

**REFLECTIONS ON THE COLLEGES  
COLLABORATION FUND PARTNERSHIP  
1999 - 2004**

Compiled for

the Department of Education and  
the National Business Initiative

by

Helene Perold

November 2004

# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
• What did the CCF achieve?	3
• Lessons learnt about the public/private partnership	4
• Looking ahead	7
• Conclusion	8
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1 What did the CCF achieve?</b>	<b>11</b>
• Raising the profile of FET	11
• Public/private partnerships do work	13
• Providing the information base for change	14
• Crafting a shared understanding of FET	15
• Other achievements	17
<b>2 The partnership</b>	<b>20</b>
• Insights gained about working in a public/private partnership	20
• A shared vision?	22
• The working relationship	23
• Bringing together the worlds of business and government	27
• Acknowledging risk	31
<b>3 The importance of the team and the funding</b>	<b>33</b>
• The dedicated team	33
• The discretionary fund	34
<b>4 How the FET colleges sector should develop</b>	<b>37</b>
• Vision for the future	37
• Priorities for future development in FET colleges	38
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>43</b>

## Acronyms

CCF	Colleges Collaboration Fund
FET	Further Education and Training
MOTT	Merger Operational Task Team
NBI	National Business Initiative

## **Executive summary**

The Colleges Collaboration Fund (CCF) was an initiative taken by the National Business Initiative (NBI) between 1999 and 2004 to support the process of transforming technical and vocational education into a responsive Further Education and Training (FET) sector. Funded by the Business Trust, the CCF was a partnership with the Department of Education. The outcome of the process was a restructured FET college landscape in which 152 technical colleges were merged into 50 new institutions over a period of four years, and the foundations laid for the further development of the sector.

The public/private partnership that drove the CCF involved a complex set of relationships that shaped the course of its activities, the processes it facilitated, and its impact. In 2004, interviews were conducted with 22 of the key players in the process to find out what lessons could be learnt from this co-operation between business and government. They provide an insight into what the parties consider to be the main achievements of the CCF, how the partnership operated, the importance of having a dedicated team and discretionary fund, and what the partners consider to be priorities for the future development of FET colleges.

### **What did the CCF achieve?**

There is broad agreement that the CCF demonstrated that public/private partnerships do work and that they add value to the process of change.

Both public and private sector interviewees agree that the CCF helped the Department of Education raise the profile of further education and training, and was indispensable to the radical strategic restructuring of the FET colleges sector in record time. The work of the CCF helped to put FET on the map by making politicians, the private sector and the public aware of the role FET could play in skills development, and helped build confidence in the public FET institutions. At the same time, one business sector respondent questions whether the CCF was able to go far enough to show results that are sufficiently concrete to meet the needs of business, while two FET college CEOs question the timing of the initiative; they argue that a CCF initiative is needed now that the landscape has been restructured.

Interviewees are unanimous in identifying the research conducted by the CCF as a major contribution to the development of the FET sector. It helped document a system of technical and vocational education that was unknown prior to the CCF initiative, and created a body of knowledge that provided the basis for strategic planning and the long-term development of the sector. According to some interviewees, the research helped build a culture of research and planning in FET colleges where previously there was none, and was very important in shaping FET discourse in South Africa.

The CCF also succeeded in developing a strong conviction among all the players that FET colleges could become a significant force within the

education and training landscape. College CEOs and provincial Department of Education officials agree that FET colleges are an important lever for transformation in the country. The interviews indicate that they developed a strong sense of optimism and enthusiasm through the international exchange programme, capacity-building initiatives, and the close engagement with CCF staff. The interviews also show, however, that since the winding up of the CCF initiative in 2004, a level of frustration is creeping in among provincial officials and college leaders owing three areas of uncertainty: the direction that FET sector is taking, the role of the national and provincial education departments in its development, and whether the sector will be centralised or decentralised.

Other CCF achievements mentioned by the interviewees include building capacity at different levels of the FET system, developing a collegiate network among institutions, creating international contacts, injecting new thinking into the sector, contributing to infrastructural development in institutions, and putting colleges in touch with the business sector.

### **Lessons learnt about the public/private partnership**

In describing the characteristics of a public/private partnership, some interviewees draw a distinction between a partnership such as the CCF and corporate social responsibility involvement in education. They view the latter primarily as a means of providing funds for certain projects. A true partnership, they argue, involves working together to achieve common goals, and should ideally involve sharing resources, risks and rewards. One interviewee argued that business can support government, but cannot take on government's role as a primary change agent. It was also pointed out that both parties need to be ready for the partnership in order to get the most out of it, and that the greatest value is gained through a long-term resource commitment that is not dependent on annual project cycles.

Suggestions for establishing successful public/private partnerships include:

- setting aside sufficient time for the partners to get to know each other well and building a strong team;
- getting a very clear understanding at the outset of the parameters of engagement and protocols;
- getting agreement on the objectives, planned outcomes and, as far as possible, strategies to be used;
- getting agreement on the roles and responsibilities of the partners;
- developing a collective sense of ownership;
- acknowledging and valuing the contribution that each party makes; and
- developing a good understanding of the different modes of operation in the public and private sectors.

To what extent did the CCF partnership follow these guidelines?

The interviews demonstrate that while there was broad agreement about the goals of the CCF, there were in fact differences among the partners as to the

strategies for achieving those goals. The initial thinking that informed the CCF business plan was crafted by the NBI. While it was in line with the FET policy framework, it placed an emphasis on an incentive-driven model of institutional development which focused on strengthening management and governance.

In its first two years, the CCF worked closely with provincial Departments of Education on this process, but the research that emerged showed that the college landscape was immature and uneven. This raised the risk that the NBI's approach would favour those colleges that were strongest and would not do enough to redress the historical imbalances. From the national Department of Education's point of view, the restructuring process had to bridge divisions between the colleges (so as to promote college collaboration) and eradicate inequities between historically white colleges and state-aided colleges while strengthening the sector as a whole.

Working through these differences depended on the commitment of both parties to building a strong FET colleges sector. Although the CCF initially had an 'arms-length' relationship with the national Department of Education, this changed in 2001 following the creation of an FET branch in the national Department. At this point a service level agreement was developed that restructured the working relationship between the parties. It changed the CCF's role to one of providing high-level technical support to the Department which in turn provided the strategic direction for the initiative. The Department also started driving the restructuring process much more vigorously from the centre.

The interviews indicate that although government welcomed the CCF initiative, there was neither sufficient time nor space to hammer out a finely-tuned agreement between the partners on the approach to restructuring, and the envisaged outcomes, operational processes and working relationships. Interviewees point out that the partnership itself was a new experience for both the public and the private sector. There was no blueprint available for public/private partnering, and the players were operating in an environment in which government institutions were still maturing.

In this context it seems that professional integrity and commitment to making a success of the process, rather than trust, held the parties together. Different world views and working styles had to be accommodated, and the barriers that are thrown up by stereotypes of business people and government officials had to be overcome. In the words of one interviewee, "We had to constantly remind each other what it was we were working towards and keep each other on our toes – 'are we still on the right track?' It was not always easy when there were differences of opinion ... and it was never easy when each of us was getting stuck in our own ideology."

So what value did business add to government through the CCF?

The interviewees from the Department of Education cite project planning, project management, the research, and the constant process of review and reflection as being the major benefits of the public/private engagement.

Government officials came to see the benefits of working with a private sector agency that has the flexibility to move quickly to implement decisions and take action. At the same time, the private sector learnt about government process, the constraints on senior officials in government, and the determination it took to move things forward in the Department of Education at a much more rapid pace than would normally have been the case.

Underpinning the five-year process was the passion and expertise of the team made up of the core staff in the CCF, the provincial officials that served on the Merger Operational Task Team (MOTT), and the college leaders who participated in the process. The value of having a fund dedicated to this process was also cited as a significant success factor, although the interviews suggest that there was much to be learnt about who controls the money and how decisions are made about how the funds are spent.

Ultimately the success of the CCF process became a risk in its own right – politically and financially – and the stakes were high. Not only did the rapid pace of the restructuring process attract the attention of senior officials in the Department of Education and the trade unions; there was also the question of whether the changes could be sustained, and what the implications were for labour processes both within the FET sector and beyond it. The FET recapitalisation programme announced by President Mbeki in May 2004 demonstrates that the work of the CCF helped raise the profile of the FET sector to its highest level and in the words of one official: “Cinderella is no longer Cinderella; Cinderella is at the ball.”

And what did business get out of the process? The fact that business made the funds available provided a strategic opportunity for the private sector to influence the course of the restructuring and widened the sense of accountability for the FET colleges. Hands-on private sector involvement helped drive the rapid pace of change and kept up the pressure on government in ways that were directly responsible for the successful outcome of the merger process. The CCF experience also laid the foundation for the future involvement of business in FET colleges partnerships and could in future mobilise more resources and interest in support of FET.

## **Looking ahead**

What is the vision for the future development of the FET colleges sector? And how do CCF players see the priorities going forward?

The interviews suggest that business and government still have different perspectives about where the emphasis should fall in developing the FET sector. Despite the gains made thus far in FET, the business sector is still not confident that government will in fact shape and resource the FET sector adequately to meet the needs of industry. In government, the concern about the structural location of FET is still to be resolved (whether it should be driven nationally or provincially), as well as the alignment of the education and skills development ‘architecture’, and the respective roles of the departments of education and labour in relation to FET colleges.

The respective concerns of the private and public sectors are also articulated in how business people, government and the college CEOs see the priorities for the future development of FET colleges.

- On the issue of the *responsiveness* of FET colleges, business players focus on the need for FET colleges to deliver the graduates that business requires, and argue that partnerships between companies and colleges can ensure better alignment between the skills produced and the employment opportunities available. Although this once again presents a risk for government, there is the view that business should support senior government officials and share in that risk so as to take the FET colleges to their full potential. For others the issue of responsiveness is more a question of community-based access to FET and here concerns include the fact that FET colleges are presently excluded from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.
- Closely allied to the issue of responsiveness is the definition of the *core business* of the FET colleges. Interviewees point out that the college mandate has still not been clearly defined and that colleges have been left to take account of a 'dual mandate' that emerges from the different orientations of the departments of education and labour. Since curriculum development is likely to drive the focus of FET colleges, some interviewees argue that specialised curriculum support is called for, while others look to the higher education sector to play a supportive role in this regard.
- *Structure and governance*: college structure, the role of government in FET and the ongoing task of institutional transformation persist as key concerns for many of the people interviewed. Challenges include finding a balance between equity and efficiency on the one hand, and unity and diversity on the other. Other issues identified are the articulation between FET and other education sectors; the role of government and the question of institutional autonomy; institutional governance; and transforming the institutional culture of FET colleges.

## Conclusion

The insights gained from this reflection process show that while government and the private sector approach the transformation of the education system from different points of view, common ground can be found in the interests of the country as a whole. Factors that contribute to the productivity of the partnership include building in sufficient time for joint planning, and making sure that the decision-making structures and working relationships between the partners are fully articulated from the outset. It would also be important for the partners to digest some of the insights gained from past experience and to work out how these are likely to influence the relationships going forward.

One of the issues that this investigation explored is the question of how the management of education systems-change differs from the management of

major projects in business. The difference seems to rest on three factors: people management (which is more flexible and less regulated in the private than in the public sector), planning (the private sector often spends more time on planning ahead than is the case in the public sector), and the fact that education is a social process in which the returns are not immediately apparent and difficult to quantify.

The interviews show that the CCF added immense value to the process of restructuring the FET colleges sector and that through it, the business community helped government lay a significant foundation for the further development of the sector as a whole.



# Introduction

The Colleges Collaboration Fund (CCF) was an initiative taken between 1999 and 2004 to support the process of transforming technical and vocational education into a responsive Further Education and Training (FET) sector in line with the vision outlined in the FET policy framework.<sup>1</sup> Funded by the Business Trust, the CCF was a partnership between the National Business Initiative (NBI) and the Department of Education at both national and provincial levels. The outcome of the process was a restructured FET college landscape in which 152 technical colleges were merged into 50 new institutions over a period of four years and the foundations laid for the further development of the sector.

This paper is not an evaluation of the CCF and its work. It explores the complex relationships that informed the partnership between the NBI and the Department of Education and shaped the course of the CCF's activities, the outcomes of the process, and its impact.

What do the participants in the process – Department of Education officials, CCF core staff, Business Trust managers and college leaders – say about the lessons learnt about partnerships between government and business? And how did the CCF add value to the process of shaping the FET sector?

Twenty-two interviews were conducted for this assignment with the following participants in the CCF process:

- Dave Brink, Co-Chairperson: Business Trust
- Theuns Eloff, former CEO of the NBI, former Campus Rector: University of Potchefstroom, now Vice-Chancellor: North West University
- Glen Fisher, Director (Education and Enterprise): CCF
- André Fourie, CEO: National Business Initiative
- Anthony Gewer, Evaluator: CCF
- Saguna Gordhan, Programme Manager: Business Trust
- Joy Grobler, Principal: Port Elizabeth College
- Frank Ingram, Director (FET Colleges): Department of Education KwaZulu-Natal
- Jannie Isaacs, CEO: College of Cape Town Central Office
- Ros Jaff, Project Manager (Research): CCF
- Khetsi Lehoko, former Deputy Director-General: National Department of Education, now Public and Private Enterprise Executive Director: Edu-Access Holdings

---

<sup>1</sup> The policy framework comprises the following: In 1997 the Department of Education published the report of the National Committee on Further Education: "A Framework for the Transformation of Further Education and Training in South Africa". This was followed in 1998 by (a) the Green Paper on Further Education and Training: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training and Work; (b) Education White Paper 4: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training and Work; and (c) the Further Education and Training Act No. 98 of 1998.

- Philip Loots, Principal: Buffalo City College
- Motsumi Makhene, CEO: Central Gauteng FET College
- Steve Mommen, Director (Public and Private FET Colleges): National Department of Education
- Themba Ndhlovu, Acting Deputy Director-General: National Department of Education
- Dan Nkosi, Principal: South West Gauteng College
- Lesley Powell, former Programme Manager: CCF, now Director: Lesley Powell Consultancy
- Abie Seakamele, Deputy Director-General: Department of Education North West
- Zozo Siyengo, Director (FET Colleges): Department of Education Western Cape
- Michael Spicer, Trustee: Business Trust
- Molly Venter, Provincial Technical Advisor: SESD (Support to Education and Skills Development) Programme (in partnership with Department of Education KwaZulu-Natal and the Danish Embassy)
- Brian Whittaker, Chief Operating Officer: Business Trust

My thanks go to each one of these people who introduced me to the complexities of the partnership, took me through the chronology, and shared their views about the many processes and events that took place over the five years. Their opinions and perceptions form the basis of this report and inform the analysis contained within it.

**Helene Perold**

14 November 2004

# 1 What did the CCF achieve?

The Colleges Collaboration Fund programmes fell into the four categories: support for the restructuring of the colleges and the organisational development of new institutions; assisting with the creation of new leadership and professional management, including capacity development; contributing to efforts to raise the profile of the further education and training sector; and evaluating the programme and its impact.

The “Project Completion Report” (2004) for the Colleges Collaboration Fund documents in some detail the extent to which the performance measures agreed in the business plan were achieved. It shows that achievements include:

- the extensive body of research that documented the size and shape of the sector;
- guidance provided to the strategic management processes;
- two sets of ‘fit-for-purpose’ institutional audits undertaken by KPMG under the auspices of the CCF;
- grants made available to all colleges to enable them to address areas of perceived operational weakness;
- the amalgamation and merging of 152 technical colleges into 50 FET colleges;
- further support to provincial education departments and colleges in respect of the preparation and assessment of strategic plans;
- the establishment of 1 852 partnership projects and the training of 850 governing body members, 7 652 senior managers, 1 12 middle managers; and
- awarding Tirisano Fellowships to 91 middle-level managers to participate in the International Exchange Programme.

How does this match up with the views and perceptions of the CCF players who were interviewed for this report? Below are some of the key impressions of the interviewees about the achievements of the CCF. They deal with the raised profile of further education and training, confirmation that public/private partnerships can add value, the importance of good research in providing an information base for the change process, the crafting of a shared vision for FET, and capacity building.

## **Raising the profile of FET**

Virtually across the board, interviewees were of the opinion that the CCF helped the Department of Education, firstly, to raise the profile of further education and training as a sector and, secondly, achieve the radical strategic restructuring of the college sector in record time.

On the question of the profile of the sector, Khetsi Lehoko, former Deputy Director-General for Further Education and Training, comments that “what we

have achieved is to raise the consciousness of both our political office bearers, the private sector and the broader public ... to build the confidence of the political office bearers in the public institutions. For me that was the significant thing we achieved.” This is against the background of the first five to eight years of South Africa’s democracy in which the Department of Education was largely focused on the improvement of general education and training in the schooling sector, followed by higher education. For Lehoko the recognition of further education and training comes with President Mbeki’s call for the recapitalisation of the FET sector, made in his State of the Nation address in May 2004: “There is no other victory than that one: for the President to make that call ... That announcement, in itself, reinforces or strengthens the levels of confidence that were already created within the institutions by this process ...”

This is reinforced both by Frank Ingram and Brian Whittaker. Ingram says: “We managed to put the technical colleges in the minds of the general public; this became part of the vocabulary of the education system.” Whittaker sees the major achievement as having been “to raise the position of technical education and the role of technical colleges on the national agenda.” Glen Fisher agrees: “... it is unlikely that the sector would have risen up the political thermometer in the way that it did and to the extent and as rapidly as it did.” Themba Ndhlovu argues that the process “assisted in sharpening the thinking in the sector and beginning to focus on conversations and dialogues around the issues” – something Fisher agrees with when he says: “The contribution at a conceptual strategic level has also been important.”

Lehoko unequivocally attributes much of the progress made to the existence of the CCF: “If the CCF didn’t exist, I don’t think government on its own would have been where we are with these colleges in the sense of shaping or clarifying the parameters because, as I said clearly, the provincial and national capacity is not there. So the CCF capacity was an important capacity. And the reality of the matter is that during the five years, the capacity in government has not changed for the better.”

Steve Mommen is equally clear about the value of the CCF: “No matter which way you argue that they were strong here and weak there, we would not be here today if we did not have the chunk of money and the tool of the CCF.”

In reflecting on this level of progress, Saguna Gordhan feels that the timing of the CCF partnership with government was fortuitous in that it provided “fertile ground” for the “increased realisation about the need for skills from the Department of Labour and from industry.” In her view “there is enough known now to actually chart the next 10 years ... there is enough political will ... there is enough policy, impetus, to make that happen and hopefully the ball won’t be dropped.” In this she is joined by CCF evaluator, Anthony Gewer, who feels that the process “laid the groundwork for the sector to move into the next phase”.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, are two sets of more qualified assessments. The first is a hard-headed business response from Dave Brink

who suggests that while progress had undoubtedly been achieved, "... it certainly isn't visible." Brink explains that "the achievements are not the sort of achievements that major business would be that impressed with, but in terms of the overall context, they have probably achieved great things and a lot more than many other initiatives in the education field."

The second set of qualified responses come from two college CEOs: Dan Nkosi and Motsumi Makhene. While both recognise the importance of the information-base provided by the research conducted by the CCF, Nkosi argues that the mergers were a government plan that would have taken place without the CCF. "The interventions of the CCF were not correctly timed. The sector survived the mergers on its own – a lot of the CCF interventions were so badly timed that they didn't really help. In many cases they were good things that came late or came too early." Essentially his criticism is that the funds could have been better spent had the capacity-building interventions, in particular, been timed to follow the merger process.

Makhene agrees and goes further to argue that the CCF was unable to fulfil its full potential owing to what he describes as a 'vacuum' in FET prior to the merger process: "The CCF existed in a vacuum because the only major thing that happened in the FET arena was the proclamation of college mergers and that did not depend on the CCF ... You actually need a transition support fund such as the CCF now ... it is only now that the CCF would have been much more relevant." He sees college collaboration as an important component of the sector's development, but draws a distinction between that and policy implementation: "College collaboration, for me, is different from funding the policy implementation requirements of the Department."

### **Public/private partnerships do work**

The second major achievement mentioned by the interviewees is that the CCF demonstrated that public/private partnerships can work successfully and can add value to the process of transformation.

Themba Ndhlovu says that "for once we had a test case that shows that private/public partnerships do work. There would have been a lot that we learnt along the line, but broadly the myth that they don't work is, indeed, just that. They do work! They may need more effort, they may not be easy to run, but at the end they do work."

Ndhlovu describes the collaboration as "a hands-on 'outside-but-inside the department system' of managing what has to be done, when and how ... The bottom line is you were able to have things moving and going, and you could see progress all the time." In his view, business and government both learnt a great deal about each other. He also mentions that Department of Education officials gained considerably from interacting with the Business Trust Board around other projects such as the malaria programme.

Ndhlovu also identifies an added, unanticipated benefit which arose from the attention that the collaboration between business and the Department of

Education drew in the wider environment: “I would hear people speaking about ‘Hey, the Trust and yourself, you guys in Education, what is it that you are doing?’ And that kind of positive vibe emerged beyond just the education system.” In other words, the collaboration between business and government through the CCF signalled a momentum and a mode of operation that was unique in the broad process of change that started in 1994. While the Business Trust supported two other large projects in education during the same period, it was the CCF that drew particular attention and prompted a significantly high level of involvement from the Department of Education.<sup>2</sup>

The Partnership Training Programme was one of the sub-components of the CCF’s programme whereby FET colleges staff would be trained to forge partnerships, and although the programme was not delivered as initially planned, a pilot programme was run in the Western Cape. According to Zozo Siyengo, the promotion of public/private partnerships in the Western Cape was a significant development. “We were a pilot province and today we are strong on partnerships in this province thanks to CCF. The notion of partnerships now is getting national support ... we may have to revisit how we manage the PPP [public/private partnership] process, but our colleges now also have partnership units that are the ‘hubs of business’ at the different institutions. Their role is to bring business into the institutions. This has been accelerated by the SESD (Danish funding).”

The perceptions of the partnership and the relationships between business and government in this project are further explored in section 2 below.

### **Providing the information base for change**

One achievement about which there is unanimous agreement among all the interviewees is the importance of the research undertaken by the CCF. Dan Nkosi sees this as the CCF’s major success: “The major achievement was to investigate and research the sector and create a mirror of the sector. The mirror created was fair. That had to be used to come out with strategies to take the sector forward.” Nkosi stresses that the independence of the research was a major factor that helped to avoid political contestation in changing the size and shape of the sector: “The research painted a mirror of the sector that emerged independently. If anyone from within the sector had said this is what the sector looks like, they would have been seen to be politically motivated. But because this mirror emerged from an independent television screen, this was the major achievement of the CCF.”

According to Ros Jaff, the research “provided the evidence that was needed ... to document a system that was not known. It was an enormous privilege

---

<sup>2</sup> The two projects were the Learning for Living Project facilitated by READ and the Quality Learning Project in the field of mathematics, science and technology, facilitated by the Joint Education Trust. Saguna Gordhan explains the Department’s intensive involvement in the CCF on the basis that it was an initiative involving systemic change on a significant scale while the other two projects were seeking to improve learning and teaching within the schooling system that was already in place.

and an opportunity to be able to create that body of knowledge and then to be able to look at the longitudinal development.”

Frank Ingram’s view is that in the course of the research process, the CCF also started impacting on the management and planning culture in the institutions: “They managed to inculcate a culture of research and planning in the sector where previously there was a culture of organic management and planning – ‘organic’ in the sense that if the money, clients, staff are available, let’s do it, regardless of the larger picture. Nowadays people are more inclined to take the bigger picture into account.”

Lesley Powell points out that the research not only provided information about the technical and vocational education and training landscape, but also helped to shape the discourse – the language used to describe evolving concepts about further education and training. She describes the CCF process as “engaging the sector and shaping the language in which we talk about the sector. [Initially] it was a very crude language, and then [came] the discussion around concepts – ‘What do we call this stuff that the Department of Education doesn’t accredit? What do we call this stuff that they do accredit?’ ... So it was allocating names to it and starting to know what the roots were and the stems and the branches.” Abie Seakamele agrees: “The other thing was elevating the whole discourse around technical colleges/FET colleges – there was this advocacy that started overall, apart from the ... interventions at capacity-building level.”

For Powell another significant contribution of the research is that it “added a knowledge base which began to shift and change as time moved on. We can now talk about the system ... in the sense of human resource development, ... changes that need to take place, problems in it. There was no chance that we could do that before.”

She also mentions the very high level of participation from colleges in the research process. “There was a great deal of involvement and they owned that research, which is why we got 98% return for the first study! ... We knew we had to make sure that we work with people and take them [along] through the process, as the discourse shifts, as the debate shifts, as the knowledge shifts.”

### **Crafting a shared understanding of FET**

Over the five-year period a strong conviction developed among the players involved in the CCF process that FET colleges could become a significant force within the education and training landscape. Glen Fisher describes this as “a vision of what this new system was all about ... policy learning, vision sharing, securing buy-in ... beginning to get a sense that the old way of doing business wasn’t going to work in this new environment and under these new circumstances.”

The remarks made by some provincial education department officials and college CEOs demonstrate that a shared understanding of the potential of

FET was in fact emerging between the players in the CCF process. For example, Abie Seakamele says “we believed we had a common vision,” while Frank Ingram argues that “these colleges are a critical lever for transformation in the country.” And from a national perspective, Khetsi Lehoko comments: “Both parties had a commitment to raise the profile of the sector, to change the sector into a meaningful player in the skills development of the country ... You can fault [the CCF] on the procedural issues, whether the management and administration was the right strategy for the point of entry into the colleges, but you wouldn’t question them about their commitment to building a viable FET sector, for youth and others.”

Factors that contributed to the formation of a shared understanding include:

- The international experience gained by the Tirisano Fellows. This undoubtedly gave them a keen sense of the contribution that FET could make in South Africa and the form it could take.
- The many different capacity-building activities as well as the advocacy work funded by the CCF contributed to the growth of a common understanding of FET. The interviews with the college leadership and the senior provincial FET officials suggest that they are committed to developing the sector and are clear about the importance of putting the institutions on to a new, well-resourced, responsive and effective footing. Molly Venter mentions that “we are excited that the colleges are now on the map, but they aren’t producing as they should.”
- The keen interest shown by the CCF staff in the institutions (through data collection processes, visits and capacity-building engagements) and their close engagement (directly or through facilitators contracted to support the merger process) with the strategic development of the institutions. In many cases interviewees mentioned the value of the support offered by the CCF and this seems to have contributed to a high level of trust between provincial officials and the CCF, and college principals and the CCF. Philip Loots puts it this way: “The CCF made one think of exactly what one’s role is and what areas had to be developed. Their constant contact with institutions make us aware that there are some areas that we weren’t focusing on to develop our institutions.” Molly Venter says: “There was a lot of trust between the colleges and the CCF. Colleges saw the people from NBI give a lot of support to colleges; they really wanted to uplift them ... They always asked ‘how can we help colleges?’”

However, the interviews also suggest that the optimism and enthusiasm that developed on the ground between 1999 and 2004 is being eroded by a level of frustration among some of the provincial officials and college leaders. This is largely generated by the lack of certainty concerning three issues:

- the direction that FET is to take as a sector;
- where ultimate responsibility resides for leadership in the sector (at national or provincial level); and



- whether the sector is to develop along a centralised or decentralised model (including the question of college autonomy).

For example, Philip Loots regrets that the CCF process did not lead to the appointment of staff and is concerned that valuable expertise is being lost to his college: “One of the most important things that should have accompanied the change is the appointment of staff ... By the time these appointments are made, one will find that most of the people will not have had that background because they are new people. A lot of senior staff have left the colleges because of the insecurity. People feel insecure because appointments aren’t made ... [In the Eastern Cape] although [a post] was advertised, appointments weren’t made because of lack of finances in the province, even though the posts were budgeted for. So province decided not to make any appointments.”

Glen Fisher remarks that perceptions like this can erode the sector’s ability to make best use of the capacity and resources that it actually has: “There are resource and capacity constraints, but at the same time there are resources and there is capacity. It is a case of is the glass half full or half empty. I think it is half full, but the environment is such that it looks more like it is half empty.”

### **Other achievements**

Interviewees also cited six other achievements that came out of the CCF process:

- The extent to which the CCF began to get technical colleges to talk to each other through provincial workshops, for example. “It began to establish **a collegiate framework** which I am not sure that the technical colleges had” (Lesley Powell).
- **Capacity building programmes.** There is broad agreement about the value of the Tirisano Fellowship programme in building a cadre of 91 skilled, well-informed and visionary individuals, many of whom were (and in some cases still are) located throughout the FET system in all provinces, able to support its development from different vantage points. Some interviewees point out that the early stages of the programme were not as well organised as the programme in later years, and others comment that it has been difficult to make full use of the fellows when they are located in academic positions and cannot be freed without additional staffing allocations being available.

Furthermore, the CCF’s facilitation of strategic planning at various stages of the process was also regarded as being particularly effective. Lesley Powell attributes this to the ability of the core staff to support a process of strategic development without imposing an external view on it. However, Dan Nkosi has a different perception about the interaction between the CCF and FET college participants on the ground: “One of the criticisms of the NBI is that they got to understand the sector, but then they did not stop

there. They ended up pushing across their own personal views as to what was supposed to happen in the sector.”

Aspects of the capacity building programme that seemed to work less well were the short workshops conducted for middle and senior management training towards the end of the CCF process in 2003/4. Criticisms include the process being rushed and being ill-timed. According to Dan Nkosi, “the CCF could not hope to take the sector forward by squeezing in its programmes in the last five to seven months.” Joy Grobler says that the training and documents were valuable, but feels that they were often “ill-timed, intrusive and cumbersome because the management information systems weren’t running.” Powell adds that insufficient attention was paid to the capacity-building methodology of these workshops with the principles of adult learning having been neglected in the workshop design.

- **Building an international network in FET.** The importance of learning from international experience in FET was a significant part of the capacity-building approach and this was achieved through the Tirisano Fellowship programme on the basis of agreements struck by the CCF and the British Council. This element of the programme was seen by interviewees as being very important in “exposing people to other programmes” (Siyengo).

Powell regrets that “the international network hasn’t been formalised into some kind of a structure” and she notes that in many cases the international contacts have been sustained at the level of institution-based relationships rather than through a sector-wide network. Others, however, see this as a positive development in that it demonstrates that some institutions are sufficiently independent to sustain working relations with international counterparts.

- **‘Getting people out of a rut’.** Philip Loots cites the CCF’s main achievement as “getting the old technical college people out of a rut to change their thinking.” It would seem that the ongoing contact between CCF staff, facilitators and colleges helped college staff to start seeing their institutions differently, re-examine their roles, and become aware of opportunities for innovation. “[The CCF’s] constant contact with institutions made us aware that there are some areas that we weren’t focusing on to develop our institutions, e.g. sometimes we are in a rut and we don’t think there is a community outside that we need to make contact with,” i.e. the business sector and the local community.

Zozo Siyengo agrees that the CCF impacted strongly on what he calls “the human element” of the restructuring process: “Teachers are the most difficult people to change. They are used to a syllabus. Now one says: ‘strategic planning, be responsive to the community, go out to business, don’t work from 8am to 3pm’ – how does one train people to do those kinds of things? The CCF has been very good at preparing the human element at the institutions to survive the new demands placed before them. The fund has been promoting rapid, responsive and responsible interventions.”

**[infrastructure funding was never part of the Business Trust remit or the CCF plan – I don't think it warrants discussion here]**

- **Business involvement.** Joy Grobler commented that for her, the primary achievement of the CCF process was getting business involved, be it through the NBI or simply injecting a business perspective into college operations. “It is a new concept and we have not always been sensitised to the business pillar. It brought expertise to the table; the strategic planning was much more detailed, of a higher standard than that of the province.”

## 2 The partnership

One of the unique features about the CCF is that it functioned as a collaboration between an external business-based agency (the CCF as a project of the National Business Initiative) and government, in order to bring about radical change in one sphere of the education system. Many of the people interviewed for this report agreed on the importance of striking public/private partnerships to enable government to address the many needs faced by South Africa in the course of transformation and development. According to Themba Ndhlovu, “Where public/private partnerships are made to work, they deliver wonderfully.”

But what makes public/private partnerships work effectively? This section starts by outlining some of the insights gained by the role-players in the process. It is followed by an examination of the basis on which the partnership was founded, explores the extent to which there was a shared vision, and looks at the factors that influenced the working relationship between the partners.

### **Insights gained about working in a public/private partnership**

The interviews yielded a number of insights about the collaboration between the CCF and government. The comments centred around the relationship between government and business in the CCF, and suggestions about how to forge working relations between parties with very different values and modes of operation.

#### ***About government and business collaborating through the CCF***

- “It was not a usual corporate social responsibility [orientation] – ‘we will give you so much money and you see what you want to do’ ... The conceptual framework was that ‘we need to make a difference’, both as government and the private sector, in partnership ... the Board of Ministers and business leadership ... monitored the process” (Khetsi Lehoko).
- “You can support what government is doing from the outside, but you can’t do what government is supposed to do from the outside” (Saguna Gordhan).
- “We learnt the lesson that it is possible to get a huge amount of work done and to give government the credit. This is more sustainable than riding in with one’s horse and seeking glory” (Theuns Eloff).
- “Any partnership succeeds because there is a readiness on both sides. I think the Department was not ready for the nature and scope of the engagement that the CCF provided” (Motsumi Makhene).
- “We learnt the value of a long-term strategic partnership that stretches over five years, is well-resourced and not dependent on annual project cycles or ad hoc projects. We knew that this is a five-year joint venture.

This is not a usual situation. The CCF demonstrated the power of that sort of partnership” (André Fourie).

- “If it is a real partnership, there is a sharing (in my view) of resources, risks and rewards. The problem with this as a partnership is that ... all the resource came from the business community through the Business Trust and all the risks ended up in the Department of Education” (Brian Whittaker).
- “The dynamics of the partnership change as people change. So as new people came into the Department, dynamics changed” (André Fourie).

### ***How to strengthen working relationships between the parties***

- “First and foremost, if you engage in partnerships, spend some time or know from the beginning that a lot of time will be spent just getting to know each other and each other’s worlds ... you must first understand what was in the heads of the people that conceived the project, and then see their role in it, before they then move on to understanding how they relate to the other people around” (Themba Ndhlovu).
- “It is very important to have a very, very, very clear understanding at the outset as to what the nature of the relationship is, as to what the parameters of the engagement are, what the objectives and outcomes are, and what the roles and responsibilities of different players are, and what the protocols are for dealing with the relationships” (Glen Fisher).
- “Partnerships should be struck bottom up on a needs and relationship-building basis” (Frank Ingram).
- “Partnerships should avoid a ‘them’ and ‘us’ approach because once you have agreed that this is a partnership, it is the project that ought to be the focus ... It is about the project team” (Saguna Gordhan).
- “What the public and private sectors mean by partnerships are often very different things and I don’t think this concept has been adequately explored and certainly it takes a long time to get a working, mutually beneficial partnership” (Michael Spicer).
- “You have to learn the way the other people play the game. You have to accommodate and plan for time for the project to actually simply create the foundation for it to begin to deliver” (Themba Ndhlovu).
- “People must understand who is in it for what, what role each party has to play. For me it is also about individuals ... it is about collective ownership and service ... Also, for you to establish trust you must believe that each party brings something to the partnership and that you value and acknowledge the contribution of other parties in terms of their expertise” (Abie Seakamele).

- “Government talks and runs in a certain way ... If you write a document ... it has to reflect how we think, as government, not how somebody who is in business thinks a thing must work. So that was one part of the dialogue that was ongoing and continuous” (Steve Mommen).

These comments demonstrate the complexity of the CCF partnership. The next section looks at the dynamics of the process and, in particular, how the different orientations of the partners shaped their orientation towards the CCF goals.

### **A shared vision?**

Restructuring the technical and vocational education and training sector was one of the CCF’s four key objectives. This was agreed between the Department of Education and the Business Trust and constituted a core outcome of the CCF business plan. But was there a shared vision of how this was to occur? How was the notion of ‘restructuring’ understood by the partners?

The interviews suggest that the NBI and the Department of Education approached the CCF partnership from different conceptual viewpoints. While there was broad agreement about the key goals viz. to restructure and improve the relevance and quality of FET, the key differences between the two parties revolved around strategy and specific outcomes.

According to Glen Fisher, “the White Paper does not talk about system-wide mergers. It talks about mergers and partnerships and various other things, where possible, and our own original business plan said that we would provide funding for collaboration partnerships, co-operation between colleges, including the possibility of mergers, and that we would support the development of provincial plans that might look at the issue of mergers at a provincial level.”

The NBI’s business plan was informed by what Ros Jaff describes as the “philosophy and the ethos ... of institutional development”. It set out an incentive-driven model for institutional development with a team-based approach to college management that would be accompanied by a partnerships development programme. Jaff describes it this way: “It wasn’t going to be a whole large national systemic merger ... The initial model was ... based on clear plans for each institution and plans for each province and then there would be the tranches of money against very, very close business planning in the institution. It would have been much more institutionally-driven and would have related to their needs.”

While the NBI’s intention was that the model would be implemented across all the provinces, the research showed that the sector was immature, uneven and unlikely to develop into a strong system of its own accord. The risk for the Department of Education was that the NBI’s approach to restructuring would favour those colleges that were strongest (i.e. previously white colleges) and would not do enough to redress the historical imbalances in the sector. From

government's point of view, the restructuring process had to bridge divisions between the colleges (so as to promote college collaboration) and eradicate existing inequities between historically white colleges and state-aided colleges<sup>3</sup> while strengthening the sector as a whole.

The Department of Education's perspective is perhaps captured in a comment that Themba Ndhlovu says he made when he first joined the FET branch in the Department: "I don't think, in fact, it was a Colleges Collaboration Fund; it was a Colleges Set-up Fund. So in a sense we were just creating colleges and then just when we should be setting them up to begin collaborating, you are then ending the project." He thus suggests that the name of the fund originally stemmed from the NBI's vision of how the sector might be restructured – through colleges collaborating with one another and restructuring taking place by means of a bottom-up process, incentivised by grants to provinces and institutions. Ndhlovu's comment indicates that the Department saw the merger process as being a precursor to college collaboration.

If the partners viewed the strategy so differently, how did they deal with the challenge of working towards the goal of restructuring the FET sector? Ndhlovu describes the process as follows: "Government has to, in all the areas where it is in control, constantly ensure that what we are doing is about improving the life for the betterment of all. We are about redress ... It is easy to say, 'We all understand the vision and are seeing the vision', but it is something else when we say 'We are translating our action to realise the vision' ... We are seeing the same vision, [but] we take different actions that take us to different ends and somebody must constantly remind us [where we are going] ... for every little project into which government is putting focus and attention, you have got to make sure that it is following government priorities, [that] it is in keeping with the prescripts of the Constitution."

This suggests that the foundation for the partnership was indeed a commitment from both business and government to do everything possible to make the FET sector a meaningful player in skills development in South Africa. Commitment was the fundamental ingredient that helped the parties bridge their differences around strategy in the interests of this larger objective.

### **The working relationship**

Initially the restructuring process was driven strongly by the CCF, working closely with the provincial education departments and the colleges. Fisher describes the relationship between the CCF and the national Department of Education in the early years as "an arms-length relationship where we would

---

<sup>3</sup> Lesley Powell points out how important it was for government to ensure that equity prevailed in the restructuring of the sector. "There was a lot of envy, a lot of jealousy, a lot of division in the sector in terms of the geographic location of the colleges (rural and urban), big distances apart, and in terms of the programmatic and accreditation differences between colleges. The historically white colleges vs the state-aided colleges: They would have linkages with business; they would have accreditation relationships which the state[-aided] colleges just didn't ever have."

keep them informed of what we were doing, there would be a liaison, but we were expected to deliver on our results.”

In 2001, the momentum shifted when the national Department of Education established a separate FET branch and Khetsi Lehoko was appointed as Deputy Director-General. The national Department restructured the working relationship with the CCF through a service level agreement that changed the CCF’s role to one of providing high-level technical support to the Department which in turn provided the strategic direction for the initiative. The Department also started driving the restructuring process much more vigorously from the centre.

This had two results. Firstly it changed the role of the CCF from that of a business-based agency partnering with government to restructure the FET sector, to that of an informed and highly skilled technical assistance facility that could provide the Department with the capacity it did not have in its own ranks. And secondly, it meant that the option of various forms of restructuring (“collaboration partnerships, co-operation between colleges, including the possibility of mergers”) gave way to the Department’s strategy of achieving a rationalised, streamlined FET sector that, firstly, meets the political demands of equity and integration and, secondly, aims to cater for industry and community-based skills development by developing the sector as a whole rather than developing institutions within the sector.

Could the partners have reached agreement on the model for change at the outset? And could the working relationship between the Department and the CCF have been more clearly articulated as a partnership from the outset? To answer these questions one needs to go back to the origins of the CCF.

The interviews suggest that in 1999 the business community recognised the opportunity to work with government on the development of the FET sector and the CCF business plan captured a fairly clear notion of the FET institutional development model that the NBI wanted to pursue.

Glen Fisher argues that “there wasn’t another organisation that had the understanding of what the policy framework was all about, and the business backing, support and some of the skills needed to put an initiative like this together.” In so doing he implicitly distinguishes between, on the one hand, launching an informed initiative (the CCF), driven jointly by business and government, to work towards a broad and mutually agreed goal and, on the other, having the Department of Education commission an external agency that has an understanding of the sector and the skills to provide technical support to the Department’s plan for developing the FET sector. Theuns Eloff puts it more bluntly: “The NBI had decided what it wanted with the FET sector; they proposed it to government which accepted it and took ownership.”

What was government’s position? It would seem that having put the policy framework in place over a three-year period (1997-1999), government welcomed the NBI initiative. At the time most of the Department of Education’s attention was focussed on the transformation of the schooling and



higher education sectors, and there was limited capacity to implement the FET policy framework. The proposed initiative promised not only a substantial injection of funds into the process of developing the FET sector, but also harnessed informed capacity in support of policy implementation. On that basis the partnership was struck between the Department of Education and the Business Trust. The CCF became the agency set up by the National Business Initiative to operationalise that agreement.<sup>4</sup>

Lesley Powell questions whether in the early stages government had a clear plan about how it envisaged the restructuring process taking place in FET. “The reality was – I was working in the CCF then – we had no option. The business plan had to go in; there wasn’t lots and lots of time to talk to people. Glen ran around talking to some people and getting verbal agreements – “Ja, that sounds great”. But try and find a paper trail for those agreements – you are not going to find one.”

Khetsi Lehoko acknowledges that the Department of Education went along with the initial model contained in the CCF’s business plan because it did not want to be obstructionist and thought that things could be worked out at a later stage: “If we insisted on certain things initially we would have looked like we were being obstructionist. So the decision was, let’s go on with this thing; we will sort it in the process.”

Brian Whittaker comments that, on reflection, the business plan underestimated the complexity of the task. He says the initial assumption was that the Colleges Collaboration Fund would be relatively autonomous and would incentivise the state agencies (the colleges) into restructuring themselves. “That, in hindsight, was a non-starter.” The reason? “It would have been different if we had understood on day one that this was going to be a political process which the Department of Education, nationally, would need to be helped to drive.” Instead it was a process through which an external agency such as the CCF could “shepherd the thing through on a technical basis, with some money behind it to incentivise the actions.” Whittaker suspects that few in the NBI and the CCF would admit that they thought the CCF would be relatively autonomous, “but it is the model I had in mind and I was wrong”.

Ros Jaff agrees that the initial business plan may have been somewhat naïve, given that the CCF was dealing with an immature system. “We were looking much more at strong institutions that could deliver on the FET mission and the skills development strategy. Clearly you needed to have some restructuring of colleges and it was ... probably going to be college-led and provincially-driven

---

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Gewer points out that the initial conception of the CCF was of a fund that would be set up to provide grants – grants to provinces to enhance the capacity of colleges, bringing in new people, even staff if necessary; grants to colleges themselves for the development of merger plans, research and the implementation of merger plans; and grants for setting up partnership offices in the colleges. He comments that the CCF’s approach was thus “a business-driven model – it was about financial incentives and about stimulating change through ... a kind of business approach.” Over a two-year period this gave way to “much more of a policy-driven approach where you had to align everything you do to policy; you can’t just run off and do things on your own.”

... It would have been a balance of the two. It wasn't going to be a whole large national systemic merger."

These perspectives suggest that there was neither sufficient time nor space to hammer out a finely-tuned agreement between the partners on the approach to restructuring, the outcomes, operational processes and working relationships. Glen Fisher is candid about this: "The 'what to do' was agreed in the sense that the business plan was agreed; what was not so clear was how the work that the CCF was doing would align with ... what the Department was doing and what formal process of communication there should be around that." Khetsi Lehoko makes a similar point: "Because it was a new thing, there wasn't clarity. It wasn't possible for us to predetermine the operational frameworks of that partnership and as a result there was always tension between ourselves and the CCF."

A number of the interviewees in the provincial education departments mention their regret that it was not possible to put in place a founding protocol for the CCF. Its absence seems to have undermined what, for them, was otherwise a very positive process. For example, Frank Ingram argues that "a firm protocol should have been established at the outset ... The protocol makes it part of the performance agreement in the public service structures and the Department of Education becomes accountable for meeting its deliverables, not only the agency. The protocol should have been part of the service level agreement whereby people are pinned down in terms of time frames, deliverables, etc."

In the years that followed, a great deal changed, leading Fisher to comment: "... to be fair, I think that the CCF and the Business Trust started off on quite a different premise from where we landed up." What eventually seemed to inform the restructuring of the relationship between the CCF and the Department of Education in 2000/1 (through the service level agreement) was the premise that, in the words of Saguna Gordhan, "you can support what government is doing from the outside, but you can't do what government is supposed to do from the outside."

Glen Fisher disputes that the CCF ever imagined that it could do the work of government and argues that the NBI had set fairly limited objectives for its role in developing the FET sector. "What happened was that the CCF business plan, in its repackaged format, became the implementation plan. Our assumption was never that we were going to change programmes, we weren't going to institute a quality assurance system. We were going to do some very specific things that would, we thought, be important building blocks in the wider process of system change. So it wasn't a question of whether we would work inside or outside of the Department in order to change the system. We always thought that the Department was in charge and our job was to make a contribution alongside in a strategic sort of way." In Lehoko's view, however, "the service level agreement was crucial in clarifying roles and responsibilities, expected outputs and outcomes."

Besides the importance of ensuring that national priorities such as equity and redress were being met, there was one other trigger for the national Department to move into the driving seat in 2001: the prospect of success in restructuring the sector and the risk that this might not be sustained in view of diminishing capacity within the provincial education departments. Steve Mommen relates how, with the help of the CCF, the Department of Education had managed to make huge strides in the restructuring process, starting in 2000. At that point, however, the fledgling capacity that had been developed in provincial departments was being threatened owing to the movement of FET officials into other positions. “That hit us hard, because you only had nine people to start with, so we lost more than half of them ... That is something you mustn’t underestimate – the turmoil in the provinces with the movement of the people ... At that point, in my opinion, the provinces were no longer in a coherent capacity position to actually sustain this process. So what we then did was we kicked into place a more centrally driven approach to the CCF.”

Perhaps the lesson that emerges from this is that in a resource-scarce context, stretched to capacity, government could not afford to pass up the opportunity presented by the CCF and sought instead, as time progressed, to mould the initiative into one that would not only support national policy in all its facets, but would also help it deliver the restructured FET sector of its choice.

### **Bringing together the worlds of business and government**

One of the key challenges in the collaboration between government and business through the CCF is bringing two very different worlds together. Jannie Isaacs comments that, “Often the bureaucracy of the state and the responsiveness of the private sector are not easily compatible ... Government is very report-oriented, and sometimes it is less about what is in the report than whether it was submitted. And sometimes private sector wants quick answers without going through layers of bureaucracy.”

Lesley Powell points out that prior to the early 1990s, people in government and business had little experience of working together towards democratic goals and that in the CCF a great deal had to be learnt about the different working styles and how these had to be adapted to achieve the goals.

For example, Dave Brink speaks for many in the business community when he questions why change processes in education take such a long time. “Business, particularly big business, just doesn’t have the time to wait for things to happen,” he says. At the same time he acknowledges that “in business one is more lenient about protocol and the CCF had to recognise that the government is more conscious of protocol and more bureaucratic, and had to work within those constraints.”

Complicating the working relationships are the perceptions that people in government and business have of each other. Themba Ndhlovu says he finds that the private sector tends to be disparaging of government on the grounds that it “knows it all” and perceives government officials as “lazy” and “dumb”. He puts it this way: “The engagement between business and government is

affected by the perception that the private sector is much more responsive, knows what it is about, has the experience, knows it all, and if you go to government you find dumb people who don't know what they are about, who are lazy and twiddling their thumbs all the time. Therefore if a person from the private sector moves in, they already move in with the perception that they are coming to put you right." Khetsi Lehoko puts this in even stronger terms: "There is an attitude that civil servants are inherently inefficient and corrupt, so the mutual respect of our intellectual capacity, our professionalism and our efficiency is already questioned. It is almost an attitude of superiority. When you are unable to do something, it is inefficiency on your part; it is slackness or something."

Brian Whittaker is one leader in the business world who acknowledges the complexity of working in government: "I think it is a difficult job and my sense on this is if you interpret the problem as 'silly people', there is not much you can do about it."

Lehoko points out that the collaboration was a new experience for both parties: "Constructing a new partnership to create conditions for success, was a new experience both for the private sector and for us. There was no blueprint on the table. And remember we are also dealing with institutions of government where they, themselves, haven't matured in terms of their own capacity, their own experiences."

This is why, according to Themba Ndhlovu, professional integrity and commitment was key in finding a way forward: "When we worked with the CCF, I found that we had to constantly remind each other what it was we were working towards, and we had to constantly keep each other on our toes – 'are we still on the right track?' It was not always easy when there were differences of opinion ... and it was also never easy when each one of us was getting stuck in our own ideology."

What about trust?

A number of the interviewees identified trust as an important ingredient that had to be developed during the five-year process. Khetsi Lehoko puts it this way: "Remember, trust is built over a period of time, so you don't walk into a relationship and then there is trust all of a sudden. You both work towards building that trust."

However, some interviewees feel that too much emphasis is placed on trust and advocate a more hard-nosed approach: "One must trust the partner to do what he is expected to do," says Theuns Eloff. "Don't get sentimental. It was a job that had to be done." Themba Ndhlovu adds to this perspective: "I don't need to trust you to do a job. I only trust my wife and my kids and my family. When we meet in this environment I need professional integrity ... All I need is that you must have the professionalism to be able to stand up and tell me, 'You are talking bullshit' if it is bullshit, and tell me 'It is a great idea' if it is great idea, and go out and do what we have agreed should be done. That is all I want ... clear principles for our engagement."

Saguna Gordhan points to the importance of developing a committed working relationship in order to sustain a project through difficult times: “The relationship between the people in the CCF and the NBI and the Department went through different phases, up and down, and it went through some really rough patches. A lot of effort needs to be made to manage that ... There is some way of managing this trust and dialogue and if you don’t manage that properly, you are going to have trouble.”

How then do the different worlds of government and business impact on strategy development and getting the job done?

Themba Ndhlovu describes the different starting points in this way: “The first argument you hear from the CCF is one that says you don’t want to over-regulate. You can hear that this is business talking. Then the first thing you are going to hear from me in government is that you must make sure that you have set up sufficient structures and processes and arrangements to ensure that whatever public resources we are pumping there will be accounted for ... We do not just allow a laissez-faire market-driven thing. For example, if the argument is, ‘Give these institutions money and let them do the procurement themselves, hire staff, etc.’ what guarantee do I have that when that money gets in there, it gets used for what it is supposed to be used, to the benefit of the system?”

The interviews suggest that government officials are impatient with what they perceive as the reluctance of business to take the time to understand the working context in government. They feel that there is little understanding of the constraints that derive from regulations designed to promote public accountability.

It is perhaps worth noting here that the launch of the CCF coincided with the changing context within government after the second election in 1999. Lehoko’s appointment as Deputy Director-General of the Department’s newly created FET branch occurred at a time when government as a whole was tightening up on administration in order to streamline the work of the bureaucracy for greater political as well as financial accountability. For example, the enactment of the Public Finance Management Act in 1999 represented a major development in public accountability. It not only made government officials accountable for public expenditure, but also made them personally liable in the case of negligence.

Themba Ndhlovu describes how this environment impacts on the actions of government officials: “You have got to make sure all the time that these public coffers are being managed properly ... each time I engage with anybody in any project, the first question I must ask is to what extent is this advancing the priorities of government. Number two, to what extent is that working within the agreed, approved systems, structures and management processes of government ... Without me having pocketed a penny, just because I didn’t allow it to work within the required prescripts, is it possible that a few months

down the line I will be made to be accountable and be fired from my job because X amount of money got lost?”

Besides the stringent provisions of the Public Finance Management Act, the decision-making processes in government also make major demands on the officials driving huge policy implementation processes such as the restructuring of the FET sector. Khetsi Lehoko cites as one challenge “... even regulating the way the CCF was dealing with colleges in the context of provincial administration ... Because at the end of the day it is we in the Hedcom<sup>5</sup> meeting who carry the can when somebody has acted on behalf of the Department.” Steve Mommen elaborates on this when he says that the CCF was “an entity that was suddenly accessing public (government) processes and functions,” but that in some instances the CCF “hadn’t actually been given the official mandate ... to do so.” Mommen acknowledges that these issues of protocol are often difficult for the private sector to grasp: “That is the issue that I think is difficult for many people. If I had a discussion with some people from business and I want to do the following, I can’t do it. I have actually got to go through a huge debate [within the Department] and get the agreement from a large number of role players before I can do it.”

Does this mean that there is no way through an intractable bureaucracy? Ndhlovu acknowledges that there is the risk that in a bureaucratic environment, officials develop operational styles that “simply go with the flow”, continuously moving deadlines for delivery. He says the value that business can add is by keeping the pressure on government by working to agreed performance indicators that are time bound. “So then it becomes my responsibility to say, ‘Okay, I am going to jump through the CFO and go straight to the DG and try and short-circuit this, [to] put it forward to the next Hedcom’.”

What then was the complementarity between business and government in the CCF partnership? Where was the value added?

“Very largely it was the project planning, project management and project systemic engagement,” says Themba Ndhlovu, “and the building, particularly in this project, of the research component and the constant review, reflection ... The complementarity, in my view, was in that planning; it was in that constant reviewing.”

Khetsi Lehoko sees the value of the partnership as having provided a means of moving some activities outside the government bureaucracy: “It is not so much that the bureaucracy ... is incompetent, inefficient and so on, but [the partner outside government] is able to be flexible and do other things that are not necessarily easy to do in government. I am beginning to understand that much better now – why certain things were possible with the CCF ... just at the level of conference organising, particularly the level of procurement and getting resources that you want, on time and so on. There is greater flexibility outside.”

---

<sup>5</sup> Heads of Education Committee comprising heads of provincial education departments.

Brian Whittaker recognises that the departmental officials were under pressure to make the CCF process work within the constraints of the bureaucracy and a tight timeframe. He describes the value that the CCF added as follows: “I think the guys in the Department thought that the external interveners just had too little sympathy with all that it means [to be] a senior official. I think the senior officials were in a very difficult position ... I think that took some guts to push it through in that way and I don’t think it would have happened without the Business Trust. I also don’t think it would have happened without the CCF. The CCF was providing the strategic or logistical backup to this; they were providing the data, they were providing the administration, so in the end we got a good result out of bringing these two parties together.”

Steve Mommen confirms that the lack of capacity in the Department of Education made the CCF a very valuable asset in the FET process. “Systemically there was never capacity to drive this process. In fact, the test of the metal is with the disbandment of MOTT, the whole system came to a grinding halt. The ebb was gone, and then the flow of the resources through the ebb was also gone. “However, he sets this against the backdrop of the very intensive process of generating a wealth of legislation over a period of four to five months: “You had to do your provincial declarations; you had to do the regulations pertaining to your councils and colleges; you had to go through the gazetting process of setting up your councils; you had to go through the declaration process in each province to establish and merge and take over assets and all that kind of stuff. There is an enormous administrative legislative process behind MOTT.”

### **Acknowledging risk**

Brian Whittaker, as quoted earlier, feels that “in a real partnership, there is a sharing of resources, risks and rewards.” What was the risk in the CCF process?

Whittaker says that “the risks were inside the national Department of Education – if this all went wrong.” Theuns Eloff elaborates: “There were high stakes. If it hadn’t worked out, senior government ministers (Frank Chikane, etc.) would have asked questions.”

For Khetsi Lehoko some of the risk was in the perception that the national education department was attempting to erode the powers of the provinces. “In the minds of our provincial colleagues ... there [was] almost an attempt to erode the powers and responsibility away from provinces ... As much as I spoke earlier about the issue of a nationally-driven process, I still recognise that you can’t go the constitutional amendment route. That will take you ages to change. So in the interim you must have that compromise between national and provincial in the context of what we call co-operative governance, to have a nationally-driven, a nationally co-ordinated equity college system.”

From the Department of Education's point of view the risk was both political and financial and, ironically, revolved around success. Steve Mommen describes the risk of success as being: "You make it, and there is no steam to sustain it." He describes the speed at which the restructuring of the FET sector proceeded: "You had massive changes at heads of department level, MECs, and all these changes caught up with us because MOTT was running at an incredible pace for a government system to bring about change. So we actually outstripped the system's capability to absorb our changes and sustain them, particularly on the budget side."

Mommen describes how the Department of Education interacted with the Department of Public Service and Administration (Work Study Unit) around the implications for college structures and staffing in the next five to ten years, and on that basis engaged in setting up the senior management staff establishment. "I took it through the labour processes, and it was immediately caught up in the maelstrom. Do you remember at the time there was a massive restructuring of the civil service, so of course the big unions didn't want us to restructure in the small system, because it might pre-empt the arrangements around the major government departments like Defence! So that was a fairly torturous thing but we managed it. In fact, for the first time we ended up in the Public Service Bargaining Council and that was a very interesting argument."

The speed of the restructuring process drew the attention of the trade unions and the senior officials in the Department – and not always positively: "Everybody was doubting whether we could have done so much work in such a short time ... Cinderella was no longer Cinderella; Cinderella was at the ball. And that attracted a whole wave of attention from different sectors and it kind of destabilised us because for the first time we had to sort of cool off the process itself ..."

For Khetsi Lehoko the risk is ever-present, particularly in the light of the recapitalisation programme announced by President Mbeki in May 2004: "Now ... the political risks are much greater than they were before, because of the attention that the sector is now receiving from political office bearers – not just the attention, but there are now expectations that are being placed on the sector by government. That is why it is critical for the sector to articulate clearly what it needs in order to meet those obligations, otherwise we are setting it up for failure."



### 3 The importance of the team and the funding

To what extent did the presence of a dedicated CCF team and a discretionary fund contribute to the CCF's ability to support government in achieving the successes cited earlier?

#### The dedicated team

The dedicated team in the CCF can be defined in two ways. On the one hand it was a core made up of a very small, but highly skilled group of four people.<sup>6</sup> However, the interviews show that it also comprised the senior officials in the national and provincial education departments, most of whom were also members of MOTT, and some of the college principals who stayed the course during the five years.

'Consistency' is the point most of the interviewees mentioned when asked about the value of the CCF core team. Anthony Gewer mentions that "consistency is important, because we know the system in and out now ... The very fact that Steve [Mommen] has been around all the time has kept the consistency going. And then in the provinces, where there have been people in place for a longer period of time, you do see that consistency ...". Saguna Gordhan agrees: "I think that projectising anything as important as this ... requires this. If the people involved in a province could have been more or less the same ... the depth of what the team would now have and what the country would now have, would be different. It is a bit idealistic, I know, but I think it might be worth doing that, even in the future ... Because then you can build on what you have done."

Ros Jaff says that the dedicated team "... provided the continuity in a very fluid situation" and provided the process with a strong administrative base – "to file, to document, to present material in a way that was effective, disseminate material, disseminate documentation, disseminate the reports."

Lesley Powell feels that having a dedicated team in the broad sense was invaluable in developing a shared experience of change: "There is a world of information in everybody's heads about the sector, which doesn't really sit anywhere else in the country ... If I couldn't get data from the institution, I would phone someone and say, 'Hey, Jannie, I am struggling with data from your campus' and he would say, 'Really, let me get it for you tomorrow' and it helped a lot, because the relationships built up slowly over time."

According to Abie Seakamele, "the CCF team was very professional in their work especially when it came to issues of consulting and making sure they take everyone on board. So their approach was very useful. They also injected a certain level of urgency and some kind of momentum and on that score alone it was very useful. We would not have gone as fast as we did if we didn't have that intervention." He attributes the slowing of the momentum in the FET college sector partly to the failure to move dedicated expertise into

---

<sup>6</sup> Glen Fisher, Ros Jaff, Lesley Powell (until she left the project) and Anthony Gewer.

the institutions themselves: “The slow pace we are now experiencing in the sector in terms of delivering concrete programmes, etc., is a result of a lack of dedicated team or resource going into the institutions. Because if you leave it to provinces, we have too many competing priorities – without some kind of dedicated focus we may not achieve what we set out to achieve.”

For Khetsi Lehoko much of the value of the dedicated expertise lay in the CCF leadership: “Although I had many battles with Glen [Fisher], Glen himself has a passion about the sector, whether he was in the CCF or not ... So you had, in his leadership, somebody who has a passion and an understanding of the sector. And partly that was also a problem because Glen, in some instances, felt we were moving slowly. Remember, regardless of the pressures of spending money and demonstrating success and achievement with the Business Trust, I think if you are close to the issues yourself you think the process is much slower.”

### **The discretionary fund**

In the discussions with the interviewees about the value of the discretionary funding available through the CCF, four issues emerged: how external funding can support specific areas of change in the education system; the fact that it was South African funding; how the funds were administered; and the benefit to government.

Saguna Gordhan points out that it is important to define the term ‘discretionary’ funding: “I think one should be careful about the word ‘discretionary’ because it isn’t just a slush fund. It is discretionary in the sense that it is in addition to [e.g. government funds] – you can’t just always have money available. You have to have some purpose.”

Having said that, she argues that the key value of such funding is that it “provides opportunities you might not have otherwise; it can accelerate things, it can make all sorts of things happen.” André Fourie agrees: “Having resources that can be directed at strategic priorities in the system ... is incredibly valuable. Government often has a huge budget, but little discretion since all the funds are allocated.”

Gordhan feels, however, that discretionary funding should not only be located outside government: “I think that government ought to think of this thing more creatively. They can do it too. It is not like we don’t have money in government – it is about making sure that they plan for it properly. “ Gordhan suggests that the recapitalisation plan and the plan for the management of the 2014 Vision could form the basis for project funding, although she acknowledges that government may face constraints in terms of how project funding is spent: “It is possible to access public funds to do this kind of work. Maybe the difficulty is the policies and practices about how you spend it. When it is outside of government there is more flexibility in relation to service providers and contracting and tendering – that makes it more responsive, maybe.”

Did it make any difference that the funding for the CCF came from the South African business community? This question elicited a range of opinions.

Most of the interviewees would agree with Saguna Gordhan's view there is some added value here: "I think it makes a difference, not the money so much as much as the trust and the partnership with government [that the provision of funding makes possible] ... Maybe the fact that it is South African business money got South African business more interested in it and focused on the issues." For Brian Whittaker the fact that business made the funds available provides a strategic opportunity for the mobilisation of more resources and interest in support of FET: "I think you capture the attention of business – if they are giving away large chunks of their money, they are more likely to answer the phone call when you say, 'I want to talk to you about this'."

Jannie Isaacs feels that it is important for South Africa to reduce its dependency on international donors while André Fourie says that the fact that the funding came from a South African source "meant a much greater sense of accountability all round." Frank Ingram disagrees: "Money was money wherever it came from." And Steve Mommen asks: "What is the difference between money from a tax base, even if it is from another country? There is the same accountability."

The interviews throw up two issues about how the funding was administered. The first concerns the relationship between the funder and the recipient of the funds. The CCF funding was made available by the Business Trust to the National Business Institute which set up the Colleges Collaboration Fund. Brian Whittaker feels that this was less than satisfactory since "you can't be both the manager of the funding agency and the recipient of the funds, and everybody, I think, knows that." Whittaker explains his concern this way: "The Business Trust and the NBI are financially and legally separate entities, that is absolutely clear. The NBI and CCF are financially and legally the same entity, they are just different names. The CCF is a brand or an NBI product; it has no other status. But the fact that the NBI was the managing agency of the Business Trust and the NBI managed the CCF and that all these relationships had to be played out with the Department, was something I wasn't terribly keen on at the start and I wouldn't do it again. I don't think that is a secret."

The second issue relates to control of the funds. While some of the business-based interviewees feel that government would have preferred the NBI merely to pay the funding over to the Department of Education to use as it saw fit, Steve Mommen disputes this: "The argument was not to have the money in here; the argument was to have control over the money. It is a nuance." According to Mommen, the service level agreement developed in 2001 aligned the CCF's procurement procedures with those of the public service and "in that way we were able to move large chunks of money very, very quickly ... So the value of having the money out there allowed us the flexibility to cover gaps ... keeping the money outside definitely had its advantages."

Nevertheless decision-making about the spending was in some cases a contested matter. According to Steve Mommen, the Department felt that it

should be able to direct the spending, but in some cases this was contested in the CCF. While Mommen agrees that in some cases the CCF perspective was valid, it would seem that this situation rankled with the Department: “We would say, ‘okay, we need to do the following’, we lay it out, and then all of a sudden you will find somebody there has taken a judgmental position on what we want to do and we are blocked.” He points out that in other funded projects that the Department is running, some larger than the CCF, “we don’t have that kind of tension because we have control of the money.”

Finally, Ros Jaff suggests that the discretionary fund helped to set up the system and has provided a platform for the Department and for the President to announce the recapitalisation drive to Cabinet and to Treasury. Her hope is that “the sector is now ready to absorb such funds and that money is coming, hopefully, in greater amounts to the colleges.” However, she also feels that “it is a tragedy” that the full Business Trust allocation of R100-million was not spent during the five-year period of the CCF. She argues that had more of the fund been spent up front, more funds might have been available to the sector, “particularly if it had shown the ability to absorb it and to take it on.”

## 4 How the FET colleges sector should develop

What is the vision for the future development of the FET colleges sector? And how do CCF players see the priorities going forward?

### Vision for the future

The interviews suggest that business and government still have different perspectives about where the emphasis should fall in developing the FET sector. Despite the gains made thus far in FET, the business sector is still not confident that government will in fact shape and resource the FET sector adequately to meet the needs of industry. In Dave Brink's view, "I don't really know what asset we have created and whether we have really got a going concern there that is going to be of great value to the nation ... I think it is going to depend on creating partnerships with industry and if they fail to create those partnerships, I think all the work that has been done will be dissipated."

Glen Fisher believes that what is missing is agreement on the core business of the colleges: "The main task is to be clear about what the colleges are for, making it clear how they can do the job that they have to do and then creating the right frameworks at national and provincial and college levels – the right levels of delegated responsibility, authority, etc. and clarity about who is responsible for them. In my view, the national Department of Education should not be trying to run the colleges system at all."

In government the concern about the structural location of FET continues. Steve Mommen points out that there has been an ongoing debate about whether or not FET should be centralised in government, particularly in view of capacity constraints: "Do we continue to maintain nine separate provincial administrations for the colleges? That for me, frankly, is where the blockage lies because what little capacity we have in the sector is divided across nine provinces."

Possibly an even larger question is how the FET colleges relate to the national skills development agenda and how the departments of education and labour interact around the FET colleges sector.

Motsumi Makhene argues that there is in fact a 'dual mandate' that colleges have to take into account, emerging from the different orientations from the departments of education and labour: "The Education Department has to compensate within a short space of time for the damage of apartheid education in the social experimentation ... policy reflects a strong redress orientation and recognition that, even though we want to be globally competitive, we have enormous backlogs that need to be covered ... The Department of Labour ... has its workforce development imperative ... not that it intentionally wants to develop people on a narrow path. But there must be some type of framework, a consensus, around how you allow education to

reconstruct the human fabric of South Africans, whilst at the same time assist or enable the Department of Labour to ride on that human development initiative.” In Makhene’s view, the lack of consensus presents FET colleges with a major challenge in terms of striking the balance between holistic educational development and workplace training: “How do we, as an institution, make sure that that dual mandate is translated into a sound educational service, at the same time delivering qualifications that turn out whole people – quality, relevance and competitiveness?”

Steve Mommen describes three categories of response that are to be developed in colleges: a general academic stream (Department of Education regulated programmes), a general vocational stream, and an occupational stream (called TOP – trade, occupational, professional). Most important in achieving this is the alignment of the “skills development architecture and our architecture” so as to maximise the resources and funds available. What also seems to be needed is closer alignment between the college system and the schools. According to Mommen, “they are going to be brought into line with each other so that part of the responsiveness can be dealt with by the colleges themselves in terms of their programme choice and delivery, but the standards of it and the certification will still remain within the national framework ... The dividing line [between schools and colleges] needs to become more and more well-defined.”

Perhaps the perspective of Abie Seakamele presents a way forward in charting a path through this complexity: “What will this joining up take? We were addressed with the Minister of Labour who is impatient with the way Education does things. When you listen to Department of Education, it behaves as though it is under siege – as though a lot has been taken away from them. We need a big indaba there. It has to do with everyone protecting their turf. I don’t know whether the solution lies in merging the two departments. National is under-resourced, but part of the issues around recruitment is not only around the technical skills you have in your area of expertise; it is also about understanding the bigger picture. If you have people who still have problems around working together for joint delivery, you run into difficulties. I’ve discovered that at times it is a clash of personality rather than the issues.”

### **Priorities for future development in FET colleges**

Needless to say, the views on the needs of the sector were divergent and generated a lengthy list of issues. Three key areas of development emerged from the interviews: responsiveness, structure and governance, and the core business of FET colleges. However, in André Fourie’s view, these are all dependent on the ongoing raising of the profile of FET. “The Minister needs to continue her prioritisation of FET over the next five years – that political leadership and attention is important and must translate into additional resources going into the sector.”

### ***Responsiveness***

Two sets of views emerged from the interviews on the question of responsiveness. Not surprisingly business people such as Dave Brink, Michael Spicer and Brian Whittaker see responsiveness in relation to the needs of economy: “Government should become serious about delivering the sorts of graduates from these institutions that business want,” says Brink while Spicer sees potential in the partnerships that are starting to develop between some companies and colleges: “FET will then have an applied outcome; it will be producing people into a market where there is a clear set of needs. In other words, it will be demand-led rather than supply-led. It won’t just be supplying people who may not necessarily have the right skills, the right training. I think that is the best way of fixing that.”

Brian Whittaker sees the challenge as being to “go for broke” and match best FET colleges practice worldwide: “The best are relatively autonomous and highly responsive and well connected with industry.” He recognises that in South Africa this may be a risk for government: “If I were the DG, I would need a lot of comfort to take that risk in South Africa now.” Whittaker’s proposal is that senior leaders in business should support senior government officials and share in the risk. This would also prevent a situation in which “sharp operators in the private sector ... try to capitalise on gaps, try to flog ridiculous products.”

The second set of views on responsiveness concerns the question of access. Dan Nkosi feels that this is one of the key challenges for the sector because “anyone who desires to learn should be able to access our colleges. That is an urgent priority.” Philip Loots points out, however, that this goal might be compromised because FET colleges are presently excluded from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This concern is supported by Jannie Isaacs who is looking to the recapitalisation fund to alleviate the problem: “One of the objectives of FET colleges is to make education accessible to people. Without recapitalisation the fees will be too onerous for students.”

### ***Defining the core business***

Closely allied to the issue of responsiveness is the definition of the core business of the FET colleges. The vision going forward has already been discussed (see pages 37-38). Glen Fisher reiterates the need for “agreement across the education system and more broadly with other government departments and key constituencies such as business and organised labour about what these colleges are for. It is very important now to define the core business of colleges.” Jannie Isaacs agrees that it is important to define the college mandate. “There is still contention about what the mandate is: it is too general right now.”

Anthony Gewer sees the task as follows: “You need to make sure that you are building people who can go into a competitive labour market and have something different to offer, [rather] than just producing a thousand people with the same certificate that doesn’t really mean much. You are now empowering learners to actively seek employment or create employment. You need to create a much more high-level stream that takes learners into areas

of specialisation, be it in engineering or whatever, in a much more innovative way.”

Gewer sees curriculum development as the driver for focusing colleges around their core business and believes that this is one of the main reasons for having a nationally determined curriculum: “... otherwise your colleges will be left to their own devices and will do things in much more expedient ways.”

Is there a need for a specialised institution that provides curriculum and professional support to the colleges such as a national institute for FET curriculum development? Khetsi Lehoko argues that without this, the capacity is not likely to be forthcoming for the excellence that colleges are meant to produce. However, Anthony Gewer is doubtful that this strategy will yield the desired results: “These semi-autonomous government departments don’t work. We saw it with GICD ... when you try and set up a semi-autonomous body, everyone defers to that body and ... they are expected to do everything. ... They [education departments] don’t always put in enough resources or capacity to do it anyway, so those institutions land up being over-stretched and under-utilised.” Gewer suggests that the professional support for FET colleges could come from universities and technikons, some of which are already showing an interest in this direction. Lesley Powell is also sceptical about whether a separate curriculum support institution for FET would work: “The reality is that they haven’t ever been able to pull it off, not in any sector.”

Linked to this is the role that the higher education sector could play in deepening the knowledge base about FET. Khetsi Lehoko feels strongly that “part of the problem with this sector is it doesn’t have an intelligentsia around it ... What you need to create around this sector is a group of academics who do research on the sector itself.”

### ***Structure and governance***

Questions of college structure, the role of government in FET and the ongoing task of institutional transformation persist as key concerns for many of the people interviewed.

For example, working off his experience recently gained in the higher education sector, Theuns Eloff identifies a central challenge as being to “sort out the balance between equity and efficiency on the one hand, and unity and diversity on the other.” He feels that it is important to consider the difference between a federal college structure in which each campus has considerable autonomy, and a decentralised system in which the different campuses are at the same level with sufficient autonomy to find their form, but the institution has one principal and one council with the power to intervene where necessary. This, he says, will have to be brokered with government which prefers a “centralised, interventionist approach”.

How FET articulates with other education sectors was also identified as a key issue to be addressed. “The articulation with other sectors needs to be solved now,” says Lesley Powell. “But how?” asks Zozo Siyengo who agrees that this is a challenge. Dan Nkosi agrees that articulation is an important issue,



particularly in making sure that “people see the difference between the schools and the colleges.” He feels, however, that this will depend on a legal framework that currently does not exist. Frank Ingram shares this concern and feels that the college sector is once again being marginalised in the provincial debates about FET and schools.

How do the interviewees see the role of government in these processes? Frank Ingram’s view is that government’s responsibility is to “drive the curriculum and to target colleges in terms of the national and provincial needs, against which funding will be given.” His view is that colleges should become “agents of the state”. This he explains as follows: “They will still be public institutions, not fully independent, but must have increased or expanded autonomy to be able to deliver on their mission.” Ingram captures this in the term ‘semi-private’ and sees each institution operating under a board of governors that is accountable to the provincial minister. In this scenario the MEC would set the policy framework and the targets, and allocate the resources to the institution that has to deliver on those targets. “Province will then measure the performance of the institutions – those that make the grade will be further rewarded and those that don’t will get their due punishment.”

Ingram sees overall responsibility as being vested in the national Department of Education “to ensure that all nine provinces are singing from the same hymn sheet regarding the curriculum, quality assurance, funding, loans, etc.” He also believes that a common model is required to resource the institutions. This is necessary to deal with the fact that there are a few provinces (such as the Western Cape) that are ahead of others owing to bigger budgets and better resources. “You can’t have [one better-resourced] province competing with those that have half the resources and capacity. This is where national comes in.”

Glen Fisher feels that the national Department “should not be trying to run the colleges system at all. It should be focusing on analysis, knowledge, information. It should be focusing on strategic interventions to build capacity in certain areas and it should be creating the kind of framework which will allow the provinces and the colleges to go forward confidently, knowing that they know what their job is.” He sees the question of autonomy in this way: “If the colleges are going to deliver, they are going to have to have the levels of autonomy that universities or technikons have ... In the Green Paper there was a very strongly articulated argument that we needed to delegate responsibility to the colleges in a planned and deliberate fashion, that you would devolve authority step-by-step, having first tested their capacity to take responsibility for their own budgets, for example.”

The issue of governance persists as an ongoing concern in the strengthening of the FET institutional fabric. Brian Whittaker says that “one of the big general lessons in the Business Trust has been the importance of governance. Unless you get these colleges properly governed, unless you have got the right people on their boards, the idea of a relatively autonomous and responsive institution just becomes a joke.”

Other issues that were expressed as areas of concern were the question of putting systems in place in the institutions (Joy Grobler), attracting the right kinds of teachers into the system and reviewing the remuneration system (André Fourie), and ensuring that at every institutional level there is a stronger calibre of leadership (Ros Jaff).

For Abie Seakamele the question of transforming institutional cultures is still paramount. “Our merger approach did not go really deep in terms of entrenching certain culture and values around the operations of the colleges. We tended to leave the operations as they were and talk broadly about the sector instead of going to the heart of it. So the whole issue of going to the culture of the organisation is critical – you can see it in their attitude to students, the services they provide.” This, he says, will take more than the resources provided by the proposed recapitalisation fund: “It will take more than money ... There is a need for colleges to be born again – to understand that they have this new mandate and it can’t be business as usual, fold your arms and say unless you put money in here, I can’t do anything.”

## Conclusion

The interviews suggest that, difficult though the CCF partnership may have been over the five-year period, the CCF added immense value to the process of restructuring the FET colleges sector and helped government lay a significant foundation for the further development of the sector as a whole.

The insights gained from this five-year experience show that while government and the private sector approach the transformation of the education system from different points of view, common ground can be found in the interests of the country as a whole. Factors that contribute to the productivity of the partnership include building in sufficient time for joint planning, and making sure that the decision-making structures and working relationships between the partners are fully articulated from the outset. It would also be important for the partners to digest some of the insights gained from past experience and to work out how these are likely to influence the relationships going forward.

One of the issues that this investigation explored is the question of how the management of education systems change differs from the management of major projects in business. The difference seems to rest on three factors: people management (which is more flexible and less regulated in the private than in the public sector), planning (the private sector often spends more time on planning and plans further ahead than does the public sector), and the fact that education is a social process in which the returns are not immediately apparent and difficult to quantify.

Hopefully this reflections exercise goes some way in helping players in government and in business gain a better understanding of this complexity.

o o o 0 o o o