

THE private higher education sector has grown rapidly in the past 10 to 15 years, offering career-orientated education and training, and operating for profit. Notably, the majority of their programmes are concentrated at the lower qualifications levels of the higher education band.

A small private sub-sector operates like universities, offering degrees, primarily in business, commerce and management. Recently there has been a surge in institutions offering accredited specialised credentials geared to prepare graduates for employment within a specific occupational niche at Level 5 or below of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

In 2001, about 48% of all students enrolled in accredited private higher education institutions were registered in such programmes.

These providers typically offer certificates and diplomas (and short courses) in niche areas such as health, beauty, entertainment, ICT, business and management.

Many of the students are non-traditional. They may experience educational or financial barriers to enter universities, they may be mature students who experienced racial barriers in the past, they may be students who would not have entered particular occupations in the past, or they may desire specific occupational skilling.

There is increasing pressure on public further education and training colleges to offer programmes only up to Level 4 (NQF) and not on the higher education band.

Conversely, the shift from technicians to universities of technology

Training young people for work is crucial



There is a gap for courses for sectors with skills shortages, writes
Glenda Kruss

entails upward drift towards degrees. This increases the danger of a gap in provision at the intermediate skills level, particularly in science and technology fields.

This gap has been highlighted by Human Sciences Research Council research, which has shown the significance of a multi-level skills development strategy. While most school-leavers aspire to university or university of technology programmes, the country also needs more young people with good intermediate level qualifications to contribute to sectors with skills shortages.

There is considerable room for co-ordination across these public

and private sites to create a vibrant, responsive intermediate skills sector.

Ways need to be found to encourage private providers to offer programmes in fields of scarce skills, with a stronger technology component, rather than simply those that are lucrative.

The quality of the credentials offered by these institutions, and the preparation they offer for the workplace, is also critical. A Council on Higher Education study suggests that many individual programmes should be more appropriately certified on the Further Education and Training band.

We need to find mechanisms to ensure that these private providers offer quality intermediate level programmes adequate to address the multiple human resources development needs of South Africa.

● Dr Glenda Kruss is a chief research specialist at the Human Sciences Research Council. She is the author of *Chasing Credentials and Mobility: Private Higher Education in South Africa* (HSRC Press). Available at no cost from <http://hrdwarehouse.hsrc.ac.za>

Marise Taljaard
Corporate Communications
Human Sciences Research Council
Private Bag X41

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

1717