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## Evaluating the role of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), in terms of fulfilling the need for literacy in English, in the private sector\*

### ABSTRACT

Although literacy efforts in South Africa were standardised and legitimised by the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework in 1995, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programmes are dwindling in numbers. Firstly, this paper seeks to position ABET within the National Qualifications Framework in a discussion of the principles of the NQF and the correlation between ABET and formal education. The way in which language is addressed in ABET is evaluated in terms of the unit standards which have been written for language and communication and the assessment thereof. Secondly, ABET in the private sector is discussed and its functioning according to the principles of the NQF is evaluated. The reasons why it is not flourishing in the corporate sector are investigated, as are the integration of education and training in Adult Basic Education. The opinion is expressed in this article that the success of ABET programmes or their failure to bridge the divide between education and training will determine how ABET is valued by industry. A case study from the private sector forms the basis for the discussion in the second part of this paper. Finally, recommendations are made for an alternative vocational ABET route which will enable ABET programmes to meet NQF requirements and the needs of industry for literacy in English.

**Key words:** Department of Education, ABET, NQF, SAQA, levels, unit standards, outcomes

The Department of Education considers the role of ABET to address three main problems (1997: 2–3):

1. political – to redress the inequalities of the previous education system;
2. economic – an integrated education and training system which provides access to further education or employment opportunities;
3. governmental – as part of the national strategy for human resources development, ABET should contribute to national economic growth.

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A conference entitled “ABET on Trial” was held in Midrand during November 2000, sponsored by the European Union and organised by Project Literacy. In the keynote address, Andrew Miller, CEO of Project Literacy, said that

[s]hrinking commercial interest in ABET is a reality. A decline in donor interest or increased donor fatigue is a reality! Donors have shifted their interests to other countries...Government tenders are infrequent ... and we are faced with a growing clientele who can't pay for the services they need! So we do acknowledge that ABET is in crisis (Project Literacy, 2001: 1).

This statement raises a pertinent issue: funding for ABET is a major concern. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) no longer have the donor support which has, in the past, allowed them to offer ABET programmes directly to the public. The majority of ABET programmes are aimed at employees in the private sector, and these are also decreasing in number.

The main concern of this paper is the reason for this decline in interest in ABET in the private sector, particularly since the private sector is largely responsible for the funding of ABET programmes at present. It follows that, should the private sector consider ABET to be ineffective, support for the ABET route will dwindle further and ABET will not be able to fulfil the function outlined in the opening paragraph of this paper.

This paper focuses on the adult literacy efforts (known as Adult Basic Education and Training – ABET) of the government and the private sector, following the first democratic South African elections of 1994. Prior to this, various literacy initiatives were run by the government and NGO's. In retrospect, these have been categorised as “lacking in direction, purpose and status...” (SAQA, 1997a: 3) and “fragmented” (Department of Education, 1996: 3). These literacy efforts can be viewed as part of the impetus for the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) within the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to ensure national standards. ABET was addressed within such a national framework to bring about integration, accountability, accreditation and status to previously disjointed initiatives.

The National Qualifications Framework can be traced back to educational talks in April 1994, in which key stakeholders in education and training; such as the former departments of education and labour, employees, providers of education and training, the African National Congress and others discussed a new vision to bridge the divide between education and training in South Africa. In 1995 (Government Gazette 16312) the White Paper on Education and Training was published and provided details as to how the South African Qualifications Authorities intended establishing the National Qualifications Framework which would provide for all learners in education and in training. The NQF would be responsible for establishing the structures and procedures to develop qualification and assessment criteria. This body would also act as watchdog over the quality of education and training provided. Learning at all ages and in both formal and non-formal educational environments would be acknowledged and accredited. Prior learning of the individual would be recognised and qualifications would become ‘portable’ by the standardisation of the NQF (this was legislated in the SAQA Act, Act 58 of 1995).

The first part of this paper will briefly position ABET within the structure of the NQF, while the second part will discuss ABET in terms of the private sector, evaluate whether or not it is functioning according to the NQF principles and examine the reasons why it is not flourishing in the corporate sector.

## **Provision for ABET within the National Qualifications Framework**

### **Principles and structure of the NQF**

The principles of the NQF have been embodied in the following key words:

**Legitimacy:** This system is representative of all groups of people who will be affected by the decisions of the NQF.

**Integration:** Education and training are viewed as part of the same process.

**Relevance:** Education should meet both the needs of individuals and the needs of the country in terms of economic development.

**Credibility:** Qualifications will be standardised and thus widely accepted.

**Coherence:** All learning should be seen as connected.

**Flexibility:** The NQF will provide various routes to obtaining the same end goal.

**Quality:** Standards will be continually set and monitored.

**Access:** More learners will have access to education and training opportunities at multiple entry points.

**Progression:** By gaining credits for various unit standards, the learner will be able to progress to other levels within the NQF.

**Portability:** Qualifications can be transferred between educational facilities and working environments.

**Articulation:** The NQF encourages movement between learning in an educational environment and the working environment.

#### **Recognition of Prior Learning:**

As previously mentioned, this entails being assessed for and given credit for previous learning and experience.

*(Act 58 of 1995; Phillips 1995)*

How language is taught in ABET programmes is largely prescribed by the outcomes accredited by the NQF. Behavioural competencies have been written as unit standards for language learning. In terms of these national standards there are four levels of ABET, which correspond with levels in the formal sector:

Level 1: Grade 3 (Std. 1)

Level 2: Grade 5 (Std. 3)

Level 3: Grade 7 (Std. 5)

Level 4: Grade 9 (Std. 7) – this is the General Education and Training Certificate (NQF 1)

Critical cross-field outcomes are the same for all levels of learning, namely:

1. Language is used to display problem solving and critical thinking.
2. Language is used in order to work **effectively as a team.**
3. Language is used in order to **organize and manage oneself.**
4. Language is used to collect and organize information.
5. Language is used to communicate effectively.

*(Government Gazette 18787, 1998)*

The unit standards on reading assume that reading, writing, speaking and listening are taught and learned in an integrated way.

### **Level 1–3 Unit Standards**

Below is an outline of the structure of the unit titles and specific outcomes for Level 1–3:

**Com 101, 201, 301**

**Title: Engage in a range of speaking and listening interactions**

Specific Outcome #1: Initiate and maintain conversation.

Specific Outcome #2: Ask for and give simple information, explanations, directions and instructions.

Specific Outcome #3: Make and respond to opinions and requests.

Specific Outcome #4: Express and respond to opinions and feelings.

Specific Outcome #5: Listen and respond critically to oral text.

**Com 102, 202, 302**

**Title: Read and respond to a range of text types**

Specific Outcome #1: Understand the literal meaning of a text.

Specific Outcome #2: Relate text to own experience and knowledge.

Specific Outcome #3: Interpret and respond critically to a text.

Specific Outcome #4: Use appropriate reading strategies to suit the text and the purpose of the text.

**Com 103, 203, 303**

**Title: Write for a variety of different purposes and contexts**

Specific Outcome #1: Select and present content appropriate to the writing task.

Specific Outcome #2: Organise and format text appropriately to the writing task.

Specific Outcome #3: Use language conventions appropriate to the nature of the text type.

Specific Outcome #4: Plan, draft and edit own writing.

A large number of service providers have designed their own programmes and course material to enable learners to meet the unit standards for Level 1 – 3 Communication in English.

**Level 4 Unit Standards**

The unit standards for Language and Communications represents 20 credits of a total of 120 credits required to obtain an NQF 1 qualification (the General Education and Training Certificate – GETC) and thus provide entry to NQF 2–4 (the Further Education and Training Certificate – FETC). Information from the Independent Examinations Board (I.E.B.) shows only 13 registered Level 4 service providers who have designed their own programmes and course materials to meet the Level 4 outcomes.

There is a distinct difference between the emphasis and layout of the Level 4 unit standards and the Level 1–3 unit standards. Whereas the Level 1–3 unit standards are categorised according to reading, writing, speaking and listening; the Level 4 unit standards treat reading, writing, speaking and listening in a more integrated manner, while unit standards seem to be loosely categorised according to functions of language or types of literacies.

The first two Level 4 unit standards reflect a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach with the focus is on viewing language as a tool that shapes society and constructs power relations therein.

**Com 001**

**Title: Show a critical awareness of language usage**

Specific Outcome #1: Identify and analyse the likely purpose, audience and source of texts.

Specific Outcome #2: Explain ways in which language is used to transmit and shape socio-cultural ideas and values.

Specific Outcome #3: Identify, analyse and respond effectively to the manipulative, ideologically-driven and biased uses of language and text.

Specific Outcome #4: Make inferences from texts.

Specific Outcome #5: Reflect critically on a writer's/speaker's point of view.

Specific Outcome #6: Explain, challenge and respond to attitudes towards languages and language varieties.

Specific Outcome #7: Produce a text to show a critical awareness of language.

#### **Com 002**

##### **Title: Engage with aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts**

Specific Outcome #1: Identify, analyse, evaluate and use literary and stylistic devices.

Specific Outcome #2: Give and justify opinions on texts.

Specific Outcome #3: Review opinions in relation to the opinions of others.

Specific Outcome #4: Relate text to own personal lives and lives of others.

Specific Outcome #5: Identify ways in which context affects meaning and understanding.

The third and fifth unit standards recognise specifically that English is important for academic purposes (EAP). Thus, not only is language for learning a general developmental outcome across all learning areas (reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively – DO2), but it was deemed necessary to write a unit standard to emphasize the importance of language as a tool with which to “access education, access information and literacies” (Com 003).

These information-processing skills are very important in preparing learners for Higher Education and Training. The outcomes lend themselves to assessment by means of a research project or assignment. This could be very useful in developing competencies, which will assist in studies beyond NQF 4. The problem with the fifth unit standard can be found in the assessment notes, which state that this unit standard does not need not be formally assessed, and should the learners undertake a research project, the results will not impact on the final assessment of learners. In addition, special consideration needs to be taken of the requirement for computer literacy in terms of developing these competencies in a computer-driven information age.

#### **Com 003**

##### **Title: Access, process, use and present information**

Specific Outcome #1: Identify the need for and aim of information.

Specific Outcome #2: Locate, access and select information.

Specific Outcome #3: Evaluate the accuracy, reliability and relevance of the information.

Specific Outcome #4: Categorise, classify, select and arrange information appropriately.

Specific Outcome #5: Develop reasoned arguments in the course of applying information.

Specific Outcome #6: Present the results of the information search and processing in an appropriate format.

Specific Outcome #7: Apply newly-acquired knowledge to life situations.

#### **Com 005**

##### **Title: Explore and use a variety of strategies to learn**

Specific Outcome #1: Use language for learning.

Specific Outcome #2: Take responsibility for her/his own learning and make choices about learning.

Specific Outcome #3: Identify different kinds of learning strategies and use what is appropriate to the task.

Specific Outcome #4: Use resources effectively to supplement learning.

Specific Outcome #5: Reflect on and evaluate learning strategies.

The fourth unit standard presupposes that by teaching learners an understanding of certain speaking and writing conventions, they will be able to communicate more effectively, and thus could be said to develop BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills).

#### **Com 004**

**Title: Use appropriate communication skills, conventions and structures for specific purposes and situations**

Specific Outcome #1: Identify the purposes of the interaction and choose an appropriate medium of communication.

Specific Outcome #2: Use format and conventions appropriate to the task.

Specific Outcome #3: Select and present content appropriate to the task.

Specific Outcome #4: Apply knowledge of language conventions to produce a text.

Specific Outcome #5: Use register and tone appropriate to the written task.

Specific Outcome #6: Plan, draft, edit and check a text.

Specific Outcome #7: Use register, tone and body language appropriate to the oral task.

The sixth unit standard should be seen in conjunction with number four. While the fourth unit standard focuses on using language conventions in producing verbal and written texts, this unit standard emphasises the identification of these conventions as a reading strategy (structural literacy).

#### **Com 006**

**Title: Demonstrate an understanding of discourse structure in texts**

Specific Outcome #1: Identify and interpret format, layout and typographical features of texts.

Specific Outcome #2: Know and apply conventions of different genres.

Specific Outcome #3: Identify and interpret the literal and inferred meaning of the text.

Specific Outcome #4: Demonstrate an understanding of the internal devices for cohesion and coherence in a text.

Specific Outcome #5: Identify and analyse visual features of texts.

These Level 4 unit standards do not make specific reference to listening skills, which are vital in terms of the learner's need for communication in his/her general communication environment, the workplace and the requirements of Higher Education and Training. Nor do they address occupational literacy as a specific unit standard, although Com 004 and Com 006 are most likely to be relevant in developing English for the specific purpose (ESP) of the work environment. The above evaluation suggests that these unit standards lean towards emphasising English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and would best meet the need of the learner aiming to enter the Higher Education and Training Band.

Furthermore, it is predicted that learners and facilitators might experience difficulties interpreting the standard at which these specific outcomes are aimed, as level descriptors are often vague. For example, Com 001, Specific Outcome 4, level descriptor 3 states that "meanings not stated directly in the text are noted". The extent to which this will be interpreted is difficult to ascertain.

This difference in format of the Level 1–3 and the Level 4 unit standards, indicates a 'gap' in the competencies and content required by learners who move from Level 3 to Level 4. This could

be attributed partly to the technical language used in the Level 4 unit standards which cause confusion and misunderstanding for Level 4 facilitators/tutors.

### **Level 5 Unit Standards**

There is no provision for attaining the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) through the formal ABET route. For this reason, there is neither an official Level 5 route or unit standards for such a level. The available outcomes are those used by ASECA (A Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults) to develop their Level 5 Communication in English learning programme. ASECA is the only institution offering an accredited course at FETC level which will assist adult learners who have been involved in the formal ABET programme, to obtain their FETC. Only a limited number of subjects are available through ASECA, and the adult learner will have to supplement these subjects by attending other institutions which offer subjects at NQF 4 in order to accumulate sufficient credits for the FETC qualification. The ASECA Level 5 programme is assessed by the I.E.B.

These outcomes are 'reminiscent' of the Level 1–3 unit standards as they are categorised according to listening, reading and writing skills. Although there is no specific category for speaking, this is covered under listening. The outcomes include categories of critical thinking skills, study skills, accessing information skills and life skills.

All ABET Levels are assessed by the I.E.B. by means of formal written examinations. Learners are assessed for all unit standards within a particular level at one sitting. Thus a credit will be obtained for the entire level of Language and Communication being assessed and not for individual unit standards (although each unit standard bears its own credits). A learner is assessed as competent in all unit standards for that level, even though all unit standards are not assessed in that examination. In addition the examination does not assess cross-critical outcomes. The researcher is of the opinion that a learner cannot be declared competent in a specific unit standard if he/she does not present evidence that all the requirements of that unit standard have been met in terms of range and cross-critical outcomes. In view of the above statement, an article written for the SAQA bulletin (1999: 5) bears consideration. This article states that,

... emphasis is placed on outcomes – specific and generic. The outcomes have to be explicit, transparent, distinct and separately considered.

Although the Department of Education's Directorate for Adult Basic Education and Training states that assessment should be based on both "*formative and summative judgements*" (1997: 115), this does not seem to be the case. Formative assessment would be in terms of continuous assessment of the learners' progress over a period of time whereas a one-time assessment based on an examination would be summative. From Level 3 onwards, learners are required to submit evidence for summative assessment in terms of oral performance and a project. These are, however, used as examination prerequisites only and do not form part of the learners' final marks.

## **ABET Within The Private Sector**

### **Case Study**

The researcher will use a manufacturing company in Alberton as an example of the role of the private sector in ABET. This company first initiated a literacy programme in 1995. It then became part of the formal ABET route in 1997. The main reason for the initiation of a literacy programme was to provide social upliftment to those workers who were previously denied access to education by the apartheid government. A secondary aim was to improve production by the development of literacy and numeracy skills which would enable the workers to perform their jobs effectively.

As previously mentioned, the private sector largely sponsored the adult literacy initiatives in South Africa since the start of the formal ABET route. Unfortunately, not all potential learners who are employed are enrolled in an ABET programme or have access to one; and very few opportunities exist for those who are unemployed and do not have a company to sponsor their studies. Thus access to such literacy programmes is largely limited to those employed in a company such as the one under discussion.

After thirty-two workers employed by the company wrote formal ABET examinations in 1997 with a success rate of 32% and 13 workers achieved a pass rate of 45% in 1998, the company used in this case study decided to discontinue its ABET programme. The reasons for this decision can be summarised as follows:

- The attrition rate: this was seen as a result of previous examination failures and a lack of adequate career counselling for ABET learners.
- Absenteeism: this was related to the demanding developmental stage of adult learners. Learners whose age group ranged between 30 and 60 years were seen to focus their time and energy on family and work commitments and had little time left for studying.
- The ABET route is a slow process and very often levels are repeated.
- Time constraints result in an exam-focused programme that is inflexible to the needs of the learners and their work environment.
- The predicted age for the qualification of some learners was close to retirement and it was suggested that alternatives to the slow formal route needed to be considered.
- There is often a lack of correlation between the academic potential of the learner and his/her employment band.

It is this last reason which could be a significant contributing factor to the reason why ABET programmes are not succeeding as well as they might in industry. In this case study, it was pointed out that a particular learner (Learner A) who had spent two years at Level 2 for literacy held the position of foreman, whereas Learner B who had successfully obtained his Level 4 certificate in English and numeracy was a forklift driver and had not been identified for promotion.

The service providers saw this as a fundamental flaw in the way in which the ABET programme was being implemented in the organisation. Academic success does not necessarily translate into vocational advancement, thus it was predicted that the learners would eventually become frustrated with the process and give up on their academic studies. It was suggested that the learners might interpret this discrepancy as an under-evaluation of their studies. Evidence from other Level 4 service providers indicated similar findings: it would seem that the majority of learners do not see a link between career advancement and their ABET credits/qualifications. Many of the service providers' comments referred to industry viewing ABET exclusively in terms of social responsibility. Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is discussed below.

### **The ABET assessment process and competencies valued by industry**

A reason why achievement in the ABET examination does not necessarily result in career advancement, could be found in the way in which competencies are defined and valued by industry. By examining the various understandings of competencies as used by education and industry, their underlying values can be compared.

In the educational framework of the NQF, competencies have been defined as "the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to the standard specified" (Phillips, 1996: 43). Bellis (in SAQA Bulletin, 1998: 6) asserts that such a definition which includes the psychomotor performance with a cognitive and affective component, "could be acceptable within general education in



all stages: in higher education, in ‘vocational education’ and in training and human resources development.” Thus the NQF definition of competency should be suitable for competencies required in the workplace. Yet it is in the difference in application of the term “competency”, that the miscommunication takes place between education and training.

In many documents explaining the concept of competency in Education, the emphasis has been on the knowledge or ability required in order to demonstrate competence i.e. what the learner will be able to know or do, rather than on the attitude and values of competency (Independent Examinations Board, 1996: 14).

This is not the emphasis which industry places on the term “competency”.

Mitrani, Dalziel and Fitt (1992: 25–27) provide a brief overview of how this term came to be used in industry. It must be noted that the term was already in use in industry by the late sixties and seventies, whereas it first became associated with the academic environment in the eighties. These authors describe work by Ghiselli, indicating how he contributed to the decline of the testing of personality traits as an indication of job performance. At this time it was also shown that academic aptitude did not correlate with job performance. It became evident that other means of describing job performance was necessary. McClelland and Dailey (in Mitrani et al., 1992: 33) designed the Behavioural Event Interview (BEI) which identified the characteristics of successful employees as well as task elements required by the job. Thus, competency assessment was achieved by means of studying people who were effective in their positions in industry. The emphasis was on the characteristics of competent or effective performance. The standard against which this competence is measured is the standard set by superior, rather than average, performers. This emphasis by industry on competent and effective employees is further emphasised in publications by Boam and Sparrow (1992), Raven (1997) and documentation by the National Training Board of Australia (1992: 29).

Industry also discusses the attitudes and values relevant to developing effective members of staff. Understandably, competencies that include these dimensions could be vague and thus difficult to assess and are therefore not the focus of the SAQA unit standards, yet industry seems to emphasise the attitudes and values of an employee’s performance more than his/her knowledge and ability to do the job.

The case study company was involved in a recent assessment of the literacy levels of learners who had already been identified as having suitable traits for a supervisor’s course. The managers felt that these staff members displayed potential as supervisors and were thus prepared to implement steps to upgrade the literacy level of employees who were assessed below the required level. It seems obvious that it would be more beneficial for industry to recruit staff with the valued attitude and value competencies, rather than to attempt to provide appropriate academic qualifications. This would explain the comment made by the manager of this case study, who said that although Learner B had advanced academically, he did not have the team-playing, problem-solving competencies needed for promotion.

The Australian National Training Board explains how values and attitudes are most relevant in terms of:

- Knowledge of the influence on performance of individuals’ own values and attitudes towards the people they work with ...
- Their significance in teamwork ...
- Their role in the collective culture of the enterprise.

This leads to an examination of the types of competencies that are emphasised by industry such as *initiative*, *leadership* and *the ability to work well with people* as identified by Raven (1997: 18).

Raven also identifies valued attitudes such as a *win-win attitude* and *persistence* (1997: 192). The importance of problem-solving competencies also receives a great deal of attention in industry-related documentation such as the National Competency Standards published by the Australian National Training Board (1992: 29), which emphasise *contingency management skills* that enable the employee to “respond to irregularities and breakdowns in routine.”

Technical problem-solving competencies are categorised in terms of design, troubleshooting, developments and technical procedures by Wu, Custer and Dyrenfurth, (1996: 1). In their historical overview of work by leading theorists (such as McClelland), Mitrani et al. (1992: 27), emphasise the important categories of competencies such as *motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge or cognitive or behavioural skills*. The authors cite the example of *achievement motivation* as being valuable to companies as it has been directly linked to increases in quality and productivity in organisations.

In theory, such competencies are ‘covered’ by the SAQA unit standards for Language and Communication. Indeed the cross-critical outcomes support these competencies. Consider Cross Critical Outcome 2 (CO 2) which states the importance of assessing learners in terms of their ability to “work effectively with others as a member of a team, group organisation and community” (see p. 3). However, as mentioned in the first part of this paper (p. 8), these cross-critical outcomes are not directly assessed by the formal ABET route and therefore it is difficult to ascertain whether learning programmes foster these valued competencies.

Similarly, while CO 1 stresses the importance of using learning to display problem solving and critical thinking, there is no evidence of assessment for these types of competencies by means of the formal examinations.

The point raised by Wu et al. (1996: 10) serves to emphasise the difference in the use of the term ‘competencies’ as used by education and industry. They argue that although problem solving may be fostered in other disciplines, technology requires its own problem-solving competencies. The authors conclude that that personal and technical solving styles are separate, and they require “...different kinds and levels of knowledge and capability” and “...individuals manifest different style characteristics when addressing problems of different natures.” Thus, even if ABET programmes claim to be developing problem-solving competencies, these may not overlap with the kind of problem-solving skills required by industry.

The above argument provides further evidence for the suggestion that work-specific literacies are not adequately addressed by the present NQF unit standards and learning programmes (refer to p. 7). The language in which the unit standards for Language and Communication is written does not coincide with the ‘buzz words’ of industry, and is therefore not recognised by industry. Education and training are definitely not integrated and thus one of the major principles underpinning the establishment of the NQF is ignored. Other principles such as relevance, flexibility and articulation of ABET within the NQF are also questioned in light of the above discussion (these principles were discussed on p. 2).

Furthermore, the formal ABET route does not take into account learner styles or future plans. Because of the seven points raised as reasons for discontinuing the ABET programme in the company, the service providers concluded that the formal ABET route was suitable only for those learners who had an ‘academic’ learning style and who had future higher education plans. As discussed in the first part of this paper, this seems to be the emphasis of the unit standards for Language and Communication (p. 7). This route was considered inappropriate for the majority of the case study learners, who would not be likely to pursue higher education and training.

In fact, the formal route was considered to be detrimental to these ‘vocational’ learners who

experienced frustration and disappointment after spending two years at the same level and did not achieve a credit at this level. In addition, learners soon became discouraged and realised that this formal route did not necessarily relate to the competencies required by their jobs and did not ensure career advancement

### **Towards a Conclusion**

For the above reasons, the service providers recommended that only 4 of the 13 learners from the case study could be considered as academic learners and should be encouraged to pursue a formal learning route. These learners would now be ready to enter Level 5 (GETC -matriculation equivalent). Because of the difficulties of this route (as explained on pp. 7/8), it was suggested that established alternatives such as the technical college matriculation, be explored. Learners could do courses that are business or technically related, depending on their career plans, business English being a requirement at this level.

It was recommended that a vocational programme be developed for the majority of learners. Technical competencies are written by the Standards Generating Body (SGB) which was established for each of the twelve organising fields of learning. Therefore, it is proposed in this article that alongside the technical competencies (which are presently being written as vocational unit standards), literacy and numeracy competencies, which are required to develop those technical competencies, be written as part of the unit standards as a whole. In this way, linguistic competencies will be written as they relate directly to the knowledge, ability, attitudes and values of the technical competencies and will better integrate education and training for those learners who do not necessarily want to pursue the formal academic ABET route. Yet these competencies will still be registered with the NQF and will be afforded the status, flexibility and portability of the academic ABET route. In this way, literacy competencies will start to contribute to real growth and development for learners and industry.

This proposal would require further modularisation of the ABET unit standards. Although the NQF allows for learners to acquire individual credits towards a qualification, i.e. they do not have to present themselves for a full qualification at one sitting, this does not meet the needs of the adult learner sufficiently. It is proposed in this article that the Level 4 and 5 Language/Communication unit standards be further modularised in terms of learners' needs for language i.e. EAP, ESP or BICS. A learner needs English for a particular reason, for example to complete certain training programmes, is then given the flexibility to focus on the specific language unit standard which she/he requires at that moment and would not be obliged to be assessed for all unit standards for that level simultaneously. This would also break the Language/Communication course into manageable portions, from the point of view of content and time. Furthermore, this approach would ensure that learners are assessed and credited for competence in each unit standard separately.

The researcher proposes that the best way to facilitate this alternative ABET route, which would address the problems of integration between education and training and the relevance of ABET to national economic growth, is through the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). These education and training authorities have been established for each of the twelve designated learning areas and form a vital link between SAQA and the Department of Labour. According to 9(2)(b)(c) of the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998), economic development and career pathing are seen as two of the main functions of a SETA. Provision is made within the Act (Section 16) to establish learnerships within a SETA so that:

- (a) the learnership consists of a structured learning component;
- (b) the learnership includes practical work experience of a specified nature and duration;

- (c) the learnership would lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an occupation...

The above suggestions would also increase the numbers of learners beyond ABET Level 3 and thus more credits/qualifications would be obtained at NQF 1. In addition, these proposals provide more than one path to Further Education and Training (flexibility) and suggest assessment options beyond the summative. This paper has endeavoured to show how the formal ABET route does not meet a number of key NQF principles such as flexibility, status and portability and has highlighted the lack of integration between education and training, by means of a case study of an ABET programme in industry. A difference in emphasis and application of the term 'competencies' was indicated as a possible reason why miscommunication between education and training persists. It was proposed that the present ABET route be seen as suitable for academic learners who wished to enter the Higher Education and Training Band and that a vocational route be established under the authority of the Sectional Education and Training Authorities. This alternative ABET route would directly link communicative competencies to the technical competencies required by job descriptions. By so doing, education and training would be more integrated and ABET learners would enjoy flexibility in terms of choice of route.

ABET would more successfully meet the Department of Education's vision for political, economic and governmental growth through Adult Basic Education and Training.

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