Ten years of ABET policy, implementation plans and research

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- 1992 to 1994
- 1995 to 2000
- 2001 to 2002
The period of passion for policy (1990-1994)

- Enormous intellectual passion is directed towards instituting a new democratic state supported system of adult basic education to benefit twelve or so million undereducated adults.

- Progressive literacy organisations influence important intellectuals in COSATU and ANC and a link between ABE and training is propagated.

- Need to fund literacy and ABE organisations in the period before state support arrives is examined by Joint Education Trust (positive) and Independent Development Trust (negative).
Pre-1994 ABE policy and funding

- National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)
- National Training Board’s National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI)
- Joint Education Trust
- Independent Development Trust
- COSATU Participatory Research Project
- The South African Committee for Adult Basic Education (SACABE)
- African National Congress (ANC)
**NEPI: adult education (1993)**

Written by John Aitchison, co-ordinator of a University dominated working group, and published in early 1993.

Presents a broad conception of adult education that is not restricted to ABE and argues for a co-operative rather than controlling relationship between state and civil society in respect of adult education provision.
NEPI: adult basic education (1992)

Written by Judy Favish, Mastin Prinsloo and Kathy Watters in a working group dominated by idealogues and published in late 1993.

Argues mainly for the integration of ABE and training (because of concerns about economic development) and for ABE to be located within the state apparatus. Supports national standards and credits and even a national curriculum. Acknowledges potential implementation difficulties.
NEPI: human resources development

A second version after ideological conflict led to rejection of the earlier version.

Argues for a comprehensive high-participation, high-skills strategy affecting the whole society, with a stress on exports of manufactured goods and high-value added activities. Insists on strong national co-ordination and more stress on efficiency and less on equity. It argues for the balancing of state and employer contributions to training. Wants a good general basic education for all (including ABE).
A Joint Education Trust commissioned report, written by John Aitchison, recommended that the Trust should continue to support ABE NGOs (which were experiencing funding difficulties as donors prematurely pulled back from anti-apartheid education work) and encourage research into ABE (two major projects were undertaken from 1994 to 1995) and promote the development of regional support agencies for ABE (only one of which was started – NASA in 1994).
Independent Development Trust (1992)

The IDT was set up by government and had budgeted about R90 million for ABE, but reneged on this commitment, partly as a result of a University of Cape Town Department of Adult Education report which dismissed ABE NGOs and rejected Aitchison’s JET recommendations. The UCT report argued for the institutionalisation of a state system of delivery guided by an ABE Development Commission dominated by labour, capital, the Department of Education and the African National Congress.
COSATU Participatory Research Project (1993)

Provided general recommendations on the restructuring of ABE, training and grading systems and their integration with labour market planning.

Heavily influenced by the writers’ visits to Australia and Germany to examine their training systems.

Opts for a competency (outcomes) based integrated education and training system with national standards and credits and accreditation of providers.
South African Committee for ABE (1993)

The first and last truly representative national ABE conference positioned literacy within ABE, itself seen as the first phase in lifelong learning. Saw ABE in a critical democratic and not merely economic perspective but also buys into an integrated education and training system with standards and certification. Argues for the state and the Department of Education having primary responsibility for provision but with a broad based co-ordination body (i.e. SACABE). Wanted a mass ABE campaign after the 1994 elections. SACABE soon withered away.
The Preliminary Report of 1994 was very different from the Draft report of 1991 because of the growing influence of COSATU.

It argued that ABE could play an important role in skills development for economic growth. ABE was more than just literacy and numeracy and should be competency-based. There should be national standards, a qualification framework and a national core curriculum with core subjects.
ANC: Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994)

Developed by the ANC with strong input from COSATU and included a small section on the need for ABET which it saw largely in terms of school equivalency literacy and numeracy with national standards.

Argued for strong partnership between state (including local government), business and civil society and the maximum use of existing facilities.

ABE must be a part of all Reconstruction and Development programmes.
ANC: A policy framework for education and training (1994)

ABET is to play a key role in reconstruction and development of the economy and society and is the foundation of access to lifelong learning. Provision is the primary responsibility of the state in terms of the right to basic education but delivery partnerships are encouraged.

There will be a national core curriculum, qualifications and certification, a materials development framework, accreditation and training of educators. ABET seen as formally equivalent to general schooling.
The plan prepared by the Centre for Education Policy Development for the ANC had a substantial section on ABET.

Systematic planning, the identification of intervention areas, strategic pilots, and partnerships (including with the Independent Examinations Board) were encouraged and a National ABE Council would be set up. A strong national Department of Adult Basic and Continuing Education should be constructed out of the Department of Education and Training. There would be a national curriculum and funding for materials development, libraries and resource centres.
Key pre-April 1994 ABET policy and implementation recommendations

- A strong national department of (adult) education with capacity for systematic planning and system development and a national programme (using existing facilities where possible)

- A National Qualifications Framework, with National certification and a National (core) curriculum

- ABET Legislation and future state funding (including more from the Education budget) together with an interim NGO funding body

- A National Council/National Stakeholders Forum with Provincial Councils and Regional support agencies

- Guidelines and capacity for educator training at all levels

- Research, information and development of curriculum and materials.
The period of official policy and implementation plans (1995-2000)

- Donor funded expertise develops formal policy and (over ambitious) implementation plans on ABET for the national Department of Education.
- ABET increasingly seen in very formal terms as a schooling equivalent and the implementation plans soon founder because of inadequate financial support.
- Research and critique of implementation failures evokes only hostility from the national Department of Education.
- The ABET Act of 2000 is a narrow piece of legislation governing public and private adult learning centres.
Post-1994 ABET documents on policy and implementation

• *Education White Paper* (March 1995)

• A *national adult basic education and training framework: Interim guidelines* (September 1995)

• *Adult Basic Education and Development* (1996)

• *Towards a national language plan for South Africa* (1996)

• *Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training* (October 1997)

• *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation* (October 1997)

• *Adult Basic Education and Training Act* (2000)
Highlights redress (for particular target groups), social participation, economic development and linkage with the RDP. There will be an ABET curriculum with three progressive sub levels on the NQF and nationally recognised standards of attainment. Existing facilities will be used and electronically networked Community Learning Centres set up for self-study and open learning. There will be partnerships with all constituencies and a representative national ABET Council as well as a professional directorate for ABET in the Department of Education and an interim ABET Task Team.
A national adult basic education and training framework: Interim guidelines (1995)

The final version of an earlier document that was hurriedly put together by a National Stakeholder Forum task group and then revised without much stakeholder consultation.

It is a ponderous mix of transformatory rhetoric and dense rules about standards, ABET levels, level descriptors, fields of study, assessment and language rules. It was de facto unusable, though frequently referred to.
Compiled by a research group from the Department of Education, COSATU, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the CEPD and the National Literacy Cooperation, this document tried to reassert the role of literacy and ABET in development rather than in formal education provision. It had little impact however.
The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology’s Language Plan Task Group’s final report of 1996, *Towards a national language plan for South Africa* had some useful things to say about literacy and reading.

Nothing much came of these proposals.
The Department of Education’s October 1997 *Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training* was hurriedly prepared for a Department of Education ABET conference by Helene Perold and John Aitchison and used some parts of what remained of a heavily cut National Literacy Co-operation draft.

This clear policy document was not well publicised and has never been used to any great effect, though nominally it remains official policy and is on the Department’s web site.
The Department of Education’s October 1997 *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: provision and accreditation* was presented in a draft written by Gail Elliot to a Department of Education ABET conference in April, then redrafted by a task team which included Professor Bhola and John Aitchison and then edited by John Aitchison for official approval in late 1997.

Significant efforts were made to publicise the plan in late 1997 and 1998. Thereafter, though it continued to influence implementation, the document became increasingly dated as attempts to implement it foundered (mainly for financial reasons).

The document assumed a serious state financial input into ABET that never materialised as well as a national Department of Education that would genuinely collaborate with others sectors.
A Green paper process, started in 1998, was aborted and the final output of the Act is very narrow in scope. It is largely concerned with the regulation of public and private adult learning centres and the setting up of governing bodies for them. Its conception of ABET is entirely formal.

It is unlikely that the Act is capable of serious implementation at the present. Many of the regulations needed to implement the Act in provinces have never been promulgated.
Key post-April 1994 ABET policies and their implementation

The strong ABET base in a national Department of Education never happened and system planning was weakened by pathetic implementation and an almost total failure by the state to invest sizable resources in ABET.

The other pre-1994 recommendations about the NQF, standards, national certification and a core curriculum were all (if slowly and inadequately) implemented, though in a very formal way.

The promised legislation was narrow and inadequate and the Advisory Councils at national and provincial levels were haltingly implemented and then failed or closed. National programmes and interventions (of provision and curriculum development) were badly planned and seldom followed through to success. Partnerships, though entered into at various stages, were seldom genuine.
The period of review and its failures

• In 1999 a new Minister of Education tried to start a literacy campaign, the South African National Literacy Initiative (and failed dismally)

• A new Tirisano strategic plan for 2002 to 2004 tried to review and revise previous plans and to update them

• Another strategic plan for 2003 to 2005 did the same

• The National Skills Development Strategy of 2001 set ABET targets for the workplace

• ABET national examination results exposed a massive failure of ABET implementation since 1995.
An innovative plan was devised to implement the Minister of Education’s September 1999 call for a national literacy campaign.

Thereafter the national Department of Education adopted a dog in the manger approach and effectively killed it and set up SANLI within the Department.

Effectively, nothing happened until 2002 when UNISA’s ABET Institute received a large amount of foreign funding to pay its Certificate graduates to run classes (with some success).
Tirisano plans for 2002-2004 and 2003-2005

These detailed strategic plans provide specification of outputs, indicators, etc. relating to ABET and SANLI.

Unfortunately writing plans according to the right specifications is not the same as implementing the plans in reality (as already discovered with the Multi-Year Implementation Plan).
The strategy stated that, as an indicator of the success of developing a culture of high quality life-long learning, by March 2005 some 70% of workers would have at least a level 1 (i.e. GETC) qualification on the NQF.

Money to help implement this objective was made available from the National Skills Fund.
Research and critique

• Low research and monitoring capacity in ABET (and adult education generally)
• A limited number of generally available publications
• Many secret evaluation studies and reports
• Hostile Department of Education attitude to any serious research and critique (particularly since 1998)
Universities of Cape Town, Natal and Witwatersrand (1992)

This joint effort by the Universities of Cape Town, Natal and Witwatersrand provided some useful historical and policy material, though most of the publication was devoted to teaching methods.
This Joint Education Trust funded survey, undertaken by the University of Natal in 1994 and 1995, produced an amazingly detailed final report that looked at learners, international issues, ABE policy and implementation in South Africa and current providers and the capacity. It remains an extremely useful resource.
University of Natal (1999/2000)

This update of the Joint Education Trust funded University of Natal survey of 1994/95, produced nine provincial reports and a synthesis South Africa one.

The reports provided rich detail on the implementation (and failures in implementation) since 1994.
The ABET on Trial Conference (2000)

This report on a European Union funded conference held in November 2000 provided a useful summary of, and one of the few published critiques of, the failures in implementation of adult basic education and training in South Africa after 1994.