

Institution: University of Nottingham
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Informing the Transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Development
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research carried out by the University of Nottingham has significantly informed international policies designed to transform technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and its role in development. This has been achieved through direct contribution to policy making at global, regional and national levels, most notably for UNESCO, the Southern African Development Community and the South African government. This has led to the revision of global, regional and national policy guidelines and the development of new regional and national indicators. Conventional policy wisdoms have been questioned at global and national levels and new concepts introduced into the policy debate.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research carried out by Professor Simon McGrath (who joined the University of Nottingham in 2005), demonstrates that the orthodox account of TVET in developing countries, as advanced by organisations such as the World Bank, is neither practically efficacious nor theoretically satisfying [1]. Instead, his research develops the case for alternative approaches, including the use of insights from human development theory, a greater use of qualitative methodologies and more attention to the voices of learners and teachers. It argues that local context matters and that existing international toolkits are ineffective [2].</p> <p>This research is grounded upon 20 years' work in the South African setting on national skills development and international cooperation and policy learning regarding TVET. Funded research on South Africa since 2005 includes three linked studies (2008-13) funded by the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the South African engineering sector skills council (merSETA) on aspects of further and higher education partnerships and employability. This work argues against the narrow neoliberal orthodoxy regarding employability and questions the tendency to blame learners and TVET institutions for failures in labour market insertion, pointing instead to their often high levels of agency and the ways in which labour markets often provide the principal constraint [3]. It focuses particularly on how institutions and contexts play important mediating roles in employability. This research has been advanced further by the awarding of a School doctoral studentship to Lesley Powell to consider the contribution of the capability approach to TVET in South Africa.</p> <p>As a research associate of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, McGrath is a member of a consortium that has received £6.5 million from the South African government (2012-14) to develop new knowledge, capacity and systems on TVET and labour market research and information architecture. In particular, this Labour Market Intelligence Partnership (LMIP) is taking forward McGrath's regional work on indicators and his previous South African work on institutions and employability. He was also part of the HSRC team commissioned by the South African government to write the background report for the education component of the official review of policy impact in the first 20 years of democracy (1994-2014).</p> <p>The wider international reach of the case is best illustrated by two recent research contributions that draw together longer-term academic and policy work. First, McGrath was lead author of the 2013 UNESCO World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training [4], which seeks to transform global approaches to TVET. In particular, it develops a more holistic account than previously existed of the range of forms and purposes of vocational learning; using the metaphor of a set of lenses, it offers policymakers and planners a new way of thinking about the multiple goals they are seeking to address. This anchors UNESCO's TVET work far more securely than previously to the organisation's educational tradition of emphasising the broad human development purposes of learning.</p> <p>In 2012 McGrath was coordinating editor of a special issue of the International Journal of Educational Development that presented a series of alternative accounts of TVET-for-development, including his own work and that of Nottingham research students (Randa Hilal, Zoe Lim and Lesley Powell) and long-term collaborators. These accounts push beyond the dominant neo-liberal and positivist theoretical and epistemological approaches. The special issue is particularly critical of the underpinning assumptions of the orthodoxy regarding the nature of</p>

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development and the roles played in it by skills and work. The papers also question the spread of a “policy toolkit” that offers decontextualised ‘best practices’, showing how this approach is based on false premises about the universal nature of the problems and solutions. In particular, McGrath’s sole-authored paper [1] highlights the importance of thinking about issues of equity, well-being, capability and aspirations as aspects of the purpose of vocational learning.

The special issue also contains a paper by McGrath and Lugg [2], based on a 13-country study undertaken for SADC and UNESCO in Southern Africa (2010-12), on the challenges of developing evidence regarding TVET performance. McGrath and Lugg advance a strong critique of the use of evidence in TVET policymaking which goes beyond the SADC/UNESCO study’s specific work on developing indicators to measure system performance. This study forms part of a comparative Southern African strand to McGrath’s work, which began with an edited seven-country study [5] that reported work funded by a consortium of South African organisations and the British Council.

3. References to the research

1. McGrath, S. 2012. Vocational education and training for development. *International Journal of Educational Development* 32/5. (part of IJED special issue available online at <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-educational-development/>, paper included in REF 2)
2. McGrath, S. and Lugg, R. 2012. Knowing and doing vocational education and training research. *International Journal of Educational Development* 32/5. (arising out of SADC/UNESCO work 2010-12, included in REF 2)
3. McGrath, S. et al. 2010. Employability in the College Sector: A Comparative Study of England and South Africa. Report to DIUS.
4. UNESCO 2013. World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training. UNESCO, Paris.
5. Akoojee, S., Gewer, A. and McGrath, S. (eds.) 2005. Vocational Education and Training in Southern Africa, HSRC Press, Cape Town. Available online at: <http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2078&cat=29&page=2>

Grants

- DIUS / BIS / merSETA 2008-13. Research on FE-HE partnerships and employability. £200 000 over three projects (McGrath PI).
- Department of Higher Education and Training, South Africa 2012-14. Labour Market Intelligence Partnership. £6.5m for consortium (McGrath Co-I. PI - Dr Vijay Reddy, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa).
- SADC / UNESCO 2010-12. Transforming TVET in Southern Africa. £250 000 over 16 partners (McGrath PI).
- British Council / Joint Education Trust / Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa 2003-5. Vocational Education and Training in Southern Africa. £110 000 (McGrath PI).

4. Details of the impact

As a result of research commissioned by national and international agencies, whose core function is to bring about large scale change and development, there has been direct impact at three levels:

- In South Africa, contributing to the TVET policy debate, to the development of indicators and to capacity building within key national institutions committed to developing skills for the labour market;
- Across southern Africa, leading the process of developing a regional strategy for TVET reform and a supporting set of indicators for the Southern African Development Community;
- Internationally, influencing the global policy agenda on TVET and its place in wider development policies, both through global policy work for UNESCO and through the onward flow of this into country-level advice.

Informing policy and practice in South Africa

McGrath has had a broad policy influence on the South African TVET system and more direct impact on indicator development and implementational capacity. Building on his research and previous direct involvement in policy development in South Africa, McGrath has advised the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET) on vocational teacher education and qualifications (2009-10) and on a new national TVET research institute (2012). In 2013, he was

invited to be a member of the Human Resources Development Council's Further Education and Training Colleges Task Team, and to identify the most pressing priorities for their work. The Task Team chair, Dr Akoojee, writes:

The issues you raised ... [will be] a component of the Task Team's programme of action for the remainder of its term. **[A]**

This has led to the HRD Council commissioning further research and development work in pursuit of these themes.

Since 2008, McGrath has worked with the engineering sector skills council, merSETA, to develop a research-informed national, cross-sectoral response to employability and to FE-HE partnerships. In the Labour Market Intelligence Partnership, in addition to research activities, he has been engaged since 2012 in supporting the development of national capacity on labour markets and TVET in research institutions, sectoral skills agencies and ministries. His work here has included individual and group briefings for senior officials of the various ministries that constitute the government's social and economic clusters and the Office of the President; presentations to 200+ stakeholders and professional staff on indicator development; and mentoring work with the junior and mid-career researchers within the consortium **[B]**. All of these strands of work have contributed to national capacity for research and policy. During 2013, he participated in the South African government's official review of 20 years of development policy and practice, which will be a key input into new government strategies beyond the 2014 elections. Behind all this, McGrath has been working to influence the public debate on TVET including writing newspaper articles and parliamentary briefing notes, and making presentations to senior officials from business, trade unions, further and higher education institutions and sector skills agencies.

Informing transformed regional TVET policy in Southern Africa

McGrath's work has also directly informed TVET policymaking in the SADC region. As a consequence of his long-standing research work on TVET in Southern Africa, and particularly the seven-country study mentioned above [output 4], he was commissioned to lead a SADC/UNESCO research project on TVET reform in Southern Africa in 2010. This resulted in the production of a 13 country study of the state of TVET presented to all regional government ministers. In order to shape policy reform and to measure its impact on the ground, 18 indicators on TVET system performance and development were designed and piloted. The team was also asked to develop a set of five strategic priorities for regional TVET transformation and a costed action plan. These were presented to the SADC Ministers of Education in 2011 and were approved by them. A Technical Committee to oversee the implementation of the plan of action was established in 2012. The Ministers also committed to regular re-collection of indicator data: the first time that TVET implementation in Southern Africa has been subjected to performance management systems. The Report was considered of such potential significance for wider international developments of TVET indicator systems that UNESCO headquarters took the decision to edit and publish it from Paris in 2013 **[C]**, this being highly unusual for such regionally commissioned work.

Influencing the global TVET policy agenda

This work has had a significant influence on the international TVET policy debate. As a result of his track record of academic and policy work in this area, in November 2010 McGrath was invited by UNESCO to provide intellectual leadership in writing a world report on TVET. The initial version of this was the key input into the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training, which aimed to transform global policies on TVET. Given the strategic importance of this, the School of Education seconded McGrath half-time to UNESCO for most of 2011 and covered the staff cost element of this. The draft report was presented to c750 senior policymakers (including more than 40 ministers) in May 2012 at the Third International Congress on TVET in Shanghai. It was then revised for publication in 2013 **[D]**. The messages of the report formed the basis of the Shanghai Consensus, a document agreed by the participants in the Congress, which outlined a global approach to TVET policy priorities **[E]**. Drawing on key themes of McGrath's work, the Shanghai Consensus calls for a transformative approach to TVET that goes beyond economic imperatives and stresses a human development perspective. It suggests a radical shift in global policy thinking about TVET.

This report is driving UNESCO practice. It forms the basis for current development work on a new

UNESCO Recommendation (the key policy advice given to all member states), for UNESCO's next TVET Strategy (from 2015) and for a wide range of UNESCO materials which give guidance to member states on different aspects of TVET [F]. The Head of UNESCO's TVET section, Dr. Chakroun, has said

Professor McGrath's contribution provided the key basis for several of UNESCO's strand of work in the field of TVET. First, his contribution has been decisive in preparing the World TVET Report and sharpening UNESCO's analysis of global trends and issues in TVET. Second, ... [the Report]... forms the basis for a proposal on revising UNESCO's 2001 Recommendation on TVET (the key policy advice given to all member states) to be presented initially to UNESCO's General Conference in November 2013. It is also central to the approach taken for the mid-term review of UNESCO's TVET Strategy conducted in 2013. Third, the work conducted with Professor McGrath is informing UNESCO's work on the position of skills for the world of work in the post-2015 agenda, particularly the call for transforming and scaling-up TVET learning. [G]

McGrath is continuing to support UNESCO's work in this area through a knowledge exchange partnership running from 2013 to 2015.

He currently is part of the Commonwealth Secretariat's expert group on TVET; has provided policy advice on TVET for development policies to more than 20 bilateral and multilateral international agencies; and has been invited to present his work to national stakeholder communities (e.g., Belgium, Denmark, Germany). His work has also influenced the international policy and practitioner debates in TVET with regard to the place of TVET in development agendas. The Shanghai Consensus was referenced in the annual ministerial declaration of the UN Economic and Social Committee 2012, which identifies important issues for future global development policy [H]. In early 2013 McGrath was one of those involved in discussions regarding the inclusion and nature of a TVET goal in the report of the UN High Level Panel for post-2015 development. This is a significant step for TVET given its exclusion from the current Education for All goals.

McGrath writes regularly for Norrag News, which reaches more than 4000 policymakers, practitioners and researchers globally, and is one of the core authors of its blog, launched at the time of the World Congress [I]. In a tweet to its 17,500 followers, the Global Partnership for Education, an international coalition of governments, multilateral agencies, NGOs and foundations, described McGrath's June 2013 blog on skills and work as a "must read" [J]. That tweet was subsequently retweeted by the Head of Outreach, Post-2015 High Level Panel Secretariat.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Work with the South African engineering sector skills council, merSETA, and the HRD Council can be corroborated by the Research and Development Manager, merSETA.

B. Work in the LMIP can be corroborated by the Executive Director, Education and Skills, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa.

C. UNESCO/SADC 2013. Status of TVET in the SADC Region. UNESCO, Paris. Available on request.

D. UNESCO 2013. World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training. UNESCO, Paris. Available on request.

E. For the Final General Report of the World Congress and the Shanghai Consensus document, see: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/technical-vocational-education-and-training-tvet/third-international-congress-on-tvet/>

F. A June 2013 update on progress since the Congress is available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002218/221805e.pdf>

G. UN ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2012/L.10

H. McGrath's role in SADC and UNESCO work can be corroborated by the Head of Section, TVET, UNESCO.

I. Norrag blog posts can be found at www.norrag.wordpress.com and Norrag News at <http://www.norrag.org/en/publications/norrag-news.html>

J. Screenshot available on request.