

New partners

Educational restructuring will be a slow process, says PUNDY
education and training imply a commitment to im



Picture: THE ARGUS

AN EDUCATION and training system that promotes reconstruction and development will have to satisfy both a social justice dimension (equality, equity and redress) and an economic growth path that will require flexible skills, continuous upgrading and the production and dissemination of relevant and applicable knowledge.

To achieve this, four inter-related elements are merging in the new education and training strategy. They are "lifelong learning", an "integrated qualifications framework", "quality improvement" and "partnerships". Lifelong learning is not just an open learning delivery

both as a proportion of total expenditure on education as reflected in the gross domestic product, which currently consumes more than 22 per cent of GDP, and about 7 per cent of GDP. This is at the top end of the spectrum for similar industrialised countries.

The undue emphasis on this level of expenditure may obscure the degree of racial and regional disparities in spending and the high costs of redressing these disparities in the medium terms. As the draft White Paper

for learning

The massive inequalities engendered by apartheid and the need for expansion and rationalisation have led to immense pressure developing for additional spending on education and training. These pressures arise mainly from four sources.

Firstly, there is the need for redress and rehabilitation. The current shortfall of school classrooms is 76 000 and the costs of renovating and rehabilitating schools are high as a result of inadequate spending on maintenance, violence and vandalism.

Secondly, the government's human resource development programme involves major extensions of educational services and new services. Among the most important of these are the phased introduction of 10 years' free and compulsory general education, school nutrition, launching the adult basic education programme and the early childhood development programme, expanding training capacity in technical colleges, community colleges and technikons, an adequate special education needs programme and enhanced pre-service and in-service teacher education to cater for this, and a tertiary education student loan/bursary facility.

Thirdly, there is the pressure of a range of demographic factors. Population growth in excess of 2,5 percent annually will increase annual demand at the sub-A level and will have a continuous ripple effect throughout the system. Urbanisation and improved access to schools increase demand in excess of the normal growth rate in impact areas. The current trend is for about half a million new learners to enter the system annually, without any effort to implement free and compulsory education. Nevertheless, the estimated backlog in provision amounts to 1,8 million children aged between six and 18 who are not enrolled in 1994.

Lastly, the rationalisation of 14-ethnically based departments and services into nine departments involves massive management and service changes. This involves costs for infrastructure and logistical support, plus some element of redundancy payments.

It is clear that the education budget must be radically reformed and that additional funds are required for education in the short term. It is unlikely that the government can significantly increase its allocation to education and training. There are three reasons: other sectoral demands for resources; slow or no economic growth which constrains the growth in government revenue; and the government's commitment to fiscal discipline and macro-economic stability, which is reflected

Four steps recons

GIVEN the serious nature and magnitude of the challenges facing the sector and training, it is evident that success in the sector can be attained only over the long term. It is essential therefore to prioritise programmes for attention, and which are appropriate to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

The programmes and development strategies are just some from a sample demand list developed by the Ministry of Education.

► **Free and Compulsory School Education**
During the five years of the government's mandate, an important aim in restructuring the education system is the process of providing quality education. It is to be introduced to introduce 10 years of free and compulsory education starting with a reception year, and extending to what is now Std 7.

► **School building to expand**
The government's commitment to free and compulsory education has major implications for school building. The number of schools and classrooms must be increased to accommodate all children. There is an annual demand of about 100 000 new classrooms. The cost of eliminating the backlog is conservatively at R1,8 billion, with an additional R1,8 billion just to keep up with enrolment. The government will make a commitment to the design specification and multiple use of school buildings.

► **Early childhood development**
Confronted with high rates of repetition and the political demands to increase equity in education, it is agreed that one cause of repetition is inadequate preparation of children. Children lack the nutrition, health, social skills and language that prepare them for school and