



JOINT EDUCATION TRUST

4th Floor, Field North Building, 23 De Beer Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2001.

P.O. Box 178, Wits 2050

Tel: (011) 339-3212/3, 339-3212/45 Fax: (011) 339-3216

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John Aitchison
Centre for Adult Education
University of Natal
PO Box 375
Pietermaritzburg
3200

Dear John

CO-ORDINATION FOR ABE RESEARCH

Thank you for your prompt proposal in this matter. We in the Joint Education Trust (JET) have done much thinking and talking around the issue and would like the DEAL collective to revise the proposal in the light of the attached comments.

We understand that your original document represents a broad outline rather than a detailed research plan: we are not necessarily requesting the latter at this stage, but, in the first instance would like to see a re-orientation of the broad thrust in response to our re-examination of some of the principal assumptions underlying JET's strategy. This has been precipitated by present developments on the ABE front at the national level, by lessons learnt at both meetings on 26 May, and by the level of capacity reflected in the responses to our Request for Proposals.

We are open to discussion on any matters either contained in or omitted from the attached document. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

NICK TAYLOR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Encls.

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NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECTS

A response to the initial DEAL proposal

1 Regional support agencies

The original conception of these agencies was that, ideally, they would serve as incipient ABE sectoral components of regional education departments, to be incorporated into the state system sooner rather than later. While the Joint Education Trust (JET) accepts the need for such institutions, and is prepared to contribute substantially to their establishment, we feel that they will not be viable unless they arise out of the policy debate at present being conducted in representative and accountable forums such as the NTB and NETF.

However, in the policy vacuum which characterises the present period, we accept the need for institutions which will contribute to the development of the NGO sector in the interim. We have not yet solved the problem as to how this should be done, except to accept in principle that such support will be rendered on a far smaller scale than originally envisaged.

This policy clarification has profound consequences for the DEAL proposal, one of the founding assumptions of which is that the research initiative under discussion will primarily be focused on enhancing the effectiveness of regional support agencies and on assessing the impact of these institutions.

2 Mapping

Our understanding is that a great deal of mapping has been done in terms of identifying:

- Numbers and locations of illiterate adults;
- Number of institutions providing literacy classes;
- Types and levels of programmes;
- Numbers and levels of learners;
- Numbers, levels and capacities of teacher training programmes, etc.

A first priority may be to collate this information and identify gaps in the existing data base. A second priority could be to undertake further research in order to investigate some of these gaps, particularly in areas where gross underprovision is coupled with large numbers of illiterates, such as particular rural communities, squatter settlements, etc. However, any such work needs to be motivated in terms of a strong research hypothesis and framed by a set of questions, rather than proceeding on the unproblematised assumption that more information will necessarily provide the basis for better provision.

3 Special studies

We see this (rather quaintly titled) category as containing some of the most important components of the work. It could include:

An investigation into the discrepancy between the number of illiterates and the **demand** for literacy. This will probably include ethnographic studies which sample different micro-communities, and which attempt to unravel the reasons why illiterates do or do not perceive a need for literacy training.

- An investigation into drop-out rates across a range of sites of provision.
- An attempt to identify the systemic, administrative and management features which characterise successful programmes.
- A survey of cost norms, such as per learner costs, admin/salary ratios, etc.

4 **National Survey**

In the light of the above discussion it is not clear what specific advantages inhere in undertaking a national opinion survey, nor what such a study would add to the information delivered by the other components described above. This does not necessarily disqualify this component, but we would need to be convinced of its necessity by means of a more detailed motivation.

5 **Time frame**

The outside limit of parts of the work could be set at 18 months, as long as interim reports on all components are received at six monthly intervals.

6 **Budget**

If our implicit recommendations for revising the proposal are accepted then the total budget for both the **co-ordination and actual research** should be in the order of R800 000,00.

The revised budget should specify a greater degree of detail than that indicated in the initial proposal.

7 **Mechanism**

The mechanism for achieving the research goals outlined in the proposal appears to be appropriate for the task. In view of the lack of regional capacity reflected in responses to the JET Request for Proposals, a high degree of centralisation in the conceptualisation and management of the entire process will probably be necessary. Of course, this does not preclude regional participation in this processes.