.

Private provision

The IEB has *User Guides* for *Communication in English* (ABET Levels 1-2; 3, and 4), and for *Numeracy* (for ABET Levels 1-2) and *Mathematical Literacy* (ABET Levels 3 and 4), and circulated to all its registered providers. These user-guides are intended to serve as guidelines in the development of curriculum material. All six user-guides follow the same format which is described briefly.

The 120-150-page user-guides are bound books with five sections each. While not being actual learning programmes, these books provide detailed and clear curriculum guidelines for all aspects of the curriculum apart from content. For example, the first section contains necessary general information about the IEB, NQF, outcomes, unit standards, assessment, and moderation. The next three sections cover examination requirements in detail, including examination and internal assessment exemplars together with memoranda and commentary with specific tips on how to assess in that particular learning area at that level. Exemplar question papers are given with explanatory comments on all questions in the exam paper, and five marked exemplar learners' answer papers. There are further sample tasks for typical exam tasks, with marking memoranda. Formative and summative site-based assessment is

explained with examples and marking memoranda, and elaborated assessment tools are provided. The last sections of the book consist of summaries of learning outcomes and assessment criteria in an easy-to-read format. Curriculum requirements are phrased clearly in terms of the *core competencies* within the unit standards—not as unit standards, and there are no unit standard numbers and formats. Each core competency and outcome is described in narrative text, and information on how to integrate and scaffold outcomes is provided. Examples in the books are sufficiently explicit to go some way towards providing models for learning programmes.

When nine of the selected large independent providers under the authority of the IEB were interviewed, it emerged that between them there were a variety of curriculum offerings, from the full range of learning programmes required for an ABET GETC, to single learning areas. Some private providers for example, offer just English and Mathematics in customized forms; others offer eight learning areas as well as various short courses. The curriculum development processes and documents are diverse (brief descriptions of the courses offered by the nine providers are available at www.umalusi.org.za as an appendix to this report).

Private providers have a range of curriculum documents—from course outlines to sets of teaching and learning materials for which there appear to be no separate curriculum documents. All of these providers use, and mentioned, the SAQA unit standards. None mentioned the IEB *User Guides* (2006).

Material submitted for review by private providers can be categorized in two ways. One type of material comprises process documents: these materials include items such as steps of curriculum development processes; the format workbooks should take; possible interests of learners that should be taken into account (for example, 'buying a car', 'consumer rights', 'loan sharks', and others); target audiences; things to bear in mind when selecting 'learning units'; and detailed notes on how to interpret the unit standards. Such information was given by providers who customize curricula for individual clients, and have no generic learning programme documents.

The second type of material comprises curriculum documents in outline or learning material (text-book) form. In all five instances in which curriculum documents were provided, coherence is provided via the thematic design of the courses—specific outcomes and assessment criteria are clustered thematically. The specific outcomes and assessment criteria are provided either together with subject-matter to be covered, texts to be used, and the scope of the content; or in separate sections. For instance in some examples, criteria are followed immediately by the associated content. In other examples, all specific outcomes are listed at the start, and the content modules follow. The relationship between outcomes and content is clearer in examples where the outcomes are followed immediately by associated content.

The degree to which content was specified differed between providers, as did the amount of content, and the degree to which content was grouped into conceptual categories.

Concerns raised by officials

When provincial ABET officials were asked for their views with regard to what needs to be done to improve ABET, many individuals answered similarly (a summary of points raised by

interviewed officials is available at www.umalusi.org.za as an appendix to this report). Five critical policy-related issues were mentioned and will be elaborated here.

- The first two challenges relate to the proliferation of curricula and lack of a specified intended curriculum. Six provinces expressed that they were having **difficulty interpreting unit standards,** saying that how to interpret the unit standards was not clear. There were two direct requests and four indirect requests from these provinces, for national interpretation of unit standards—national interpretation for clarity and common interpretation across provinces. These provinces called for a common understanding of content and context in particular learning areas. There is a desire and need for each unit standard to be "unpacked" so that everyone can agree on the associated content. The indirect requests for national interpretation include requests to work with other provinces; requests for national exemplars; requests for curricula in the form of the National Curriculum Statements; and requests for unifying learning and teaching support materials. Some provinces have taken steps to try to address this challenge; others have made suggestions, which are noted here. One of these provinces expressed knowledge of gaps in their curriculum, and lack of knowledge as to how to address these gaps: this province feels that it is working in isolation, and expressed a desire to be linked to other provinces. Two other provinces also mentioned experiencing a lack of direction, and have already taken co-operative steps towards monitoring what the other is doing. Two provinces asked for a simplification of terminology relating to the unit standards—it was pointed out that educators do not have the training to work with the unit standards. Two provinces asked for a syllabus with a format like that of the National Curriculum Statement, which was easier to read. That one province suggested the creation and use of specific learning and teaching support materials (presumably, a textbook) to create common understanding of content, indicates the seriousness of this challenge.
- The second challenge relates to the lack of an intended curriculum. Four provinces noted the urgent need for **good learning and teaching support materials.** It was noted that good textbooks would go a long way towards establishing common understanding of content within the learning areas. It was also noted that more resources were needed for adults to read, that ABET learners were not accustomed to a culture of reading, and that they needed to practice reading—with assistance at every step of the way. A need was expressed for exemplars for each of the learning areas, of different forms of assessment (projects, assignments, et cetera), actual examples of assessment tools, and textbooks.
- The third challenge points to the content of ABET curricula. Eight provinces drew attention to the **types of skills and levels of difficulty** of content and skills currently offered in ABET, and made suggestions based on extensive experience of ABET policy implementation in the field. These provinces drew attention to the relationship between theoretical and practical work. There were requests for both a splitting-off of "academic" from workplace skills, and for an increase in practical work- and life- related skills. At the academic end of this continuum, there was a request from a province to link ABET more closely to FET. At the other end of the spectrum it was pointed out that ABET learners were often failed Grade 12 learners seeking ABET certificates in the hope that these would assist them to gain employment. Seven provinces called for the introduction of more practical workplace-related skills. This view was echoed at the national ABET meeting of October 2007, by provincial and national ABET officials, and a SAQA

Commented [m1]: We need to include this in the references.

representative who suggested that this type of skill be included in the electives. Some of the examples of practical skills suggested by provinces include training for the jobs of dressmaker; food manufacturer; food producer; switchboard operator; electrician; travel and tourism executive. Other suggestions relate to more basic life skills such as how to use banking facilities and follow written instructions without assistance; and technology skills. Clearly the needs of ABET learners in different age cohorts differ, and an attempt to stem the high ABET drop-out rate would need to cater for these diverse needs in some way.

- Two further problems were mentioned: these challenges are not directly related to the curriculum, but aggravate difficulties with respect to curriculum delivery. Eight out of nine provincial responses mentioned improving the **conditions of service** for ABET teachers, who can only work and earn part-time. This condition has several implications for the delivery of the ABET. There is no permanent teaching body for ABET: institutions train educators, and then have difficulty retaining them—with the consequent drain of expertise. Further, there is great disparity between educators, with some being highly qualified, and others having the minimum of qualifications and needing specialized training in specific learning areas. Since educators are not allowed to teach in formal schools and ABET, the more highly qualified educators in ABET are continually lost to formal schooling. This is particularly problematic for learners given the lack of clear prescription for the intended curriculum—if one educator leaves, and another takes over, they may teach learners entirely different things.
- The fifth challenge noted by officials in two provinces relates to the **institutional structure of ABET;** officials requested a review of this structure. The institutional structure of ABET varies across provinces; ABET is typically located between one and three directorates. Provinces requesting the review were both structured with ABET across more than a single directorate. The officials expressed a need for a single directorate for efficient delivery. Needs for pilot ABET centres and more ABET curriculum advisors per province, were also expressed.

Interviews with a small sample of private engineering providers under the auspices of SETAs revealed different but related challenges to those mentioned by departmental officials. Challenges relate similarly to curriculum, quality assurance, and structures enabling delivery of the curriculum.

- Curriculum challenges are created by the **inadequacy of SAQA unit standards**. Many engineering-specific unit standards are irrelevant in their current form, and some essential content is entirely missing from the available array of unit standards. It is therefore possible for a person to receive a qualification without being in possession of the skills necessary to carry out the job for which the qualification pronounces him/her fit. Further, some engineering qualifications are needed, for which there are no, or only some, unit standards—and the need for these qualifications is recognized throughout the industry. Additional challenges arise with respect to fundamentals—in that many learners lack the requisite fundamental literacy and numeracy skills needed for progression in the industry. These challenges together with the unit standard system have resulted in a proliferation of courses: a particular job title (for example, "foreman") is no indication of learners' competences. There is general acknowledgement between those interviewed, that this training needs to be more consistent across providers.

- A second challenge noted is the inability of some SETAs to carry out their **quality assurance** functions. The reason given by the interviewed providers is the lack of technical expertise and technical expertise *infrastructure* of these SETAs. Consultative panels also lack the appropriate specialized input of qualified engineers.
- The third set of challenge relate to **structures enabling curriculum delivery**. It was originally intended for the current system, that learning programmes be created within the industry. This has not happened in a widespread way, largely because developing such programmes is an activity parallel to, but not directly affecting productivity, and is thus not viable for companies. The engineering sector is characterized by fluctuating cycles of productivity, company size, contract duration, regulatory requirements, and geographic mobility. Some 60-70% of the workforce is not permanently employed, and many workers are of necessity employed part-time. All of these factors mitigate against the provision of broad and deep education for workers by companies. It is extremely costly in terms of time and funds, to develop learning programmes and materials. A consequence of the current system is thus the development of viable short skills programmes written against specific unit standards, especially since courses can comprise any number, variety, and combination of unit standards. The inability of companies to afford **training provision based on levies** is also a challenge: small companies cannot afford to provide training; training is unevenly provided across medium-sized companies; it is only in large companies that training is really viable (these companies can spare individual workers for relatively extended periods of time). Under these circumstances even a levy raised to 3% will not facilitate training across the board. Some providers have formed Section 21 companies in order to provide desperately needed training. Some companies are of necessity providing training at their own cost, in order to gain the benefits of resulting skill levels. Difficulties have also been experienced with **learnerships**, the intentions of which are to provide on-the-job training for learners. Learners often do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills, and these inadequacies lead to struggles with job-specific content. Since learners are awarded learnerships for short periods, learnerships are short-term investments for companies – companies cannot afford to release learners for the relatively lengthy periods required for study. Once a learnership has been completed, it is difficult to find work placements for the learners and without these, the learning processes come to an end. An important point raised by the interviewees is the need for **specialized practical training sites** in the engineering sector: the example of a past house-building training centre was given. At this centre, parts of houses were regularly built and demolished, the bricks being "washed" for re-use. FET colleges are possible sites for artisan training; at present there is a lack of such sites.

In the course of interviews with private providers under the auspices of the IEB, the variability in the competence levels of ABET educators mentioned by public officials, was also noted. Many private providers felt that a considerable proportion of ABET educators were not able to scaffold the learning of ABET learners to the required levels, especially in Mathematics, Science, and English. With the ad hoc courses described above, these private providers have clearly successfully begun to address some of the gaps in public provision, especially around the introduction of practical workplace and life-skills-related skills. Without co-ordination at a higher level however, the possibility exists that some of these ad hoc courses may be disjointed and may not necessarily fit into bigger programmes or learning pathways.

SHORT COURSES

There are many ABET providers offering short courses. These range from unit standards-based skills programmes to needs-based courses offered by community-based organizations. Some public adult learning centres offer unit standards-based short courses, for which they have developed their own curricula. Businesses often employ providers to develop courses targeted at a specific need in their workforce; such courses may or may not be unit standards-based and accredited. The diverse range and large number of such courses made it impossible for them to be reviewed as part of this research. Nonetheless, it is clear that besides the need for formal education, there is a crucial role to be played by flexibly offered and developed courses.

4. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from this documentary review that the current constitution of the intended curriculum for ABET qualifications does not work well. Using unit standards as the primary mechanism to specify the intended curriculum has led to a radical proliferation of documents. This proliferation can be seen at all levels—national, provincial and local—and in all sectors, public and private. An important potential danger here is the likelihood that curricula will vary with respect to quality and usefulness, and the possibility of adult learners in wealthier contexts having access to qualifications higher in quality than those available to less wealthy learners.

Umalusi has elsewhere conducted research showing that there are serious problems with specifying outcomes in qualification documents, and not having prescribed syllabuses. Our research (Umalusi 2007b) shows that unit standards and outcome statements are open to a wide range of different interpretations, and that where there are no central examinations (as for language and mathematics courses which are currently offered as part of Seta qualifications) there are as many standards as there are providers. This current research does not go as far as making judgements about standards. What it does show, however, is that the lack of a prescribed syllabus or intended curriculum has led, in the case of the Umalusi-issued GETC, to an astonishingly confusing proliferation of supplementary documentation. What makes the Umalusi-issued qualification different to the Seta qualifications is that there are central examinations, offered through the Department of Education and the IEB. While this may be preferable to the situation of every little provider developing their own assessment, with the accompanying divergent standards that this will lead to, it is unfortunate as the examination may become the *de facto* curriculum. This is an unfortunate practice as teaching off an examination can be very narrow. It also means that educators get none of the support that they would get from a good syllabus document—for example, with regard to sequencing, pacing, methodologies, and so on. It is very disempowering for educators, who then are playing a constant guessing game in relation to the examinations.

It is interesting to note that one of the aims of unit standards (or an outcomes-based curriculum) was to introduce more democracy into the education system; it was believed that educators would have greater freedom to design their own curricula. However, because educators are unable to interpret unit standards, or interpret them in widely divergent ways,

layers of additional documents in fact at times have made the system highly authoritarian—as was discovered in this research. For example, it was found that four provinces compel public adult learning centres to use the learning programmes that they have developed. Giving educators a prescribed learning programme is far more authoritarian than the old system of prescribing a syllabus—with a syllabus, educators have a lot of freedom to design their own learning programme, but with clearly specified content and skills. This is an interesting irony of the failure of unit standards as a policy mechanism.

The creation of ABET is a remarkable achievement which takes cognizance of the legacies of South African history, and South Africa's ideal of full participation in the global economy. There is a need now to take all the strong points of this fledgling project forward by reviewing aspects which need refinement. Based on the multiplication of ABET curriculum documents evident in the documentary review; the expressed difficulty of creating learning programmes from unit standards; and the need for comparable appropriate curricula across provinces and within industry sectors, this report recommends that:

- **National ABET curricula** are created for all GETC learning areas and electives, by the National Department of Education in collaboration with provinces, subject experts, and representatives of business, labour, and civil society. These curricula should be modeled best practices for good syllabuses locally and internationally. There needs to be a single dated document for each learning area.
- **Centralized curricula** are created for industry-specific courses, by industry-specific experts in conjunction with Setas and their associated consultative panels. Quality assurance should similarly be carried out by Setas and their consultative panels, in conjunction with the appropriate experts. Industries have their own hierarchies of respected expert players, the collective input of which needs to be sought. If based on unit standards, the plans should also include elaborate specification of skills and content to be covered. There should ideally be a single dated document for each industry-specific course.
- **Good ABET learning and teaching support materials, based on the national ABET curricula,** are tendered from the best expertise available in South Africa, and screened nationally before being distributed to providers.
- **Assessment is standardized and centralized,** so that specific certification has specific and nationally recognized meaning. This requires national curricula in the case of the GETC, where the Department of Education or the IEB would be responsible for assessment, and centralized training plans in the case of industry-related qualifications, where the Department of Labour would be responsible for assessment.
- **Relatively informal, non credit-bearing but relevant courses of varying lengths should be encouraged and supported**. There may be instances in which such courses need to be accredited or quality controlled through, say, recognized professional associations, but there is also a need to create an enabling and supportive environment for courses which do not need to be accredited, quality assured, or certified.

Clearly, curriculum and assessment are not enough. The organization of ABET in provinces seems to need urgent review, in order to be consistent across provinces, and to be more efficient and effective. The delivery of ABET needs to be dramatically improved. Sites could include schools, FET colleges, community halls, tertiary institutions, and other specialized

delivery sites. A variety of delivery models and sites should be considered. Conditions of service for adult educators need to be reviewed, with a view to creating a permanent well-qualified ABET teaching force with fair remuneration and benefits.

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