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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

It is my pleasure to present the fourteenth edition of the annual Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) *Research Bulletin on Post-School Education and Training* (PSET). Each year, the Bulletin shares summaries of completed, current and planned research, including, summaries on event proceedings/announcements, reviews, research practices and statistics/Fact Sheets. This edition of the Bulletin covers a wide range of PSET issues, including those related to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and Qualifications and Quality Assurance Bodies. Through this publication, the Department intends to continue building the relationship between research producers and users, thereby improving policy and practice within the PSET space. Since its inception in 2013 the Bulletin has served as a vital resource, and previous editions can be found on our website at www.dhet.gov.za.

This fourteenth edition of the Research Bulletin has produced the greatest number of summaries to date, indicating the level of commitment by our entities to investigate gaps in their respective spaces in an effort towards improving the support offered to citizens. The depth of research undertaken will certainly offer great insights into the PSET space and will highlight strengths and weaknesses in the system on where resources should be directed to better assist beneficiaries. We applaud all contributors as this edition proves to be rich, well crafted and informative. The research is extensive and shares a wealth of information from details on methodologies for differing research areas, research findings on critical areas in the PSET space, and recommendations for improvement. Thank you to all those that took the time share these new developments with us. Your efforts and commitment to the PSET sector's growth, and to knowledge-sharing through this platform, is greatly appreciated.

We encourage readers to reach out to the authors for deeper insights.



Dr Nkosinathi Sishi

Director-General: Department of Higher Education and Training

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The *Research Bulletin on Post-School Education and Training* (PSET) published annually by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) serves as a key resource for researchers, stakeholders, and participants in lifelong learning. The Bulletin consolidates abstracts, summaries, and excerpts from completed, ongoing and planned research across the PSET landscape, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and Quality Assurance Bodies among others. In addition to research outputs, the publication includes book reviews; event summaries and announcements; reflections on research practices; and key statistics on the PSET sector, enabling readers to access the original sources.

We prioritise quality, evidence-based research. While the Bulletin is not a platform for opinion pieces, we welcome well-reasoned and substantiated contributions from all stakeholders, who remain responsible for the content they submit. We strive to ensure that all content is accessible encouraging contributors to use clear plain language and to avoid unnecessary jargon.

Each submission undergoes rigorous reviews by the DHET Editorial Committee to assess its relevance, rigour and contribution of PSET research. Final selections are made to ensure alignment with the sector's research priorities and needs.

Feedback, research contributions and suggestions for improvement are always welcome. Please send your input to dhetresearch@dhet.gov.za

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A. EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS

1. Counternarrative to Youth Unemployment (*Hoosen Rasool*)

The dominant narrative of youth unemployment is that South Africa faces a skills deficit on the supply side. It asserts that there is a skills mismatch between the skills and qualifications that young people possess and the skills that employers want. Therefore, youth require appropriate skills training to secure employment. Furthermore, the narrative contends that youth are enterprising and should be encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship. They will start businesses and create employment. The dominant narrative suggests increased spending on education and training, along with a greater emphasis on youth development projects. The media, politicians, and business people perpetuate this narrative. Increased education spending and graduate output over the past three decades have coincided with a steadily growing youth unemployment rate.

This discussion paper replaces the dominant narrative on youth unemployment with a counternarrative. It argues that South Africa's youth unemployment problem is fundamentally a manifestation of poor economic growth and, therefore, it is disingenuous to label youth unemployment as merely a supply-side skills deficit. The economy offers too few employment opportunities, not only for young people but for individuals of all ages. Without inclusive and sustainable economic growth over the long-term, "slaying the unemployment dragon" is a mirage.

The paper proposes a reassessment of policy on two fronts: economic and education and training. Firstly, a pro-employment macroeconomic framework is needed to rebalance the economy and achieve decent and inclusive employment growth. It necessitates a three-pronged approach: directly spurring employment, wherever possible, resolving macroeconomic imbalances that retard employment, and advancing employment-rich structural transformation. Secondly, the national skills system must run in tandem with a pro-employment macroeconomic framework. It necessitates an open, flexible, agile, and outward-looking national skills system that recognises that skills can be acquired in various ways beyond the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Disruptive technologies have upended the notion that learning and career pathways are a linear progression through narrow NQF levels. Skills acquisition and career development are

based on non-linear models that reflect the complexities of the labour market. It comprises a distinctive system of provision, a parallel universe of training, outside the NQF. The paper proposes reforms with a central focus on addressing youth unemployment.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

za.linkedin.com/pub/prof-hoosenrasool/51/a77/530/

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2. Youth Empowerment Report 2024 (*Beate Stiehler-Mulder and Norman Mafuratidze*)

The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) was conceived in response to South Africa's persistent socio-economic challenges, particularly high youth unemployment, limited access to skills development opportunities, and systemic inequalities that continue to marginalise young people. Recognising the urgent need to integrate youth into the mainstream economy, the project sought to create pathways for empowerment through education, training, and employment opportunities. Its purpose extended beyond short-term interventions, aiming instead to build sustainable solutions that would enhance employability, promote entrepreneurship, and strengthen social cohesion. At the core of the initiative was the recognition that young people are not only vulnerable to exclusion but also hold immense potential as agents of innovation, growth, and transformation. The project thus set out to equip youth with relevant skills, expand access to information and resources, and foster an enabling environment where they could actively participate in economic and community development. By aligning with national priorities, such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and youth employment strategies, YEP was designed to address both immediate socio-economic gaps and long-term developmental objectives.

The project revealed critical insights into the barriers and opportunities surrounding youth empowerment. Structural challenges such as poor-quality education, mismatched skills, limited exposure to work environments, and weak institutional support were identified as persistent obstacles. Gender disparities further compounded these issues, with young women often facing heightened barriers to economic participation due to cultural norms and limited access to opportunities. The project highlighted the importance of integrated support systems that combine training, mentorship, and practical work experience, noting that isolated interventions often fail to produce lasting impact. A major insight was the need to align training programmes with market demands to ensure employability and sustainability, rather than focusing solely on theoretical education. Furthermore, the project underscored the importance of partnerships between government, private sector, civil society, and educational institutions, as collaborative efforts significantly increase the scope, quality, and sustainability of youth empowerment initiatives. Another key observation was that youth require more than technical skills. They need soft skills, entrepreneurial competencies, and resilience to navigate a competitive labour market. Additionally, the project found that digital inclusion and access to technology are critical enablers of youth participation in modern economies, highlighting the risks of digital exclusion in a rapidly evolving labour market.

YEP achieved notable progress in creating opportunities for youth, while also identifying systemic weaknesses that require continued attention. Among the main outcomes was the successful rollout of targeted training and skills development programmes, which enhanced participants' employability and entrepreneurial potential. Many young people reported increased confidence, improved work readiness, and greater awareness of career opportunities. The project also facilitated internships, job placements, and business development support, enabling participants to transition from training to practical application. Importantly, the initiative fostered youth-led enterprises, which contributed not only to income generation but also to community upliftment. However, findings also revealed significant challenges. While training improved individual prospects, structural barriers such as limited job availability, slow economic growth, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hindered broader impact. Geographic disparities were also evident, with rural youth facing more severe challenges compared to their urban counterparts due to limited infrastructure and fewer economic opportunities. Another finding was that although the project enhanced youth employability, sustained outcomes require long-term investment, continuous mentorship, and institutional support beyond project timelines. Overall, the evidence suggests that empowerment initiatives can create meaningful change, but they must be embedded within broader systemic reforms to fully address youth unemployment and socio-economic exclusion.

The report underscores the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, long-term investment, and alignment with broader national development goals. Firstly, government must strengthen policy frameworks to ensure youth empowerment initiatives are coordinated, adequately funded, and monitored for impact. This includes parliamentary evaluation of youth development policies to identify gaps and ensure accountability. Secondly, government institutions should prioritise sustainable support programmes that provide skills development, job placement services, and access to finance for youth entrepreneurs. Thirdly, the private sector is urged to expand its role in creating youth employment through internships, apprenticeships, and enterprise development initiatives, leveraging corporate social investment to scale impactful programmes. For retailers and other industry actors, aligning training programmes with actual labour market needs and investing in technology-driven solutions is key to building future-ready youth. Furthermore, capacity building and awareness campaigns must be expanded to address gender disparities, challenge cultural barriers, and promote inclusivity. Successful global practices in youth employment should be adapted locally, with particular emphasis on integrating digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and

innovation into training curricula. Finally, systematic data collection and continuous evaluation should be institutionalised to inform evidence-based policy reforms and track progress. These recommendations collectively highlight the urgency of not only creating opportunities but also ensuring the sustainability of empowerment interventions, positioning youth as central actors in South Africa's socio-economic transformation.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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3. The Impact of Occupational Qualifications on Youth Unemployment in South Africa: Bridging Urban and Rural Divides (*Zakariyya Desai*)

Youth unemployment in South Africa has hit a crisis level. Without a new approach, the country risks leaving entire communities behind. Modern occupational qualifications that align with the market can be offered through well-equipped Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in partnership with Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and industries. By giving young people the skills they need, South Africa can promote inclusive growth. The potential of occupational training can harness the creation of sustainable jobs across the country.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.qcto.org.za/for-researchers---academics.html> (Below the Webinars section)

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4. Track and Tracer Study of Employed Persons (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) funds various learning programmes with the strategic intent of improving the skills level of the Health and Welfare sector workforce. This annual tracer study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of HWSETA-funded qualifications on employed workers who completed their programmes in the 2023/24 cycle. The study aimed to identify and map the career pathways undertaken by these workers and evaluate programme impact across five objectives: career progression, worker competency, salary and benefits, alignment of qualifications, and learner perceptions.

The study was a retrospective, cross-sectional follow-up survey targeting 259 workers who completed Learnerships, Undergraduate Bursaries, or Postgraduate Bursaries in the 2023/24 period. Data was collected via Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) and Online Surveys. Out of 256 contactable learners, 114 responses were achieved, resulting in a 45% response rate.

The key research findings are outlined, below.

- Determining whether the qualification has provided a career progression: Programmes were shown to deliver a dual value by strengthening employment stability (70% remained with the same employer) and enabling mobility (22% changed jobs). Crucially, the majority of career progression, including promotions and job changes, was secured within six months of programme completion.
- Determining the self-reported improvement in the skills and competencies of workers as a result of the training: Qualifications provided job-ready, applied skills, leading to a high self-reported increase in confidence and competency. Improvement levels ranged from 75% to 100% across the cohort, validating the programme's role in competency growth.
- Determining the change in salary/wage and fringe benefits after obtaining the qualification: The programmes facilitated upward salary mobility and improved access to benefits. Postgraduate bursary recipients who changed jobs progressed into the highest salary bands (above R51,000 per month) and secured comprehensive benefit packages. Learnership participants who remained employed also showed a clear upward salary movement, with almost half advancing into the R12,801–R25,600 band.
- Determining the alignment of acquired qualifications with labour market demands: Qualification utilisation was strong, demonstrating high alignment with labour market demands. Specifically,

94% of job changers and 72% of those who remained with the same employer reported a direct link between their current role and the acquired qualification.

- Learners' perceptions towards the programme: Overall satisfaction was very high (91.4% satisfied or very satisfied), with strong endorsement (88.9% would recommend the programme). However, learners highlighted specific operational challenges concerning post-programme employment support, administration, financial management, and mentorship.

HWSETA programmes deliver a strong, immediate impact by strengthening both employment stability and broadening career pathways for employed workers across key performance indicators. To maximise long-term impact and ensure programme fidelity, the study strongly recommends that HWSETA improve internal controls with employers to understand how the programmes are being implemented across various employer types, to better analyse the learners' feedback, and to manage the programme accordingly, as the findings suggest some deviation in implementation across the sector.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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5. Track and Tracer Study of Skills Programme for Workers (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The study focused on workers that have completed both credit-bearing and non-credit bearing skills programmes in 2023/24. The goal of the study was to assess improvements in worker productivity after exposure skills training funded by the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA).

The study aimed to:

- Determine the benefits gained by workers from the skills training.
- Determine the usability of the skills obtained by workers.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining online surveys with qualitative key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The survey was administered to 260 employees, of whom 57 participated in the study.

The key findings of the study are outlined, below.

- Main reasons for undertaking the training were to improve performance (47%, n=27) and gaining formal qualification or competence (23% and 21%, respectively).
- 67% reported using the skills that they have learned from the training in their current jobs “to a great extent.”
- 68% of respondents self-reported that the training improved their productivity “to a great extent.”
- There was an 73% perception that the training would be a source for career advancement among the respondents.

Despite low response rates, the study suggests that the HWSETA is contributing to the upskilling of sector workers and improving their productivity. As a result, their needs are met.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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6. Track and Tracer Study of Non-Governmental Organisation//Non-Profit Organisation Officials' Skills Programme (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The goal of the study was to evaluate the relevance and outcomes of skills development interventions provided to officials working within the non-governmental and non-profit organisation sectors. This represents Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority's (HWSETA's) first evaluation focused specifically on Non-Government Organisation (NGO)/Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) officials, reflecting its commitment to strengthening governance, service delivery, and sustainability in the health and welfare sector through targeted capacity-building initiatives.

The study aimed to:

- Assess the extent to which HWSETA-funded training interventions respond to the identified skills needs and priorities of NGO/NPO officials.
- Examine how acquired skills are applied to strengthen organisational governance and service delivery.
- Identify additional skills needs and support measures that can enhance the future relevance of HWSETA's NGO/NPO interventions.

The study employed a quantitative research design supported by descriptive analysis. Data were collected through telephonic interviews using a structured questionnaire. A total of 125 officials completed interviews (23% response rate). Respondents included managers, employees, and volunteers from all nine provinces.

The key findings of the study are outlined, below.

- The most pressing skills needs identified by the NGO sub-sector include Communication Skills Leadership and Governance Skills and Early Childhood Development (ECD) at 47%, 38% and 35%, respectively.
- 54.4% of respondents were of the view that their training needs and priorities were met.
- 44,8% of respondents reported that the skills development initiatives they participated in were very relevant to their daily work responsibilities.

- 48% reported benefiting from the programme, citing improved competency, performance, and service delivery.

Findings confirm that HWSETA's interventions are highly relevant and impactful, contributing to improved organisational governance, staff competency, and community service outcomes. However, to enhance long-term sustainability, HWSETA should prioritise certification follow-ups, funding efficiency, and ongoing mentorship. Expanding training content to include financial management, project management, and technology skills would further strengthen the sector's capability to deliver effective social services.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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7. Track and Tracer Study of Unemployed Persons (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) Track and Tracer Study of the unemployed learners assess the employment outcomes of beneficiaries that have completed learnerships, apprenticeships, internships, and bursaries. The programmes are designed to enhance employability and support the transition of learners into sustainable livelihoods within South Africa's health and welfare sector. The study aimed to assess learner pathways after completing HWSETA Workplace-Based Learning (WBL) and bursary programmes. The study objectives are as follows:

- Assess the employment status and nature of jobs secured by beneficiaries.
- Examine progression into further studies and entrepreneurship.

Data collection method combined Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI) and Computer-Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) to reach a diverse group of beneficiaries nationally. A total of 441 respondents participated in the survey.

The key findings of the study are outlined, below.

- The overall employment rate is 32%. There is a significant contribution to employment opportunities from learnerships and bursaries (52% and 27%, respectively).
- Almost two-thirds of study participants (63%) found employment within six months of completion. Learnership and bursaries graduates have quicker absorption compared to other programmes. 46% of the participants were employed on full-time basis while 43% were on fixed-term contracts and 10% were employed part-time.
- Only 10 participants reported that they are self-employed.

The study confirms that HWSETA's training programmes significantly contribute to youth employment, however challenges remain in transitioning learners into sustainable employment. The report recommends that HWSETA enhance job placement mechanisms, expand mentorship and provide top-up training on entrepreneurship to foster job creation and empower individuals to become self-reliant.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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8. Track and Tracer Study of Unemployed Persons Funded for Skills Programme (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) Unemployed Skills Programme Tracer Study evaluates the relevance and impact of short skills programmes funded by HWSETA for unemployed persons. These programmes, including Workplace Readiness and Employability Skills, aim to enhance employability, improve job readiness, and stimulate entrepreneurship among unemployed youth within the health and welfare sectors.

The study aimed to:

- Determine the extent to which HWSETA-funded skills programmes respond to beneficiaries' training and employability needs.
- Assess the proportion of beneficiaries who secured employment or became self-employed after programme completion.
- Examine which skills programmes most contributed to improved employability.
- Explore beneficiaries' motivations for enrolling and their post-training support needs.
- Identify the challenges faced by beneficiaries in accessing employment or entrepreneurial opportunities.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative telephonic surveys and qualitative focus group discussions. A total of 233 respondents participated in the survey (response rate: 34.8%), while four focus groups were conducted across four provinces. Quantitative data were analysed using excel, and qualitative insights were derived through thematic analysis.

The key findings of the study are outlined, below.

- Most participants were female (81%), aged 26–35, and held matric qualifications. Over 60% had been unemployed for more than a year before joining the programme.
- 61.6% completed Workplace Readiness, and 38.4% completed Employability Skills programmes, with a 95.6% completion rate.

- 17% (n=39) of respondents gained employment, 7% (n=17) became self-employed, and 12% (n=27) pursued further studies.
- 86.8% reported benefiting from the programme, citing improved communication, problem-solving, interview, and entrepreneurial skills. Learners credited the training with enhancing employability, confidence, and readiness for job interviews.
- 35.2% of respondents stated that the training improved their employability “to a great extent.” However, limited job placement support post-training remains a significant barrier, with 86% reporting no additional assistance after completion.

HWSETA’s Unemployed Skills Programmes remain relevant and impactful in building foundational employability skills for job seekers in the health and welfare sector. However, the study highlights a persistent employment absorption gap despite strong satisfaction levels and perceived skill gains. Strengthening post-training job placement mechanisms, career guidance, and mentorship support could significantly improve transition-to-work outcomes. Sustained partnerships with employers, community organisations, and other Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) are also recommended to maximise the socio-economic return on skills investments.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

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9. Track and Trace Study Report: Mathematics, Accounting and English Support Programme (Gwen Mbatha, Sanele Dlamini and Lunga Bernard)

This report presents the results of a Track and Tracer Study for Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority's (FASSET's) Mathematics (Maths), English, and Accounting Support Programme that benefitted Grade 8 to 12 learners during the financial years 2020/2021, 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024. The non-pivotal support programme was geared to assist unemployed learners.

The data was collected from a sample of 769 distributed questionnaires, yielding 331 responses, representing a response rate of 43%. An online survey questionnaire was designed based on a series of questions specifically structured to gather survey data centred on basic education academic support in Maths, Accounting and English subjects. The design of the online survey tool was structured to enable respondents to answer the questionnaire in a short space of time and to access it through emails and WhatsApp.

The analysis examined the demographics, academic achievements, and perceptions of beneficiaries, highlighting the programme's strengths, areas for improvement, and overall effectiveness.

- 91.52% of respondents were between 17 and 20 years old.
- 70% were female, 29.09% male, and 0.91% identified as other genders.
- 95.76% were African, with minimal representation from other racial groups.
- 99.7% reported no disabilities.
- 93.58% of respondents completed the programme, while 6.42% dropped out.
- 95.42% obtained their matric certificates, with 79.19% achieving Bachelor's Degree passes.
- 33.33% of Certificate-level achievers gained admission to post-matric institutions, primarily Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.
- 34.13% are pursuing programmes at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 7, indicating significant academic advancement.

- Notable improvement in Maths was achieved, with 24.52% achieving Level 5 and 15.48% achieving Level 7 post-intervention. Confidence increased significantly, with 92.9% reporting increased confidence levels.
- English performance improved, with 63.51% achieving Levels 6 or 7 post-intervention. Beneficiaries reported a boost in confidence, with 59.8% feeling extremely confident.
- Post-intervention achievements in Accounting were encouraging, with 40.76% rating the programme as extremely good, and 53.16% reporting improved confidence.
- 81.67% attributed their academic success to the programme, and 55.45% stated they could not have completed their studies without it.
- 59.94% were very satisfied with Maths support, 61.02% with English support, and 57.32% with Accounting support.

The study highlights the critical role these initiatives play in improving learners' performance in key subjects and opening pathways to higher education and career opportunities. The programme has successfully reached and impacted learners, particularly those from underprivileged and rural areas, providing them with much-needed academic support. Ultimately, the programme serves as a testament to the transformative potential of targeted academic support in fostering educational equity and social development.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.fasset.org.za/research>

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10. Unemployed Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority-Funded Beneficiaries (*Yunus Doba, Tanzala Kikasu, Andrew Kamwendo, Maliga Reddy and Nkululeko Praisegod Zungu*)

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and employment for unemployed youth, while simultaneously enhancing the skills and competencies of workers within the retail sector. Its interventions are strategically designed to create an enabling environment where beneficiaries can secure employment, upskill for career advancement, or acquire the necessary skills to establish and grow their own enterprises. Through a suite of programmes including learnerships, graduate placements, bursaries, internships, workshops, and skills development initiatives the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) aims to cultivate a workforce that is knowledgeable, competent, and professional, ultimately contributing to the transformation and sustainability of the wholesale and retail sector.

The primary purpose of this research project was to track and trace beneficiaries who participated in W&RSETA-funded interventions to determine their employment, entrepreneurial, or continued training outcomes. Additionally, the study evaluated the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing youth unemployment, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing employability. By examining the outcomes of these programmes, the study aimed to provide actionable recommendations for maximising the return on investment from W&RSETA funding and improving the overall impact of skills development interventions.

The study's findings reveal that W&RSETA-funded interventions have had a measurable impact on beneficiary employment and entrepreneurial activity, although the outcomes are uneven and highlight areas for improvement. Most beneficiaries reported positive experiences, indicating that participation in learnerships, bursaries, internships, and graduate placement programmes enhanced their employment status or entrepreneurial journey. Satisfaction data revealed that while a majority expressed contentment with the funding and skills programmes, a notable proportion of beneficiaries indicated neutrality or dissatisfaction, highlighting the need for further refinement of programme delivery and alignment with industry requirements. Respondents overwhelmingly supported improvements to programme content to address technological advancements within the sector, emphasising the need for

interventions that keep pace with evolving market demands. Similarly, beneficiaries advocated for strengthened learnerships and graduate placement opportunities, more formal mentorship training, and securing industry commitment to facilitate employment, demonstrating a clear demand for programmes that provide practical work experience, career guidance, and long-term industry engagement. The insights suggest that while the SETA has made significant strides in workforce development, the sector requires continuous recalibration of interventions to align with evolving industry standards, technology trends, and entrepreneurial needs.

The research identified several critical outcomes and challenges in the current skills development framework. Firstly, a substantial proportion of unemployed beneficiaries faced challenges in securing sustainable employment due to limited job opportunities, skills mismatches, and a competitive labour market. Secondly, while funded programmes improved employment outcomes for many, there were clear gaps in curriculum alignment, practical work experience, and mentorship support. Beneficiaries noted that learnerships and skills programmes, while valuable, often lacked exposure to real-world industry practices and entrepreneurial development. Data from satisfaction surveys indicated that most beneficiaries agreed that the SETA interventions positively impacted their employability, yet a notable percentage remained neutral or dissatisfied, suggesting areas for programme enhancement. Furthermore, respondents strongly supported the integration of mentorship, career guidance, soft skills development, and formalised pathways from learning to work, highlighting the necessity for holistic interventions that address both technical and professional competencies. These findings underscore the importance of industry-academic partnerships, adaptive curricula, and structured work-integrated learning to enhance employability, retention, and entrepreneurial outcomes.

The study recommends a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to optimise W&R SETA interventions. Key recommendations include aligning curricula with technological and sectoral advancements to ensure beneficiaries acquire relevant, up-to-date skills. Partnerships between academic institutions, retail businesses, and industry experts should be strengthened to inform curriculum design and facilitate Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), mentorship, and career guidance. Work readiness programmes, internships, and graduate placements must be expanded and closely monitored to provide practical experience that enhances employability. Funding strategies should prioritise programmes that address scarce and critical skills, ensuring resources are selectively allocated to interventions with the greatest potential impact. Mentorship support should be formalised, incorporating industry-based

mentors to guide beneficiaries and enhance practical learning outcomes. Entrepreneurship education must be embedded across all programmes to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and promote self-employment opportunities, addressing youth unemployment sustainably. Regular qualitative evaluation and monitoring of interventions, including cost-benefit analysis and feedback from beneficiaries and employers, should guide programme improvements and ensure accountability. Contractual obligations with participating institutions and industry partners must be enforced to safeguard programme quality, promote beneficiary retention, and prevent exploitation, such as the use of students as “sponsored labour.” Additionally, the SETA marketing and outreach initiatives should be strengthened to inform beneficiaries of available opportunities and enhance participation rates. Collectively, these recommendations aim to ensure that interventions are relevant, practical, and responsive to the evolving needs of the retail sector, thereby maximising employment, upskilling, and entrepreneurial outcomes.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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11. Technical and Vocational Education and Training and University Work Integrated Learning – Track and Tracer Study (*Thoko Mahlangu, Johanna Ledwaba and Bulelwa Plaatjie*)

The Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) funds Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programmes for unemployed Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and university learners as a pathway to qualification completion, workplace skills development, and employment. To assess the programme's effectiveness, HWSETA conducted a national tracer study of the 2023/24 cohort.

The study followed a retrospective, cross-sectional survey was conducted with learners who completed HWSETA-funded WIL placements during 2023/24 across South Africa. From a total eligible population of 729 learners (420 TVET; 309 university), 352 responded, yielding a 48.3% response rate. Data was collected via structured interviews, guided by ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

The key research findings are outlined, below.

- Determining the attainment of full qualification after WIL completion: Completion rates were high, with 93% of TVET and 89% of university learners finalising their studies. However, many faced delays in receiving certificates - linked to administrative inefficiencies in TVET institutions and outstanding fees or poor communication at universities, slowing labour market entry.
- Learners' experiences towards the WIL programme: Government organisations hosted most learners (73%), followed by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) (12%) and the private sector (13%). TVET placements typically lasted 18 months, compared to shorter university placements (under six months for 53%). Nearly all learners (95%+) were assigned mentors, and government sites consistently received stronger ratings for supervision quality. TVET learners reported heavier workloads but better structured schedules, which contributed positively to their experience.
- Learners' perceptions towards the WIL programme: A majority (55%) rated the WIL programme as excellent, and over 82% considered the skills gained either relevant or extremely relevant for career progression. Learners highlighted increases in job-specific knowledge (89%), communication skills (94%), and task execution ability (92%), confirming the programme's role in strengthening both technical and soft skills.
- Learner employability after completion of WIL programme: Employment prospects differed sharply between groups. Just under one-third (29.9%) of TVET college learners secured jobs,

compared with more than half (52.5%) of university learners. Time-to-employment also varied: 35% of employed learners were absorbed immediately after WIL, while most others experienced delays. Importantly, job alignment was very high - 98% among university graduates and 63% among TVET college graduates, showing that when employed, learners work in roles directly linked to their WIL training.

The WIL programme has proven highly effective in supporting learners to complete qualifications and gain work-readiness skills. However, systemic issues, particularly certification delays and the limited absorption of TVET college graduates - undermine its broader employability impact. To maximise programme effectiveness, the study recommends streamlined certification processes, strengthened labour market linkages, and targeted support for TVET college learners in accessing employment opportunities.

This study demonstrates that while HWSETA-funded WIL is operationally successful, achieving long-term impact requires addressing external systemic and market barriers.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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12. The Practicability of Future Ready Financial and Accounting Services Sector Graduates in South Africa: An Exploratory Study (Sanele Dlamini and Lunga Bernard)

The study addressed the persistent gap between academic preparation and workplace readiness, where graduates typically possess strong theoretical knowledge but lack essential practical skills for professional success. With digital transformation accelerating due to Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) advances, the Finance and Accounting Services (FAS) sector requires graduates equipped with both technical competencies and broader professional skills.

The study revealed significant deficiencies in graduate preparation across multiple competency areas. Students demonstrated strong development in financial administration and theoretical understanding but showed poor development in technological skills, data analytics, and professional competencies. Current curricula emphasise conventional concepts while neglecting modern requirements like Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications, and blockchain technology. This study confirmed hiring difficulties for personnel with finance-related software skills, data analytics capabilities, and modelling program proficiency due to outdated curricula. The alignment between 21st-century demands and educational programmes requires urgent attention across stakeholder values, competency requirements, and capability achievement.

Seven critical work values were identified: thinking and learning, cultural competence, self-care, multiliteracy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills, working life skills, and sustainable future participation. These translate into five broad competency categories essential for graduate success: technological skills, critical thinking, communication skills, adaptability, and professionalism. The research highlighted concerning gaps in these areas within current educational frameworks.

For accountancy professionals, four generic skills emerged as essential: digital acumen, decision-making, organisational skills, and business acumen. The World Economic Forum (WEF) predicted significant employment disruption, with over 40% of accounting roles potentially eliminated by automation within five years. However, opportunities exist for

accountants to evolve into strategic advisors, requiring enhanced soft skills alongside technical competence.

The study emphasised immediate action on digital skills training, including blockchain technology, information assets, and autonomous systems. Professional bodies, educators, and government must collaborate to identify employability-enhancing skills. Tertiary institutions should balance technical knowledge with soft skills development, ensuring graduates possess comprehensive capabilities for professional success.

Therefore, it is obvious that addressing the skills mismatch requires coordinated effort from graduates, businesses, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and the broader economy. Strategic curriculum design coupled with industry partnerships can significantly improve graduate employability, creating future-ready professionals capable of navigating technological transformation while maintaining core competencies essential for sector success.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.fasset.org.za/research>

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B. GENDER AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

13. 'We Do Not Like Talking About Our Problems': Socialisation and Idealised Masculinity as Drivers of Help-Seeking Avoidance Among College Men in South Africa (Yandisa Sikweyiya, Pinky Mahlangu, Carrie Brooke-Sumner, Andrew Gibbs, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Mercilene Machisa)

This article explores how identities and contexts influence help-seeking avoidance behaviour among college men.

This exploratory qualitative study purposively selected 88 male students (aged 18–30) from some universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in South Africa. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Eight FGDs were conducted, one in each selected university (n = 2) and TVET colleges (n = 6) in 2018–2019. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

The researchers found that college men's early life experiences and socialisation strongly influenced their ability to express emotion and access services when in need of help. The data also revealed a masculinity that men aspired to and wanted to be seen as embracing or personifying while on campus. Most men ascribed to an ideal of masculinity that made it difficult for them to share their feelings (e.g., emotional pain, sadness; and bottle their emotions) and seek help from campus-based counselors or peers. The few men who reported using campus mental health support services appraised them as unsuitable and unhelpful for them and indicated a preference for services that were more culturally relevant. Most men indicated a preference for male counselors, of which there were very few.

These findings may be useful for the formulation of evidence-based context-specific and culturally sensitive approaches for increasing men's access to mental health and psychological support services on South African college campuses.

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14. Ntombi Vimbela! Sexual Violence Risk Reduction Intervention: Pre and One-Year Post Assessments from a Single Arm Pilot Feasibility Study Among Female Students in South Africa (Mercilene Machisa, Pinky Mahlangu, Esnat Chirwa, Ncediswa Nunze, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Rachel Jewkes)

The extremely high prevalence of sexual violence victimisation reported among female students in South African public higher education demands urgent action to develop, rigorously evaluate and scale effective prevention interventions. This article details findings from a pilot feasibility study of Ntombi Vimbela! a campus sexual violence risk reduction intervention developed to tackle the high burden of sexual violence in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa.

Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!) is a sexual violence risk reduction intervention that comprises sexuality empowerment, gender and social norm change, early-risk identification, self-defence, resistance and mental wellbeing components. NV! is comprised of ten workshop sessions running for 3.5 hours each. Workshops are co-delivered by two trained peer facilitators per group of at most 20 first-year female students. One-year post-intervention quantitative outcome assessments were remotely completed by 98 participants who participated in the NV! pilot workshops. Qualitative assessments were conducted with 35 participants through In-Depth Telephone Interviews (IDTIs).

One year after attending NV! workshops, most participants reported improved awareness of sexual rights, assertive communication, shifts in gender equitable beliefs, reductions in rape myth acceptance, improved expressed sexual relationship power sexual decision-making, and improved negotiation within their intimate relationships. Participants' depressive symptoms also significantly decreased. Many participants improved awareness of sexual assault risk and vigilance, including using self-protection strategies such as removing themselves from environments where alcohol intoxication posed sexual assault risks. Some participants used assertive communication to withstand peer pressure to engage in risky sexual behaviours. Most participants scored highly on the self-defence efficacy scale. Some participants were exposed to and successful in using verbal and physical resistance strategies in potential sexual assault risky situations.

These findings indicate the potential beneficial effects of NV! as a campus sexual violence risk reduction intervention at one-year post-intervention, which must be evaluated in a future rigorous randomised control trial.

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15. “I Don’t Want to Be Known as a Weak Man”: Insights and Rationalisations by Male Students on Men’s Sexual Violence Perpetration Against Female Students on Campus (Yandisa Sikweyiya, Mercilene Machisa, Pinky Mahlangu, Ncediswa Nunze, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Rachel Jewkes)

Understanding how men view rape is foundational for rape prevention, but it is not always possible to interview men who rape, especially in a college campus context. The researchers explored male students’ insights into and rationalisations for why men on campus perpetrate Sexual Violence (SV) against female students by analysing qualitative focus group discussion data with male students. Men contended that SV is a demonstration of men’s power over women, yet they did not perceive sexual harassment of female students as serious enough to constitute SV and appeared to be tolerant of it. Men perceived “sex for grades” as exploitative and rooted in the power asymmetry between privileged male lecturers and vulnerable female students. They were disdainful of non-partner rape, describing it as acts exclusively perpetrated by men from outside campus. Most men felt entitled to have sex with their girlfriends, although an alternative discourse challenged both this entitlement and the dominant masculinity linked to it. Gender-transformative work with male students is needed to support them to think and do things differently while they are on campus.

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16. Preliminary Evidence of Promise of a Sexual Violence Risk Reduction Intervention for Female Students in South African Tertiary Education Institutions (*Pinky Mahlangu, Mercilene Machisa, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Ncediswa Nunze, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Rachel Jewkes*)

Campus sexual violence risk reduction and resistance interventions have been developed and tested among female students in the global North and proven effective. Evidence-based interventions to prevent sexual violence tested amongst female students in the global South and in South African campuses are lacking. The researchers present preliminary evidence of promise of Ntombi Vimbela! (NV!), a sexual violence prevention intervention piloted amongst first year female students in eight purposively selected campuses in South Africa. Focus group discussions were conducted with 118 female students who participated in NV! workshops. Most students found the content of NV! relevant and reported having experienced its positive effects. They perceived that NV! empowered them with skills to assess and deal with sexual assault risky situations. NV! changed their attitudes and beliefs about gender, shifted their acceptance of rape myths and beliefs, improved communication skills, enhanced self-esteem, and confidence to defend oneself in risky sexual assault situations. Few participants were unsure whether they will be able to use the skill in real life. These findings indicate a range of short-term positive outcomes which the researchers anticipate would reduce the risk of sexual assault among first year female students. This suggests that NV! should be subject to further evaluation.

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17. Factors Associated with Female Students Past Year Experience of Sexual Violence in South African Public Higher Education Settings: A Cross-Sectional Study (Mercilene Machisa, Esnat Chirwa, Pinky Mahlangu, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Ncediswa Nunze, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Rachel Jewkes)

Intimate partner sexual violence and non-partner rape experiences are widely reported by female students in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), consistent with global trends. However, limited research has focused on investigating vulnerability factors, which is vital for informing interventions.

The aim of this study is to describe the factors and inter-relationships associated with female students' increased vulnerability to past year experience of partner sexual violence and non-partner rape in South African higher education settings.

The researchers interviewed 1 293 female students, i.e., 519 students in six Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college campuses and 774 students at three university campuses. Participants were volunteers aged 18–30. The measured vulnerability factors included childhood sexual abuse, other trauma, mental ill-health, risky sexual behaviours, food insecurity, partner violence, and controlling behaviours. The researchers used bivariate analysis, logistic regression, and structural equation modelling methods.

Twenty percent of participants experienced past-year sexual violence (17% partner sexual violence and 7.5% non-partner rape). Childhood sexual abuse had direct effects on experiencing past year sexual violence and physical, emotional partner violence or controlling behaviours. Risky sexual behaviours mediated the relationships of childhood sexual abuse or harmful alcohol use and past-year sexual violence experience. Mental ill-health mediated the relationships between childhood sexual abuse, other traumatic exposures, food insecurity, physical, emotional partner violence or controlling behaviours, and past-year partner sexual violence or non-partner rape experience.

Risky sexual behaviours, gender inequitable relationship dynamics, mental ill-health, and food insecurity are related and amenable vulnerability factors associated with female students' sexual violence experiences. Therefore, addressing these through comprehensive campus interventions, which are implemented when students first enrol in higher education and are

most vulnerable to sexual violence, is critical. Society-wide sexual violence prevention is also imperative.

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18. Suicidal Thoughts, Depression, Post-Traumatic Stress, and Harmful Alcohol Use Associated with Intimate Partner Violence and Rape Exposures Among Female Students in South Africa (*Mercilene Machisa, Esnat Chirwa, Pinky Mahlangu, Ncediswa Nunze, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Rachel Jewkes*)

While ample evidence from high-income country settings indicates the prevalence and risk factors for multiple mental ill-health symptoms in student populations, evidence from low- and middle-income higher education settings remains limited.

The researchers determined the frequency, associations, and structural pathways between mental health outcomes and possible risk factors among a sample of 1 292 predominantly Black African and female students ages 18–30 years, enrolled at nine purposefully selected public universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) campuses. They measured and created a mental ill-health latent outcome consisting of depressive symptoms, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicidal thoughts. They also measured traumatic exposures including childhood trauma, recent Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), non-partner rape, and other life traumatic events. They used structural equation modelling to analyse data.

The researchers found that 50% of the surveyed students engaged in binge drinking, 43% reported depressive symptoms, 9% reported PTSD symptoms, and 21% had suicidal thoughts. Students' experiences of childhood trauma, food insecurity, other traumatic events, non-partner rape, and IPV impacted the mental ill-health latent. IPV experiences mediated the relationships between experiences of childhood trauma or other trauma and the mental ill-health latent, and the relationship between binge drinking and other life traumatic events. Non-partner rape mediated the relationship between food insecurity and the mental ill-health latent. Binge drinking directly impacted non-partner rape experience.

The findings substantiate the need for campus-based mental health promotion, psychosocial services and treatments, and implementation of combined interventions that address the intersections of violence against women and mental health among students in South Africa.

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19. Mental Health and its Drivers in Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer-Identifying Women at a South African Higher Education Institution: A Qualitative Study (*Carrie Brooke-Sumner, Pinky Mahlangu, Kristin Dunkle, Ntlotleng Mabena, Rachel Jewkes, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay, Sinegugu Duma, Nelisiwe Khuzwayo, Yandisa Sikweyiya and Mercilene Machisa*)

Many university students have poor mental health, and sexual minority students may be particularly vulnerable. This study explored lived experiences and drivers of poor mental health amongst lesbian and bisexual students in a South African university.

Three Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in isiZulu on three campuses, with 56 participants between 18 and 30 years old, identified through the campus Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) + forum. A topic guide with open-ended questions on mental health experiences guided the FGDs. Discussions were audio recorded, translated and transcribed into English. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted, with emerging themes confirmed in a meeting with a subsample of participants (member checking).

Three main themes emerged: (i) Experiences of mental health problems and resilience, (ii) drivers of poor mental health across the life course and (iii) drivers of poor mental health in current student life. Participants articulated a deep self-awareness of their distress and the impact on their academic and personal lives. They described how their poor mental health impacted their academic performance, self-care and relationships, contributing to a sense of overwhelm. Substance use, particularly alcohol and marijuana, was widely reported. Participants also identified resilience factors, chief amongst which was social interaction through supportive friendships and connections within the LGBTQI + community. The early drivers of poor mental health identified by participants included rejection by family based on their sexuality, the burden of meeting societal expectations of women in their cultural context and the pressures created by religious beliefs about minority sexual identities. Participants highlighted the strain of navigating their sexual identity in unaccepting environments, which led to feelings of self-stigma and emotional exhaustion. Homophobia on campus further exacerbated their distress, with participants highlighting experiences of verbal abuse and discrimination.

This study describes experiences of poor mental health of sexual minority women students in South Africa. Mental health promotion interventions for campus environments, including approaches that build self-acceptance and foster social support, are urgently needed to address drivers of poor mental health. This should include multicomponent psychoeducational interventions that affirm gender and sexuality, promote mental health literacy and self-acceptance and enhance healthy coping strategies and resilience.

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20. Intimate Partner Violence Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women Students on Campuses in South Africa: A Qualitative Study Exploring Context, Drivers, and Impacts (Pinky Mahlangu, Carrie Brooke-Sumner, Yandisa Sikweyiya, Kristin Dunkle, Ntlotleng Mabena, Rachel Jewkes, Nelisiwe Khuzwayo, Elizabeth Dartnall, Managa Pillay and Mercilene Machisa)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a global public health problem, associated with negative physical and mental health impacts. Research on IPV has mainly focused on heterosexual relationships with limited focus on same-sex relationships. This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study which explored experiences, context, drivers, and impact of IPV in same-sex relationships of students who identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer (LBQ) women at three campuses in a university in South Africa.

The researchers collected data through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 56 students who self-identified as LBQ women. Participants were Black African, between 18 and 30 years of age, enrolled in courses for at least 1 year, and volunteered to participate in group discussions. Data were analysed inductively using a thematic analysis approach. The researchers drew from the post-structural feminist theory to understand the relationship dynamics in same sex relationships of LBQ women.

Three themes were developed through the analysis of data. The first theme is on the nature and forms of violence experienced by LBQ women—where women described bidirectional partner violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional IPV, and controlling behaviors in their relationships; and discrimination and disregard for bisexual women. Theme two highlighted the drivers and context of violence experience and enactment in intimate relationships which included multiple factors: past traumas, previous experience of violence, poor communication and poor conflict resolution skills, and heteronormativity and gender norms. IPV occurred when gender roles and expectations were not met, and when contesting for power and dominance in relationships. The last theme elaborates on the mental health impacts of IPV among LBQ women which included depression, anger, self-hate, and negatively impacted self-esteem. Furthermore, participants spoke of their mental health contributing to IPV perpetration and negatively affecting their academic outcomes.

Findings suggest the need for IPV interventions that address both victimisation and perpetration, given the occurrence of bidirectional violence. Such interventions should focus on building healthy and non-violent relationships and on promoting mental health of LBQ women students in same-sex relationships. Interventions should be co-developed with LBQ women on campuses for greater relevance and impact.

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21. Conduct of Men the Biggest Barrier for Elected and Appointed Women in Local Government (*Matodzi Ralusha*)

For local government to succeed, ethical and accountable political and administrative leadership are required as expounded in the White Paper on Local Government (1998). Research conducted by the University of the Free State (UFS) (2024) assessed the competencies of appointed and elected women leadership in South African municipalities, as well as the main additional constraints on their optimal performance. This is the first known comprehensive research conducted to assess the competencies of, and constraints on, appointed and elected women in the local government sector in South Africa. A total of 422 women participated in the study - 33 councillors, 71 managers and 318 non-managers (aspiring future managers).

The research results indicate that women in local government have proficient basic skills. This is true for both elected and appointed officials. For the elected officials the research results indicate that most of the councillors were recruited into the party due to being activist in their respective communities. The training they received to prepare them for their new role was informal, and formal training only took place when they became councillors.

It was found that female councillors still suffer from explicit and implicit male dominance and even exploitation. Until this unequal power relationships are improved, women in the local government workplace could improve their management performances by developing better emotional intelligence (thick skin, assertive, confident, public speaking and listening skills). There was also broad recognition that elected representatives need digital skills to be in a position to navigate the internet – this includes basic computer skills but also negotiating online protocols and conducting themselves accordingly.

The main skills auditing gaps in the current system found that women councillors do submit skills information but very little is done with the collated data, noting the equity target that 54% of women should benefit from Human Resource Development (HRD) interventions. This can be improved by including women councillors more directly in the work skills processes of the municipality. The performance effectiveness of women can be advanced through ensuring that women support one another to form a united front, especially against male domination, intimidation and discrimination.

Women also reported that they have learnt the most through informal learning from other colleagues, much more than through formal courses. The idea of local community-based women caucuses was mooted as women face unique challenges in the workplace having to balance their responsibilities as spouses, mothers, grandmothers, fathers, providers and community activists. This is a fraction of the roles that men play.

There should be no difference in the conduct of men and women. However more can and must be done to ensure that the challenges faced by women are better addressed in the workplace. One case in point is the consequence faced by a member of parliament, Naledi Chriwa who was disciplined by her party for attending to her sick child and in the process missing a crucial vote in parliament. The party bosses stance was that loyalty to party comes before family. One can only imagine the untenable position that the female member of parliament faced.

Men sometimes knowingly or unknowingly undermine and disrespect their women colleagues. It is for example common for appointed and elected women to be side-lined by their male colleagues. As some respondents phrased it, men are only interested in power and using women to get to positions. Another senior local government practitioner indicated that she had experienced more sexism in the workplace than racism. In the national and provincial spheres, South African Local Government Association (SALGA) have addressed the issue of women empowerment in local government through various forums that have increased and capacitated elected and appointed women, however women often return to negative male-dominated working environments. The conduct of men appears to be the biggest barrier for women advancement in the workplace. This is worst in instances where women in leadership find themselves in the minority, where they are frequently overlooked, victimised and belittled. Men are simply callous and oblivious to their offensive behaviours.

The research also confirmed that women experience online and physical bullying in the workplace. One female councillor had her car torched and faced continuous threats from community members who often resort to emotional blackmail and abuse which is illustrative of the current pressure current and future councillors face. The question is whether this intimidation happened because she was a woman or a councillor. Whatever the real motivation, female councillors are particularly vulnerable and some are periodically killed. There is no doubt that the stakes for women leaders in local government are high and that the

costs of being an elected women office-bearer is particularly high. This pattern is likely to increase as South Africa gears towards local government elections 2026.

In summary, the research findings reveal a complex interplay of factors that contribute to the underrepresentation and underutilisation of women's potential in leadership and management roles. These factors range from structural barriers and skill disparities to cultural and institutional biases that collectively hinder women's advancement and efficacy in decision-making positions. Notably, the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, combined with work-life balance challenges and inadequate recognition, underscores the systemic nature of these obstacles.

Embedded within these challenges, however, are opportunities for transformative change. The evidence and insights gathered not only highlight the gaps but also point towards actionable strategies that can be employed to dismantle these barriers. It is evident that targeted interventions in training and development, policy reform, and cultural change are crucial in creating an enabling environment for women leaders.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The full article can be accessed on the following link: <https://dullahomarinate.org.za/multilevel-govt/local-government-bulletin/archives/volume-19-issue-2-june-2024/the-conduct-of-men-the-biggest-barrier-for-women-leadership-in-local-government>

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22. Closing the Gaps on Leadership and Gender Inequality in the Finance and Accounting Services Sector (*Sanele Dlamini and Lunga Bernard*)

The study aimed to assess gender representation and leadership gaps in South Africa's Finance and Accounting Services (FAS) sector. Its primary objective was to evaluate progress made in advancing women into leadership positions, identify persistent barriers, and assess the impact of institutional initiatives such as African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA), South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA's) Thuthuka Fund, and Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority's (FASSET's) Women's Legacy Programme. Understanding these dynamics is critical for fostering inclusive leadership and addressing systemic inequities in the sector.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining desktop research with a stakeholder survey. Questionnaires were distributed to 5,796 stakeholders within the FASSET database, yielding 34 responses. Although the response rate was low (<1%), the desktop analysis provided a robust foundation of data to validate trends and findings across the sector.

The findings are outlined, below.

- **Board Representation:** Women hold 28% of board seats in the FAS sector, compared to 35% in the top 40 Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)-listed companies. Certain companies, such as Bidvest, have achieved notable parity, with 75% female board members and 50% female executives.
- **Board Executive and Chief (C)-Suite Representation:** Progress in executive leadership remains slow. Female representation increased from 6.5% in 2005 to only 11.8% in 2023. Women remain significantly underrepresented in Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and executive roles, with FirstRand being the only major bank led by a Black woman CEO.
- **Asset Management:** Women account for 20% of portfolio managers, higher than the global average of 11%, but still limited. Female Chartered Financial Analysts (CFAs) constitute only 18% of members, with representation declining progressively from CFA Level I to Level III.
- **Professional Bodies:** AWCA expanded Black female Chartered Accountant (CA) (South Africa (SA)) membership from 407 in 2002 to 8,588 in 2022, funding over 130 bursaries. SAICA's female membership now stands at 42% (22,786 out of 54,420), with 10,472 Black

women; the Thuthuka Fund increased Black African and Coloured membership from 5% to 23%. FASSET's Women's Legacy Programme has seen over 400 graduates complete Executive and Middle Management Development Programmes since 2023.

- Other Professions: Female actuaries make up only 15% of the profession, with minimal board and executive presence. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners South Africa ((ACFE SA) reports 45% female membership but only 27% female board representation.
- Barriers Identified: Key challenges include balancing societal and family roles, resistance to transformation, poor succession planning, attrition due to unsupportive cultures, and resource constraints in smaller firms.

While progress at board level is evident, executive and C-suite transformation remains slow. Asset management and actuarial professions reflect deep gender gaps. Initiatives by African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA), South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), and FASSET have expanded the pipeline of women, particularly Black women, yet systemic barriers persist. Achieving gender parity requires stronger legislation enforcement, cultural change, targeted succession planning, and expanded institutional support to ensure women advance and thrive at all leadership levels.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.fasset.org.za/research>

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C. RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING

23. A Gap Analysis on the Status of the Recognition of Prior Learning Frameworks and Implementation in Uganda and Tanzania (*Shirley Lloyd*)

A research report was prepared for the First East African Conference on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Kampala, Uganda under the stewardship of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International) and presented on 12 December 2024. This report aimed to investigate the status of RPL Frameworks and Implementation in Uganda and Tanzania.

This is a qualitative study, comprising a literature review and semi-structured interviews. A structured questionnaire was used to gather qualitative data from participants, which was applied in the in-depth interviews with officials and regulators (policymakers, government officials and DVV officials, and senior academics) in Uganda and Tanzania.

The study revealed the participants' perceptions of the status of RPL frameworks, of lifelong learning and of the development of qualifications frameworks in their respective countries. The study also revealed the challenges of developing and implementing policies; these include the lack of clear mandates for a single responsible department or organisation for the further development and implementation of RPL, a disaggregated and segmented policy environment, lack of resources, lack of knowledge and understanding about RPL, poor communication, and lack of a good articulation system to enable recipients of RPL to further their studies. The study discovered the opportunities for RPL, lifelong learning and qualifications framework developments such as growing recognition and focus on all levels of government, and institutions for the need to leave no one behind, the important role of qualifications frameworks to underpin RPL, the growing political awareness of the need for a lifelong learning policy and vastly improved access and articulation opportunities for youth and adult learners. The findings of this study are supportive in providing solutions to the development of RPL, lifelong learning policies and qualifications frameworks in the respective countries, and a set of best practices that support the adoption of an integrated system. The researcher makes recommendations for the policy formulation and implementation in the two countries.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/1op64clf7rl3ub0r8ykib/GAP-ANALYSIS-ON-THE-STATUS-OF-RPL-FRAMEWORKS-AND-IMPLEMENTATION-IN-UGANDA-AND-TANZANIA.pdf?rlkey=af0jni5k2rg2efitamvjolq68&st=446mkfzy&dl=0>

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24. The Extent of Articulation of the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework Qualifications and the Workplace, Self-Employment and Further Study in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (*Marco MacFarlane*)

The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) commissioned a research study to Mzabalazo Advisory Services (MAS) to investigate the extent of articulation of Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) qualifications into the workplace, self-employment, and further study, particularly into qualifications registered on the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF). While articulation between General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GENFETQSF) and HEQSF qualifications might appear more straightforward, the research pays close attention to the interconnectedness between the OQSF qualifications and HEQSF while recognising its vital role in preparing students for the workplace and entrepreneurship. This research is based on the premise that a robust and efficient Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system is the cornerstone of a well-developed nation. A high degree of articulation, or interconnectedness, is essential within individual sub-frameworks and across them, encompassing all learning programmes and institutions. This interconnectedness ensures that learners can smoothly transition between various institution types, educational levels and pathways, maximising their potential for personal and professional growth.

The study showed a path to workplace and self-employment with occupational qualifications and skills programmes. OQSF qualifications provide a pathway to employment and self-employment and contribute to the career progression of individuals already in the workforce. This indicates that OQSF qualifications are not solely an entry point for those with limited education, but also a pathway for upskilling and career advancement. The research also found a strong link between training in the OQSF and relevant employment. Most respondents reported being employed in positions related to their field of study, and self-employed individuals are primarily engaged in business directly related to their field of study. The alignment highlights the effectiveness of occupational qualifications in preparing individuals for specific career paths and equipping the graduates with the skills and knowledge to establish and operate businesses within their area of expertise. Most occupational qualifications analysed allowed for vertical articulation into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), providing access to Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas, and, in some instances, Degrees. This suggests that occupational qualifications can serve as a stepping stone to more advanced

studies, potentially facilitating deeper specialisation. However, articulation in further study remains relatively low in practice.

The study recommends that the QCTO intervene during qualification development to ensure that, where applicable, curriculum outcomes align with the admission requirements of qualifications to which the occupational qualifications allows articulation. This is viewed as a significant gap that needs to be addressed.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.qcto.org.za/for-researchers---academics.html> under published presentations: Research Papers.

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25. Quality Council for Trades and Occupations' Research Project on International Benchmarking of Recognition of Prior Learning in Vocational Education and Training (*Marco MacFarlane*)

The research project comprised a desktop study of global trends in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy and practice aimed at benchmarking the provision of inclusive quality RPL programmes and services across the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF). It traces the historical development and progress of different models and practical applications of RPL policy and practice over the last 25 years and includes an assessment of the differentiated impact of digitalisation, climate change, and demographic shifts on the economies and labour markets of countries in the global North and South. The study found that, while the principles and core elements of the Lifelong Learning Outcomes Model (LLOM) of RPL remain stable and are applied in most countries and contexts around the world, applications of the LLOM reflect processes of recontextualisation and adaptation which are responsive to local policy contexts and conditions. It further explores the diversity of RPL policy and practices around the world, and hones in on the role of RPL as an enabler of flexible learning pathways and qualification systems that address the skills challenges faced by formal and informal sector workers in different contexts.

Five country-based thematic case studies located in India, Southern Africa, Jordan, Syria, and Ireland highlight the policy and practical challenges involved in building these pathways, with specific reference to the challenges of digitalisation, migration and informal sector transitions. The study confirms that there is 'no one-size fits all' and that implementation of LLOM varies substantially across contexts and between sectors. Through exploring the themes via country/region-based case studies, it became clear that RPL policies and practices are best understood, against the background of a country's broader economic, labour market, and skills development policies, and against the backdrop of its vocational education and training system and institutions.

From lessons learnt from global reviews and thematic case studies and a workshop with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), the six criteria for enhancing RPL policy and practice in and across the sub-framework that were identified were:

- Expanding RPL pathways and opportunities.
- Building institutional and practitioner capacity.

- Leveraging digital technologies.
- Targeting key sectors for strategic planning and implementation.
- Strengthening stakeholder collaboration.
- Ensuring policy coherence and funding.

The report concludes with the results of the benchmarking activity and recommends that these RPL criteria to be considered in the provision and quality assurance of alternative learning pathways for workers looking to enhance their skills and occupational qualifications.

The full report is available in the QCTO Research Bulletin 2024-25 can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.qcto.org.za/publications%2c-policies%2c-guidelines---forms.html> under published presentations.

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26. Exploring the Ideals of a Developmental State: The Role of KwaZulu-Natal's Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Community Education and Training Institutions in the South African Context (*Essa Cambula*)

'Thirty years into democracy, South Africa continues to grapple with the persistent structural challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment, with these issues remaining particularly pronounced in provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal' (Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation, 2024). Post school education, particularly that provided by TVET and CET institutions has not yet proven adequate in addressing these and other challenges such as that of skills mismatch. For instance, 'the merSETA Regional Skills Demand Report for KZN identifies persistent shortages in artisanal, engineering, and intermediate technical skills, highlighting that graduates from local TVET colleges often do not meet industry-ready competency levels' (merSETA, 2023). A case study conducted at a KZN TVET college further demonstrates that employers frequently report gaps in practical and employability skills, reinforcing evidence of a substantial skills mismatch in the province (Mncwabe, 2020).

In an effort to become a developmental state, the democratic government from its inception, adopted a number of policies such as the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), New Growth Path (NGP), the National Development Plan, 2030 (NDP) as well as District Developmental Model (DDM). Within this agenda, the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector particularly Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Education and Training (CET) play a critical role.

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provides a unique provincial context, contributing approximately 16% to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and serving as South Africa's primary logistics hub through Durban and Richards Bay ports for example.

The province hosts nine public TVET colleges, the highest concentration nationally, strategically located alongside Special Economic Zones (SEZ) such as Dube Trade Port and Richards Bay Port. These initiatives are intended to align industrialisation with skills development (KZN Provincial Treasury 2023:23).

'The KZN Provincial Treasury Socio-Economic Review and Outlook 2024/25 confirms that unemployment is deepened by the misalignment between college offerings and industry needs, with employers reporting that graduates lack required competencies' (KZN Provincial Treasury 2023:194).

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach grounded in pragmatism, comprising 109 quantitative student questionnaires and 20 qualitative stakeholder interviews. Findings show that while TVET/CET institutions are recognised as enablers of the developmental state, several barriers weaken their impact. These barriers include the following:

- Curriculum misalignment with labour-market needs.
- Weak industry linkages.
- Low throughput rates/insufficient digital readiness.
- Limited funding.
- Negative societal perceptions of vocational education.

The above need urgent attention as it affects any prospect of SA being a developmental state. 'These outcomes signal the need for system-wide reforms, improved collaboration with industry, and stronger policy coherence to realise the transformative potential of the sector', (Wedekind and Mutereko, 2021:45).

The study recommends that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), as the primary custodian of the TVET and CET sectors, strengthens sector responsiveness and developmental impact through three key interventions.

Firstly, DHET should establish a digital performance dashboard to publicly track institutional outcomes such as graduate employment, industry partnerships, lecturer industry exposure, and infrastructure readiness. Transparent monitoring can drive accountability and enable evidence-based planning across the sector (DHET, 2019:19). Secondly, the department should mandate bi-annual curriculum review processes, jointly facilitated with industry councils, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and institutional academic boards, to ensure that programmes remain aligned with dynamic labour-market demands (Papier, 2017:21). Thirdly, the study recommends the creation of a National Innovation Fund

dedicated to piloting new delivery models, expanding e-learning capacity, and strengthening research-driven partnerships, drawing lessons from successful international systems such as the German Dual System and Singapore's Institute of Technical Education (Tan and Chua, 2015:44).

To illustrate the practical implications of these recommendations, the study highlights Coastal KZN TVET College (CKZN TVET) as an emerging example of strategic reform aligned to developmental state priorities. The institution now has a fully-fledged Partnership, Innovation and Development (PID) sub-directorate, under which the Research and Curriculum Development Unit is located. Already, the College is forging new collaborations with public and private institutions, including UNISA, FESTO, the INSETA, Nudle DigiHub, and multiple SETAs such as MICTSETA, CETA, and MERSETA. 'These partnerships are enhancing technology adoption, digital innovation, and workplace-based learning opportunities- key components of a modernised developmental TVET system' (McGrath and Powell, 2020:23).

TVET Colleges are now embarking on QCTO programmes to replace the 'theory' programmes that have not been efficient in responding to the needs of the country. 'TVET responsiveness improves significantly when institutions adopt partnership-driven, innovation-oriented strategies supported by enabling national policy environments' (Oketch, 2021:66).

By bringing to light the voices of institutional leaders and students in KZN, the research grounds abstract theories of development in the lived realities of communities, thereby enhancing both the relevance and authenticity of the knowledge base.

The full document will be published on the DHET Research Repository:
<http://www.psetresearchrepository.dhet.gov.za/>

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27. Exploring the State and Nature of Green Hydrogen Technology in the Mining and Minerals Sector (*Nelson Chipangamate, Mayshree Singh, Kevin Brooks, Khuliso Masindi, Nonkuselo Madlakana, Anna Gowera, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Themba Tshabalala, Masaila Machaka and Kingwell Chirwa*)

This study examines the state of green hydrogen technologies and their implications for skills development in South Africa's Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS). Green hydrogen is crucial for the country's decarbonisation efforts and is projected to create significant employment.

The MMS is a key stakeholder due to its abundance of Platinum Group Metals (PGMs), which are used in electrolyzers. However, the skills required to support this emerging economy are not well understood.

The study revealed several key challenges. A primary issue is the very low level of awareness, understanding, and preparedness for green hydrogen technologies among key stakeholders including educational institutions, and MMS companies, which risks future skills shortages. The sector is also hindered by regulatory uncertainties regarding production standards and safety, as well as significant infrastructure challenges, including high upfront costs and limited facilities for production, storage, and transport. Although there are no current skills gaps, the report warns that the anticipated growth of green hydrogen will lead to future imbalances if curricula are not developed proactively.

To prepare the workforce for the green hydrogen economy, the report proposes several solutions to be led by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA):

- Develop a comprehensive workforce development plan that identifies required skills and creates targeted training programmes.
- Launch a robust awareness campaign to educate stakeholders on the benefits and opportunities of green hydrogen.
- Create inclusive learning and career pathways through partnerships with educational institutions, promoting internships and apprenticeships.
- Collaborate with industry stakeholders to lobby for the establishment of clear standards for green hydrogen technologies to improve safety and consistency.
- Foster global and local partnerships to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.

The report concludes that a multistakeholder approach is essential to position the MMS as a leader in the green hydrogen economy.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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28. Transforming the Township Retail Market (*Jonathan Aspeling, Michael Cant, Virimai Victor Mugobo and Terance Hermanus*)

The township retail market represents a vital segment of South Africa's economy, serving millions of households and contributing significantly to employment and income generation. Historically, however, this market has been marginalised, facing structural constraints such as limited access to finance, underdeveloped infrastructure, and lack of integration into formal supply chains. The purpose of the study is to critically examine how the township retail economy can be transformed into a more dynamic, competitive, and sustainable sector. It seeks to unpack both the historical and contemporary factors that shape the sector, highlighting the ways in which informal and formal dynamics intersect to either constraint or advance growth. The Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 further exposed vulnerabilities in township retail, but it also created a renewed urgency for transformation, digital adoption, and innovative business models. The report positions township retail transformation not only as an economic imperative, but also as a developmental necessity, central to addressing unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Its purpose is therefore twofold: to generate evidence-based insights on the challenges and opportunities in township retail and to propose strategies that can align this sector with national economic recovery, inclusive growth, and skills development agendas.

The findings of the study reveal that township retail holds immense potential for transformation but requires targeted interventions to unlock this value. One major outcome is the identification of systemic barriers, such as unfair competition from large retailers who often penetrate township spaces without creating meaningful partnerships with local traders. This perpetuates a cycle of dependency and marginalisation. Another outcome is the recognition that township retailers, when supported, can act as critical nodes of local economic activity, fostering job creation, local ownership, and community development. The findings also stress that technology adoption is not a luxury but a necessity for competitiveness. Traders who have adopted digital payments and e-commerce platforms have experienced improvements in efficiency, customer loyalty, and revenue growth. However, many remain excluded due to infrastructural and financial barriers. The study also finds that skills shortages particularly in financial literacy, inventory management, and marketing, limit the ability of township retailers to expand. Importantly, the study emphasises the role of collaborative models, where partnerships between government, corporates, financial institutions, and skills development bodies can generate inclusive ecosystems for growth. A hybrid approach that integrates

informal and formal practices emerges as a key finding, pointing to a future where township retail evolves as part of the mainstream economy without losing its unique community-oriented character.

The study concludes with comprehensive recommendations aimed at driving the transformation of township retail into a sustainable, competitive, and inclusive sector. First, there is a pressing need to improve infrastructure in townships, particularly in relation to storage, transport, utilities, and digital connectivity. This would reduce operational inefficiencies and enable retailers to compete on better terms. Second, access to affordable finance must be prioritised. Tailored financial products, micro-loans, and grants should be designed for township retailers, complemented by capacity-building programmes that enhance financial literacy and management skills. Third, supply chain integration should be strengthened through deliberate policy and private-sector interventions that promote inclusive procurement, joint ventures, and cooperative models between large retailers and township traders. Fourth, the digital divide must be bridged by expanding access to affordable data, devices, and digital literacy training, thereby enabling township retailers to harness the opportunities of e-commerce and digital payments. Fifth, skills development must be at the centre of transformation. Targeted programmes focusing on entrepreneurship, financial management, customer service, and digital competencies are necessary to professionalise the sector. Finally, institutional collaboration is critical. Government, industry stakeholders, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and development agencies should create coordinated support frameworks to monitor progress, foster innovation, and ensure that township retail transformation aligns with broader national priorities of job creation, poverty reduction, and economic inclusion.

This topic is within the Research Agenda of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Wholesale and Retail Leadership (W&RSETA) Chair. Contact the chair at (aspelingj@cput.ac.za).

The full document can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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29. Evaluation of the Impact of the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority's Informal Traders and Micro-Enterprise Development Programme in Creating Sustainable Formal Small Businesses (*Prominent Choto and Virimai Victor Mugobo*)

The Informal Traders and Micro-Enterprise Development (ITAMED) programme, implemented by the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA), was conceived against the backdrop of South Africa's pressing challenge of high unemployment, widespread informality, and limited entrepreneurial support structures. Informal traders and micro-enterprises form a crucial part of the South African economy, particularly as avenues of survivalist employment in marginalised communities. However, these enterprises often remain small, vulnerable, and excluded from mainstream economic opportunities. The purpose of the ITAMED programme was therefore twofold: to equip informal and micro-entrepreneurs with relevant business skills and to facilitate pathways for them to transition into sustainable, formalised enterprises that could create employment, contribute to local economies, and support sectoral transformation. The evaluation aimed to measure whether ITAMED achieved its intended objectives, assessing its design, implementation, and ultimate impact on participants' business growth, sustainability, and formalisation. It further sought to identify lessons and provide recommendations to strengthen future initiatives targeting the informal economy.

The evaluation is rooted in national imperatives such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), which both highlight the role of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and informal traders in driving inclusive economic growth and employment. By focusing on the Wholesale and Retail sector one of the largest employers in the country the programme aimed to link micro-enterprises to broader economic opportunities, formal markets, and value chains. The background thus underscores the rationale for interventions that go beyond skills training to include mentorship, access to finance, compliance assistance, and sustained support mechanisms. The purpose of the evaluation was not only to review progress but to critically reflect on structural barriers, sector-specific challenges, and the broader policy environment shaping micro-enterprise development.

The evaluation revealed mixed but valuable outcomes regarding ITAMED's effectiveness. On the positive side, the programme enhanced participants' knowledge base, instilled greater business confidence, and improved practices in areas such as bookkeeping, customer service, and compliance awareness. A proportion of participants were able to register their businesses, access formal banking services, and expand their operations. This demonstrates that ITAMED contributed meaningfully to laying the foundation for enterprise growth and formalisation. Furthermore, the programme played an important socio-economic role by fostering entrepreneurship among historically disadvantaged groups, particularly women and youth, thereby advancing transformation in the sector.

However, findings also showed that the pathway from informality to formality remains fraught with difficulties. Many participants reported limited progress beyond training due to inadequate follow-up support, lack of capital, and weak integration into supply chains. The formalisation process, while aspirational, was often unattainable given the high costs, regulatory complexities, and infrastructural barriers. As a result, the programme's broader impact on creating sustainable formal businesses was less pronounced than anticipated. The evaluation also identified gaps in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems, with insufficient tracking of long-term business performance post-training. This limited the ability to measure whether improvements were sustained or translated into broader sectoral growth.

Importantly, the evaluation highlighted the catalytic role of mentorship, networks, and partnerships in driving meaningful impact. Where participants had access to mentors, financial institutions, or retail value chain linkages, outcomes were far more positive. Conversely, isolated interventions lacking integration into broader ecosystems yielded limited results. Overall, while ITAMED was successful in raising awareness and building entrepreneurial skills, its long-term impact on business sustainability and formalisation was constrained by systemic barriers and insufficient post-training support.

Based on the findings, the evaluation recommended several critical actions to enhance future iterations of ITAMED and similar programmes. Firstly, a shift is required from short-term training interventions to holistic, ecosystem-based support models. This means combining skills development with access to finance, infrastructure, and markets, thereby addressing the multiple dimensions that influence enterprise sustainability. Partnerships with municipalities,

financial institutions, and large retailers should be strengthened to provide participants with practical pathways into the formal economy.

Secondly, mentorship and post-training support must be institutionalised as core components of the programme rather than optional add-ons. Sustained mentorship, business coaching, and peer-to-peer networks can significantly increase the likelihood of business growth and formalisation. The programme should also consider differentiated approaches tailored to local contexts, recognising that rural, peri-urban, and township entrepreneurs face unique constraints requiring customised solutions. Thirdly, the regulatory and compliance environment should be addressed in collaboration with government stakeholders. Simplifying business registration processes, reducing costs, and streamlining municipal requirements would lower barriers to formalisation and enhance programme effectiveness. The evaluation further recommended that ITAMED adopt stronger M&E frameworks to track long-term outcomes, including business survival rates, employment creation, and contributions to sectoral transformation.

Lastly, it was recommended that ITAMED be repositioned as a catalytic platform within the broader Wholesale and Retail sector strategy for supporting SMMEs and informal traders. By embedding the programme within sectoral value chains, aligning with policy priorities, and leveraging partnerships, ITAMED could transition from a training-based initiative to a strategic driver of inclusive growth. In this way, the programme could more effectively contribute to building sustainable formal small businesses, advancing transformation, and supporting national imperatives for job creation and poverty alleviation.

This topic is within the Research Agenda of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Wholesale and Retail Leadership (W&RSETA) Chair. Contact the chair at (aspelingj@cput.ac.za).

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<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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30. Impact Assessment - Historical Debt Repayment Programme (*Gwen Mbatha, Sanele Dlamini and Lunga Bernard*)

The study aimed to assess the impact of the Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority's (FASSET's) Historical Debt Repayment Programme covering the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24. The grant was created to minimise the stress caused by existing student debt from previous, completed studies and qualifications, and was valued at a maximum of R40,000 per learner.

An online survey questionnaire was designed to include a series of questions specifically structured to gather survey data centred on historical debt repayment support. The design of the online survey tool was structured to enable respondents to answer the form quickly and to access it through emails.

Questionnaires were distributed to 904 (90%) of the 1,001 beneficiaries and 691 (76%) responses were received.

The findings are outlined, below.

- Most respondents were aged 25 to 34, representing 77.13% (533 individuals), followed by those aged 18 to 24 at 16.79% (116 individuals), and those aged 35 to 44 at 6.08% (42 individuals).
- Females made up 61.51% (425 respondents) of the sample, while males accounted for 38.49% (266 respondents).
- Nearly all respondents (97.83%, 676 individuals) identified as African, with other racial groups comprising the remaining 2.17%.
- The most common debt range when the programme was introduced was above R36,000, accounting for 31.01% (214 respondents). This was followed by other specified amounts at 21.30% (147 respondents) and debts of R0–R10,000 at 10.29% (71 respondents).
- The programme fully eliminated the debt of 66.33% (457 respondents), while 13.35% (92 respondents) had their debt partially covered. For 20.32% (140 respondents), the coverage status was partially specified.

- Nearly half of the respondents (48.48%, 335 individuals) reported being employed, while 29.96% (207 individuals) were unemployed, and 21.56% (149 individuals) were pursuing further studies.
- Most respondents (89.72%, 611 individuals) expressed being very satisfied with the programme, while 7.20% (49 individuals) were slightly satisfied, and 3.08% (21 individuals) were not satisfied.
- A significant majority (69.05%, 464 respondents) indicated that the programme enabled them to make academic progress.
- 69.57% (471 respondents) attributed their academic success to the support provided by the programme.
- An overwhelming 90.71% (615 respondents) stated that they would recommend the programme to others.

The Historical Debt Repayment Programme has positively impacted beneficiaries, with two-thirds reporting full debt elimination and high levels of satisfaction (89.72%). The programme significantly enhanced academic and professional outcomes, making a meaningful contribution to the beneficiaries' lives.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.fasset.org.za/research>

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31. Challenges and Opportunities for Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in the South African Economy (*Wessel Pretorius Botha, Gillian Ceiridwen Michalowski, Jennifer van der Walt, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Masaila Machaka, Kingwell Chirwa and Themba Tshabalala*)

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and opportunities for (legal) Small-Scale Mining (SSM) in South Africa, emphasising its vital role in promoting sustainable economic development in rural areas. While SSM provides crucial employment and strengthens local economies, it is hindered by numerous obstacles.

The study identified several key challenges facing the sector. These include intricate and protracted licensing procedures, high compliance costs, and a lack of legislative support, which often push operators into informal activities. Furthermore, a pervasive deficiency in managerial, technical, and financial skills contributes to inefficiencies and unsafe working conditions. In contrast, the report also highlights significant opportunities. With proper formalisation and support, SSM has the potential to generate substantial employment, boost the national economy, and provide economic empowerment for marginalised groups, including women and youth. Emerging policies like the 2022 Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) Policy present pathways for formalisation and partnerships with large-scale mining enterprises.

The findings are highly relevant to the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA), as most challenges are linked to skill development. Three critical areas for skills development were identified: business skills (including financial management), health and safety, and environmental management. Stakeholders see a key role for the MQA in leading skills initiatives and helping operators overcome barriers, such as the prohibitive cost of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

The report recommends four main interventions:

1. Streamlining licensing and permit processes through a digital platform.
2. Establishing capacity development programmes focused on financial management, safety, and environmental compliance.
3. Fostering public-private partnerships to improve access to equipment and markets.
4. Promoting environmental stewardship through a subsidised EIA support programme.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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32. Unlocking the Potential of Lower-Level Employees: A Collaborative Approach for Upliftment and Empowerment In South Africa's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Retail Sector (*Vickey de Villiers, Frans van der Colff and Semona Pillay*)

Upliftment and empowerment are critical yet underexplored constructs within South Africa's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) retail sector, particularly concerning lower-level employees whose contributions are often overlooked. These employees, encompassing roles such as merchandisers, cashiers, and floor staff, are the backbone of retail operations, directly influencing customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and overall store performance. The present study aims to investigate current initiatives aimed at uplifting and empowering lower-level employees in FMCG retail stores, examining how these employees perceive upliftment and empowerment, the benefits derived from these practices, and the degree to which employees experience empowerment within their work environment. The study further seeks to gather insights from managerial perspectives to understand how organisational policies and practices facilitate or impede these outcomes. Using a qualitative, interpretivist, and exploratory approach, the research team conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 employees and 13 managers from FMCG retail stores. Thematic analysis, employing both inductive and deductive techniques, was applied to capture key themes, and quality checks were implemented to ensure trustworthiness and rigor throughout the study. The overarching purpose was to provide evidence-based recommendations for fostering sustainable upliftment and empowerment practices that benefit employees, retail stores, customers, and the broader community.

Participants articulated diverse interpretations of upliftment and empowerment, with employees emphasising opportunities to learn, gain knowledge, acquire new skills, receive recognition, and pursue career advancement. Motivation, goal-setting, and improved quality of life were also central to employees' definitions. Managers echoed these sentiments and further highlighted mentorship, participation in decision-making, and providing the necessary resources as integral to empowerment. Both groups emphasised the fundamental importance of acknowledging the contributions of lower-level employees, who are pivotal in ensuring operational excellence, customer satisfaction, and store profitability. The benefits of empowerment were consistently linked to increased productivity, higher job satisfaction, improved staff retention, stronger customer relations, and positive community impact. These findings align with prior research, indicating that empowered frontline employees demonstrate enhanced performance, engagement, and organisational commitment. However, the study

also uncovered mixed experiences among employees, with some feeling valued and supported, while others reported exclusion, limited recognition, role ambiguity, and low engagement, reflecting inconsistencies in managerial practices and organisational culture.

The analysis revealed that while FMCG retail stores have initiated measures to uplift and empower employees, these efforts are unevenly implemented. Employees reported that feedback mechanisms often exist but are inadequately valued or actioned, resulting in skepticism about their impact. Communication was highlighted as a key area of concern, with information sharing being inconsistent, selectively distributed, and often limited to operational or negative feedback contexts. Training programmes were available in most stores but were frequently constrained by limited coverage, irregularity, and a focus on induction rather than continuous development. Career advancement pathways were similarly inconsistent, with opportunities varying by manager discretion and individual relationships rather than structured organisational processes. Recognition and appreciation were identified as vital motivators; however, participants noted that positive contributions often went unnoticed, undermining engagement and morale. The role of management emerged as pivotal in shaping the experiences of lower-level employees. Managers who were visible, approachable, supportive, and actively engaged on the shop floor were associated with higher employee motivation, better performance, and enhanced empowerment outcomes. Conversely, senior managers were often perceived as distant, lacking a nuanced understanding of frontline challenges, which further compounded role ambiguity and disengagement. Employees' suggestions emphasised mentorship, structured training, career progression transparency, and managerial visibility as mechanisms to strengthen empowerment. Additionally, the need for inclusivity, recognition, and constructive feedback was recurrently stressed as fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among employees.

The study's findings underscore the need for a collaborative, people-centered approach to upliftment and empowerment, emphasising the inclusion of lower-level employees in decision-making to avoid top-down or patronising practices. Retailers are encouraged to consider the following comprehensive recommendations: engage in open dialogue about expectations, interpretations, and needs of both managers and employees; recognise, respect, and value each employee's strengths and contributions; actively solicit input and provide constructive feedback on suggestions; offer ongoing practical and theoretical learning opportunities, covering both job-specific and soft skills; introduce clear and transparent career progression pathways aligned with employees' ambitions and organisational requirements; cultivate

supportive work relationships that demonstrate genuine interest in individual growth and well-being; encourage ownership by gradually delegating responsibilities while avoiding undue pressures; promote transparency regarding business matters and how employees' contributions impact outcomes; and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities in an ongoing process of empowerment. These measures extend beyond organisational policy to managerial practices, emphasising visible leadership, one-on-one engagement, mentorship, and leading by example. Collectively, these recommendations aim to create a work environment where employees are recognised, empowered, and engaged, fostering enhanced productivity, staff retention, customer satisfaction, and broader community impact.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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33. Investigating the State of Artisan Supply and Ways of Enhancing their Competencies in the Mining and Minerals Sector (*Pontsho Twala, Isaac Mabala, Matsobane Nong, Oluwatobi Dayo-Olupona, Basani Magwaza, Malete Mosesi, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Themba Tshabalala, Masaila Machaka and Kingwell Chirwa*)

This project sought to investigate the supply of artisans in South Africa's Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS), highlighting a critical national shortage. The country produces only 20,000 artisans annually, falling short of the National Development Plan's (NDP's) target of 30,000 by 2030. This shortage is intensified by rapid technological advancements within the MMS, which demand new and specialised skills.

The study identified several key issues. There is a significant underrepresentation of younger artisans, which threatens knowledge transfer from an aging workforce and hampers the sector's growth. Although enrolment in artisan programmes is high, low completion rates undermine development initiatives. Critical trades such as Diesel Mechanics, Electricians, and Millwrights face persistent shortages. A major finding is that current training programmes are not sufficiently aligned with technological advancements and workplace readiness, providing foundational skills but failing to address advanced needs. While newly qualified artisans possess "fair" technical skills, they lack essential soft skills like problem-solving and critical thinking, leaving them underprepared for real-world challenges.

To address these problems, the report recommends a multi-stakeholder approach led by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA), focusing on:

- Launching a robust Artisan Marketing Campaign to attract young talent to the profession.
- Improving completion rates by strengthening foundational skills (e.g., Maths and Science tutorials in schools) and implementing a "Learners at risk programme" to support struggling trainees.
- Reviewing and updating training programmes in collaboration with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), and mining companies to integrate soft skills and advanced technological components related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

The report concludes that success depends on improving existing programmes and leveraging established relationships rather than creating new ones from scratch.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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34. A Comprehensive Impact Evaluation of the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority Strategic Programmes: Towards Addressing the Imbalance (or not) Between Skills Supply and Demand (*Nobukhosi Dlodlo, Jade Turner and Makhosazane Buthelezi*)

The report on the imbalance between skills supply and demand in South Africa was developed to respond to growing concerns about the structural disjuncture between the country's education and training outputs and the needs of its labour market. South Africa continues to face persistent challenges of unemployment, underemployment, and mismatched qualifications, particularly among young people who form the majority of the labour force. At the same time, employers across multiple sectors report difficulties in recruiting appropriately skilled workers, pointing to systemic inefficiencies in the alignment of supply-side training systems and demand-side industry requirements. The purpose of this report was to critically assess the extent and causes of these imbalances, highlight sectoral variations, and provide evidence-based recommendations for addressing the skills mismatch. Central to the investigation is the recognition that education and training institutions are often supply-driven, producing qualifications that do not sufficiently match the competencies required in the workplace. By analysing patterns of skills production and absorption, the report seeks to inform policy reforms, improve coordination between education systems and industry, and propose strategies to enhance South Africa's human capital in ways that promote economic growth, social inclusion, and resilience in a rapidly changing global economy.

Several critical insights emerged from the analysis. First, South Africa's labour market reveals deep structural distortions, where an oversupply of low- and semi-skilled labour coincides with shortages in high-demand occupations such as artisans, engineers, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) specialists, health professionals, and management roles. This mismatch is exacerbated by high dropout rates in secondary and tertiary education, poor quality schooling in disadvantaged areas, and weak career guidance systems that channel learners into oversubscribed fields with limited labour market absorption. Second, the country's training and higher education systems often operate in silos, with weak linkages to industry, resulting in graduates who lack the practical skills and workplace exposure required for employability. The report also highlights spatial disparities, where rural and township youth have limited access to quality training institutions and employment opportunities, reinforcing patterns of inequality. Another insight is that while policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan (NDP), the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), and Sector Skills

Plans (SSPs) acknowledge the importance of alignment, implementation remains inconsistent, fragmented, and inadequately monitored. Employers, in turn, report low levels of trust in training systems, citing concerns about the relevance of curricula and the readiness of graduates. Furthermore, globalisation, technological change, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) are reshaping skills demand, creating new occupations while rendering others obsolete. Yet, South Africa's skills planning mechanisms are not sufficiently agile to anticipate and respond to these shifts, leaving the workforce vulnerable to both structural unemployment and skills obsolescence.

The report finds that the imbalance between skills supply and demand has significant socio-economic implications, contributing directly to high unemployment rates, low productivity, and limited competitiveness of the South African economy. Among the major outcomes is the identification of critical skills shortages in sectors such as manufacturing, wholesale and retail, construction, ICT, and health, which constrain sectoral growth and the ability to meet national development targets. Another key finding is the oversupply of qualifications in humanities and social sciences, which do not match the demand patterns of a labour market increasingly shaped by technical, digital, and vocational competencies. The evidence also shows that Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), while mandated to bridge the gap, face governance and capacity challenges that limit their impact. Poor alignment of occupational qualifications with industry standards further weakens their ability to create demand-responsive interventions.

The report also highlights the negative impact of underinvestment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, which remain under-resourced, stigmatised, and disconnected from industry. Furthermore, employers frequently indicate that even when graduates possess theoretical knowledge, they lack problem-solving, communication, digital literacy, and adaptability skills essential for workplace integration. The research underscores that addressing skills mismatches requires a systemic and coordinated approach, as piecemeal interventions are insufficient to resolve the scale of the problem. The persistence of these imbalances not only undermines economic growth but also entrenches social inequality, as large numbers of educated yet unemployed youth face barriers to participation in productive economic activities.

The report provides a series of recommendations aimed at addressing systemic weaknesses and promoting better alignment between skills supply and demand. Firstly, it advocates for stronger partnerships between education institutions, SETAs, industry bodies, and government to ensure curricula are responsive to evolving labour market needs and that training incorporates practical, work-based learning. This should be complemented by enhanced labour market intelligence systems that generate accurate, up-to-date data on skills demand and feed directly into policy and planning processes. Secondly, the report recommends targeted investments in TVET colleges, focusing on infrastructure, lecturer development, and curriculum reform, to reposition them as credible providers of technical and vocational skills aligned with industry requirements. Thirdly, it calls for a reorientation of higher education enrolments, with greater incentives for students to enter scarce-skills fields such as engineering, ICT, health sciences, and artisanal trades, supported by bursaries, mentorship, and career guidance. Employers are urged to expand Workplace-Based Learning (WBL) opportunities, including internships, apprenticeships, and graduate placements, as these provide vital exposure and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Additionally, the report highlights the need for greater policy coherence and coordination across government departments to avoid duplication and fragmentation of skills development initiatives. Emphasis is also placed on promoting adaptability, entrepreneurship, and digital skills among young people to prepare them for the 4IR and future labour markets. Lastly, it recommends continuous Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of skills planning mechanisms, with accountability frameworks that ensure interventions are evidence-based and result-driven.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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35. Post Corona Virus Disease-19 Technology Adoption in the South African Wholesale and Retail Sector (*Linda Chipunza and Virimai Victor Mugobo*)

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted global economies, and the South African wholesale and retail sector was no exception. The crisis accelerated the adoption of technology as businesses were forced to adapt rapidly to survive amidst restrictions on physical trade, shifting consumer preferences, and the growing prominence of e-commerce platforms. This report seeks to contextualise the extent of technology adoption within the sector, highlighting the strategies and practices that enabled firms to navigate post-COVID realities. The purpose is not only to document the short-term responses but also to critically reflect on how these adaptations have reshaped operational models, workforce dynamics, and long-term competitiveness. Central to this exploration is the recognition that the wholesale and retail sector, a key employer and driver of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), faced both vulnerabilities and opportunities that required coordinated responses. The report therefore aims to provide insights into sectoral resilience, structural transformation, and the role of technology in bridging systemic gaps.

Several important insights emerged from the study. Firstly, the pandemic acted as a catalyst for digital acceleration. Businesses that had previously been reluctant to invest in technology were compelled to embrace e-commerce, digital payment systems, and virtual customer engagement tools to remain viable. The integration of digital solutions was no longer seen as optional but as a core business necessity. Secondly, consumer behaviour underwent a permanent transformation, with more South Africans increasingly preferring online shopping, contactless services, and digital platforms for product discovery and transactions. This necessitated a shift in value chain management, logistics, and last-mile delivery systems. Thirdly, disparities in adoption were noted across business sizes and subsectors. Large, well-capitalised firms adapted more seamlessly, while small and informal retailers faced barriers such as lack of digital literacy, infrastructural challenges, and limited access to finance. This digital divide risks widening inequality within the sector. Additionally, workforce dynamics shifted significantly, with increased demand for digitally skilled workers, reshaping both skills needs and training priorities. Collectively, these insights underscore how technology adoption has become both a survival strategy and a competitive differentiator in the post-pandemic retail landscape.

The report's findings highlight that technology adoption had tangible outcomes for businesses. Companies that leveraged digital platforms during the pandemic reported increased market reach, cost efficiencies, and better resilience against disruptions. E-commerce penetration grew markedly, supported by widespread use of mobile devices and fintech innovations that facilitated secure, convenient transactions. For consumers, this translated into expanded access to goods and services, though often at the expense of traditional brick-and-mortar stores that struggled to adapt. Another significant outcome was the acceleration of automation and data-driven decision-making within supply chains, which enhanced efficiency but also raised concerns about potential job displacement. The findings also point to persistent barriers, including inadequate broadband infrastructure in rural areas, high data costs, and limited digital literacy among certain groups, particularly informal traders. Importantly, the sector showed evidence of hybridisation where physical and digital platforms co-exist signaling that the future of retail will likely blend in-person experiences with digital convenience. Overall, while technology adoption has been transformative, the uneven pace of change raises policy and developmental concerns that require urgent intervention.

The report concludes with several strategic recommendations to ensure that technology adoption strengthens the wholesale and retail sector inclusively and sustainably. First, there is a need for targeted investment in digital infrastructure, particularly in underserved rural and township areas, to close the connectivity gap. This should be complemented by policy interventions to lower data costs and expand access to affordable digital tools. Second, skills development must be prioritised. Training programmes tailored to both current employees and new entrants should focus on digital literacy, e-commerce management, data analytics, and customer engagement in virtual environments. Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and industry associations have a critical role to play in aligning training with evolving sectoral needs. Third, financial support mechanisms, such as grants and low-interest loans, should be designed to assist Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and informal traders in adopting digital solutions, thereby avoiding widening digital divide between large and small players. Fourth, collaboration between government, private sector, and industry bodies should be strengthened to create enabling ecosystems for innovation, knowledge sharing, and inclusive growth. Finally, continuous monitoring and research should be undertaken to track the sector's digital transformation, ensuring that strategies remain adaptive to emerging challenges and global trends. By implementing these recommendations, the sector can build resilience, foster competitiveness,

and contribute meaningfully to South Africa's broader economic recovery and transformation agenda.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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36. Food Safety Competence Research: Free State Safety Pilot Project (*Lues Ryk and Deon Barnard*)

This research was undertaken to examine food safety competence within South Africa's wholesale and retail sectors, with a specific focus on contrasting franchised and independent businesses. Recognising that food safety is central to consumer protection, business sustainability, and sectoral growth, the study sought to evaluate knowledge, attitudes, and practices across multiple dimensions of food handling and management. The pilot study, conducted in the Free State (FS), used twelve dimensions derived from internationally recognised Prerequisite Programmes (PRPs) as the basis for analysis. These dimensions included regulatory compliance, food receiving, storage, cooking temperature control, contamination, personal hygiene, allergen management, pest control, shelf readiness, customer education, emergency procedures, and leadership.

The primary purpose was to establish a foundational understanding of food safety practices, highlight key disparities between business models, and provide recommendations to strengthen competence across the sector. Importantly, the findings offer both a diagnostic view of current practices and a roadmap for future interventions at a national level, particularly as the sector grapples with rising food safety risks and the growing importance of informal and small-scale traders. The research identified four overarching themes as critical to advancing food safety competence: Education, Compliance Support, Collaboration, and Food Safety Culture.

Education should be prioritised through the development of standardised training programmes aligned to the twelve dimensions of the PRPs. Training must be accessible, affordable, and adapted to the realities of small and independent businesses. Leveraging digital platforms, such as e-learning and digital tracking systems, can reduce costs and widen reach. Leadership development programmes should be introduced to strengthen management's role in fostering accountability and embedding food safety as a shared responsibility. At the same time, public and customer education campaigns can complement business efforts, ensuring consumer awareness around issues such as allergens and storage.

Compliance Support is essential to bridge resource gaps, particularly for independent businesses. User-friendly Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), checklists, and templates

should be developed and widely disseminated. Strengthened traceability tools and affordable incident management systems can help businesses prepare for and respond to emergencies. This support must be practical, reducing administrative burdens and enabling smaller operators to integrate compliance into their daily operations.

Furthermore, collaboration across the sector offers an opportunity to accelerate improvements. Knowledge-sharing platforms between franchised and independent businesses can foster peer learning and mentorship. Partnerships with government, academia, and industry associations can produce common training frameworks, subsidised audits, and affordable pest control or traceability solutions. Policy advocacy is also critical, particularly in securing financial support and reducing barriers for smaller businesses and informal traders.

Finally, building a Food Safety Culture is fundamental. This requires leadership modelling, staff engagement, and the integration of food safety into everyday routines. Organisations should invest in food safety culture assessments to identify gaps and design tailored interventions. Incentive programmes, recognition schemes, and participatory training can help foster ownership among employees, ensuring that food safety is no longer perceived as a burden but as an integral part of organisational success. Consistent audits, clear communication, and reinforcement of shared values will further embed food safety into organisational identity.

The recommendations also extend to the informal trade challenge, which represents a vital yet vulnerable part of the sector. Moreover, given the absence of structured systems in this segment, interventions must be practical, low-cost, and accessible, including community-level training and simplified compliance tools. Addressing this gap is essential not only for protecting public health but also for supporting equitable growth across the food value chain.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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37. Empowering South African Inland Fisheries Through a Green Economy Transition: The Role of Local Government - A Review of Best Practices and Lessons Learned for South Africa's Local Government Involvement in the Transition to a Green Economy (*Christopher Bova and Qurban Rouhani*)

This article summarises key findings regarding the role of Local Government (LG) in their involvement in programmes, interventions, and initiatives relating to a green economy transition, based on research commissioned by the LG Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) which reviewed previous and existing LG involvement. The research identified key best practices and lessons learned from green economy related initiatives, programmes and interventions involving LGs; identified key benefits to LGs based on their involvement; and developed recommendations for optimising future involvement in enabling a green economy transition. Data collection involved a vast review of accessible existing literature regarding involvement of South African LGs in green economy initiatives, as well as interviews with key representatives from LGs. This information was qualitatively analysed using thematic analyses to identify salient best practices and lessons learned for the effective implementation and involvement in enabling a green economy transition. It also provided an optimal sector for green economy intervention (Inland Fisheries), which can incorporate multiple facets of the green economy objectives.

The following are some of the key findings of this study:

- **Capability:** South Africa ranks low in its transition to a green economy due to limitations such as energy dependence, funding constraints, political will, income inequality, and lack of capacity and skills.
- **LG Role:** LG plays a crucial role in enabling South Africa's transition to a green economy by establishing regulatory frameworks, promoting green concepts, supporting community-based initiatives, encouraging sustainable transportation, and engaging with the private sector.
- **Benefits:** The benefits to LG from the green economy transition include meeting legislative mandates, cost savings, increased tax base, attracting investment, promoting social and economic development, and improving public health and environmental services.
- **Lessons Learned:** Lessons learned from case studies highlight the importance of measuring initiative success, considering the scale of the initiative, securing funding,

fostering partnerships and collaboration, setting clear objectives, developing policy frameworks, and addressing procurement issues.

- Leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR): 4IR can facilitate the transition to a green economy by enhancing resource efficiency, waste management, and resource protection. However, South Africa's lagging digital infrastructure and low technological literacy hinder the capabilities of 4IR, necessitating an enabling environment and training for marginalised youth.
- Urban-centricity: Green growth initiatives have primarily focused on urban areas and charismatic industries, neglecting rural areas and exacerbating social inequality.
- Optimal sectors: Inland fisheries, representing rural communities, offer significant potential for green economy initiatives, incorporating multiple key elements of the green economy, such as resource efficiency, renewable energy, circular economy, green jobs, and environmental protection.

From the above findings, the research developed the general recommendations for LGs which fit within four general categories:

- Initiative development – During initial development of programmes or initiatives that LG will be involved in, considerations should be made in relation to funding capability, social equity, utility, programme monitoring, collaboration, streamlining, and scale.
- Accessing/providing funding – Various considerations need to be taken when accessing or providing funding for green initiatives, including those in relation to existing funding, inter-agency collaboration, foresight, traceability, and ensuring projects incorporate social equity and training components.
- Collaboration – The transition to a green economy requires participation from the public and private sectors, as well as, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). There are many benefits to forming collaborations and partnerships, and to unlock them the following recommendations are provided: Developing a stakeholder database can help streamline the identification of potential project/funding partners; identifying partners that can fill capacity needs; clearly defining the partnership agreement to avoid conflicts between partners; and breaking down silos where possible by including other government entities, private sector, and civil society.
- Leveraging 4IR and South Africa's Youth – Incorporating modern technology can streamline green initiatives and be used to enhance their capacity, while including and

developing South Africa's youth can ensure long-term capacity for a continued green transition. The following recommendations can enhance their inclusion: Using smart technologies to enhance monitoring of initiatives, collaboration between partners, and critical communications to constituents; youth inclusion; and training.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za).

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://lgseta.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RESEARCH-REPORT-INLAND-FISHERIES-THROUGH-GREEN-ECONOMY-TRANSITION-2022-2023-FIN-YR.pdf>

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38. The Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority Subsector Skills Reports: Insights for Skills Planning (*Kedibone Moroane-Nkhobo, Qaqamba Matha, Lizzy Tefu, Sithembile Mkhize and Aviwe Beja*)

The Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) has published a series of subsector skills reports in 2024, focusing on the Base Chemicals, Glass, and Surface Coatings subsectors. These reports provide evidence-based insights to support strategic skills planning, industry competitiveness, and workforce sustainability in line with the objectives of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system.

The findings reveal that all three subsectors face systemic challenges, including energy supply constraints, economic volatility, and significant skills shortages. However, opportunities exist through growth in construction, automotive, renewable energy, and sustainability-driven markets. For example, the base chemicals subsector is undergoing rapid transformation due to digitalisation and the global shift to greener feedstocks, creating demand for expertise in green chemistry, artificial intelligence, and process automation. The glass subsector highlights opportunities in smart glass, recycling, and energy-efficient manufacturing, while emphasising the need for qualifications in glass technology and auto-fitment. The surface coatings subsector is strongly influenced by regulatory requirements to reduce Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), driving demand for professionals in sustainable chemistry, functional coatings, and digital tools.

Across the subsectors, workforce demographics show that the majority of employees fall within the 35–54 age group, underlining the urgency of succession planning. Hard-To-Fill Vacancies (HTFVs) such as chemical engineers, production engineers, and laboratory analysts further illustrate critical skills gaps. These reports reaffirm the importance of aligning education and training initiatives with evolving industry needs, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (Maths) (STEM) fields, to ensure a competitive and future-ready workforce.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://chieta.org.za/about-us/what-we-do/research-skills-planning/chambers/#323-326-2024-1752066381>

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39. Global Chief Financial Officer Competency Certification: Lessons for South Africa's Post-School Education and Training Sector (*Nicolaas van Wyk*)

The role of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is transforming globally—from a compliance-focused financial steward to a strategic leader responsible for Environmental, social, and governance (ESG), digital innovation, and ethical governance. This shift demands a new approach to CFO education, certification, and professionalisation. Drawing from international case studies in Brazil and Italy, this contribution explores how South Africa can adopt the CEN 476 CFO Competency Framework, developed by the European Committee for Standardisation, to enhance the global competitiveness and ethical leadership of its financial executives.

South Africa's current Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system is highly fragmented, separating technical finance (e.g., Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) Accounting) from strategic learning (e.g., BCom General). Although South Africa's Chartered Institute for Business Accountants (CIBA) has introduced a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)-recognised CFO designation, broader reform is needed to close the gap between academic qualifications, workplace learning, and global certification standards.

This research recommends aligning national curricula and professional pathways with CEN 476 to integrate strategic thinking, ESG competencies, stakeholder engagement, and digital finance across all levels of training. Practical reforms include curriculum redesign, interdisciplinary integration, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), and lifelong Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The international models examined—Brazil's dual-tier Confidential Computing Architecture (CCA) framework and Italy's ESG-aligned UNI/PdR 104:2021 standard—offer lessons in structured career progression and global benchmarking.

By aligning with CEN 476, South Africa can ensure that its CFOs are equipped not only to serve local governance and development priorities but also to operate with credibility in global markets. The contribution concludes with a policy roadmap for multi-stakeholder collaboration, curriculum reform, and certification alignment under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), positioning South African CFOs as economic catalysts for sustainable and ethical growth.

The link to a blog article on the paper is as follows:

<https://myciba.org/blogs?p=global-cfo-competency-certification-lessons-for-south-africas-post-school-education-and-training-sector>

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://media.myciba.org/academy/docs/2025.DHET.Research%20Bulletin-CFO%20Certification%20Full%20article.pdf>

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40. Navigating the Merchandiser's Dilemma: Strategies to Mitigate Role-Related Challenges (*Vickey de Villiers, Frans van der Colff and Semona Pillay*)

Merchandising plays a pivotal role in South Africa's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) retail sector, yet the experiences, contributions, and challenges of merchandisers remain underexplored. Merchandisers occupy a unique position, reporting simultaneously to their employer, store management, and suppliers, which introduces operational complexities and often conflicting expectations. The purpose of this study is to explore the contributions of merchandisers to customer satisfaction and store performance, examine the challenges they face, and identify strategies to enhance their effectiveness and engagement within the retail environment. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with fifteen merchandisers and fourteen managers overseeing merchandising activities. A thematic analysis, combining deductive and inductive approaches, was applied, with iterative review of transcripts to ensure accurate coding, theme refinement, and interpretation. Rigorous quality control measures and ethical protocols, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent, were observed throughout the study. By examining perspectives from both merchandisers and managers, the study aims to illuminate the integral role of merchandisers, while offering actionable insights to address persistent challenges in the FMCG retail context.

The study highlights the central role of merchandisers in driving customer satisfaction and overall store success. Merchandisers perform a wide range of essential tasks, including replenishing shelves, setting up promotions and displays, rotating stock, maintaining neat and clean shelves, updating product labels, assisting customers in locating items, and coordinating stock orders. These actions ensure consistent stock availability and enhance the customer experience. Managers acknowledged that merchandisers' specialised knowledge, on-floor presence, and engagement with customers significantly contribute to store performance, sales, and operational efficiency. Despite their critical contributions, merchandisers experience numerous challenges. Role conflict and ambiguity arise as they balance expectations from multiple supervisors, often leading to confusion about priorities and operational responsibilities. Role overload is common, with merchandisers frequently asked to perform duties outside their formal scope, sometimes under tight time constraints. A sense of exclusion and limited collaboration with store employees further undermines their sense of belonging, engagement, and morale. Communication gaps, insufficient recognition, and the lack of consultation on operational decisions exacerbate these challenges, leaving

merchandisers feeling undervalued despite their frontline contributions. These findings align with prior research emphasising the importance of employee empowerment, recognition, and inclusion in mitigating job stress and enhancing performance in retail contexts.

The research reveals that when retail stores actively address merchandisers' challenges, both operational outcomes and employee satisfaction improve. Positive practices include soliciting merchandisers' input on stock management, promotions, and customer service; assisting with tasks during busy periods; providing recognition and appreciation; and fostering inclusive team environments. Projects demonstrating structured collaboration between stores and merchandising companies such as aligned shifts, performance monitoring, and regular feedback resulted in enhanced loyalty, operational efficiency, and job satisfaction. Nonetheless, these initiatives are inconsistently implemented across the sector. Interviews highlighted that effective communication, inclusion, and recognition are key determinants of merchandiser engagement and performance. Conversely, environments lacking these elements contribute to role stress, disengagement, and diminished contributions to customer service and store performance. Overall, the study underscores the dual importance of technical competence and interpersonal inclusion for merchandisers to fully realise their potential and positively impact retail outcomes.

Based on findings from the interviews and supported by prior literature, several actionable recommendations for retail stores emerge, centering on communication, inclusion, and recognition: Firstly, regular meetings should be facilitated to promote open communication and collaboration between merchandising companies, retail stores, suppliers, and merchandisers. These sessions should aim to align goals, clarify responsibilities, and address challenges collaboratively. Clear role definitions, job descriptions, and expectations should be reinforced to reduce role conflict and ambiguity, ensuring merchandisers understand their duties and reporting lines. Recognition and appreciation of merchandisers' contributions are essential; managers should acknowledge efforts, offer verbal or tangible rewards, and cultivate personal engagement to affirm the merchandisers' importance to customer satisfaction, profitability, and store success. Open communication channels should be encouraged, allowing both formal and informal dialogue where merchandisers can share challenges, ideas, and feedback without fear of reprisal. Inclusion should be fostered through active participation in store activities such as floor walks, training sessions, team-building events, and strategy meetings, ensuring merchandisers are integrated as equal team

members. Providing the same induction and access to store knowledge as permanent staff can reinforce a sense of belonging and collaborative engagement.

Implementing these recommendations is mutually beneficial, merchandisers gain a sense of value, ownership, and belonging, while stores benefit from increased efficiency, improved customer satisfaction, and enhanced overall success. By addressing role-related challenges systematically and fostering a culture of communication, inclusion, and recognition, FMCG retail stores can strengthen the contributions of merchandisers, resulting in more sustainable and high-performing retail operations across South Africa.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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41. Waste Management Strategies and Practices in the Wholesale and Retail Sector in South Africa: Lessons from Global Best Practices (Lawrence Obokoh, Abiola Babatunde, Ehi Idoko, Princewill Okwoche and Herbert Ntuli)

The investigation into waste management strategies within South Africa's Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector has been driven by the growing global imperative for environmental sustainability, cost efficiency, and socio-economic development. Central to this investigation is the concept of green retailing, which seeks to integrate environmental protection with business profitability through careful management of supply chains, logistics, facilities, and post-consumer behaviours. The impetus for such approaches arises from multiple drivers, including global and national environmental policies, stakeholder pressures, and economic incentives. Wastage, especially in packaging and food, represents a significant barrier to achieving green retail objectives, affecting environmental outcomes, socio-economic conditions, and food security. The retail sector plays a crucial role in generating packaging waste, with multinational corporations such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestlé highlighted among the highest polluters. In South Africa, packaging and food waste contribute substantially to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment, yet inefficient handling, inadequate recycling infrastructure, and limited policy alignment exacerbate environmental and economic challenges. This report seeks to critically examine existing practices, identify gaps, and recommend sustainable interventions tailored to the W&R sector, drawing on global best practices and local insights.

The analysis reveals that waste management challenges in South Africa's W&R sector are complex and multifaceted. Major obstacles include inconsistent stakeholder alignment, insufficient data, poor measurement frameworks, and lack of unified waste reduction targets. Food waste, in particular, is influenced by inefficiencies in distribution, outdated labelling practices, over-ordering, and inadequate staff training. Packaging waste faces similar hurdles, with rising disposal costs, limited recycling alternatives, and misaligned incentives obstructing progress toward circular economy adoption. Regulatory frameworks such as the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMSS) and the National Environmental Management: Waste Act (NEMWA) provide mandates for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and industry waste management plans, yet compliance remains inconsistent. The Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 pandemic further highlighted vulnerabilities in supply chains, cold chain management, and consumer behaviour, intensifying food loss and waste. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for retailers to implement sustainable supply chain practices

prioritising local suppliers, improving demand forecasting, optimising cold-chain logistics, and adopting seasonal sourcing which can reduce environmental impact while enhancing operational efficiency. Global comparisons demonstrate that countries such as the United States of America (USA), Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia have successfully integrated circular economy principles, innovative packaging, and technology-enabled food recovery programmes, offering valuable lessons for South Africa.

The study underscores the critical role of stakeholders, including retailers, wholesalers, producers, waste management companies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and government agencies, in driving sustainable waste management. Effective interventions are shown to require a combination of stakeholder collaboration, technological innovation, and policy alignment. South African initiatives, such as the Food Forward SA programme and Pick n' Pay's Food Waste Reduction Programme, illustrate how redistribution, inventory optimisation, and consumer education can significantly mitigate food wastage and contribute to food security. However, persistent gaps exist between local and international practices, particularly regarding infrastructure, regulatory support, funding, and public engagement. An evaluation of South Africa's Waste Management Act reveals strengths in its legislative framework but highlights limitations in enforcement, stakeholder compliance, and capacity. Key indicators such as food waste generation rates, diversion rates, recovery rates, and financial impact metrics are essential tools for monitoring progress and guiding continuous improvement. The report finds that successful waste management not only enhances environmental stewardship but also generates economic benefits through cost savings, operational efficiencies, and brand reputation enhancement.

Drawing upon global best practices, survey results, and local analysis, the report offers targeted recommendations for retailers, government institutions, and stakeholders in the W&R sector. Large-scale data collection and analysis of Food Loss and Waste (FLW) is recommended to quantify volumes, types, and sources across the supply chain, coupled with comprehensive stakeholder engagement to inform actionable interventions. Benchmarking against international standards can identify gaps and inspire innovative solutions. Moreover, policy and regulatory reviews should target inconsistencies, promote incentives, and encourage adherence to sustainable practices. Capacity building, training, and awareness campaigns for staff, suppliers, and consumers are essential to instil behavioural change and operational improvements. Exploring case studies from developed countries, such as the USA, Canada, Germany, the UK, and Australia, provides practical examples of successful

strategies, technologies, and collaborative approaches that could be adapted locally. Government institutions are encouraged to strengthen infrastructure, regulatory oversight, and public education campaigns while supporting circular economy initiatives through incentives, technical assistance, and monitoring frameworks. Sustainable waste management goals should prioritise reduction at source, efficient recycling, resource recovery, and energy-efficient practices within the W&R sector, supported by collaborative programmes among retailers, NGOs, and industry associations. Lastly, continuous evaluation of interventions and successful programme models, such as Food Forward SA and international initiatives like Fare Share and OsHarvest, demonstrates the importance of innovation, community partnerships, and knowledge exchange in reducing waste and enhancing food security.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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42. A Meta-Analysis of the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority Input Statistics in the Higher Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sectors, in the Free State (*Sally Joubert*)

The purpose of this study was to critically analyse the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) input statistics within the Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sectors in the Free State. The research situates itself within the broader mandate of W&RSETA to facilitate skills development and workforce entry, particularly for entry-level participants. Over recent years, the W&RSETA has implemented a range of interventions to promote workforce participation, including bursary schemes, graduate placement programmes, internships, and targeted skills development initiatives. These programmes are designed to address both unemployment and under-skilling within the retail sector, ensuring that the labour force is equipped with relevant competencies while simultaneously supporting economic development objectives. This study employed a qualitative case study methodology, integrating insights from a comprehensive literature review on Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) interventions and guiding policies with a meta-analysis of W&RSETA input statistics. By analysing existing interventions and assessing their impact on workforce development, the study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for optimising skills development strategies for both unemployed and employed individuals in South Africa. The overarching goal is to support adaptive, evidence-based approaches to skills training that align with sector-specific needs, emerging industry trends, and broader national socio-economic imperatives.

The meta-analysis revealed that W&RSETA-funded interventions have contributed significantly to the skills development ecosystem in the Free State, particularly in creating pathways for entry-level participation in the workforce. Key insights indicate that while unemployed youth benefit from structured bursaries, internships, and bridging programmes, employed individuals have comparatively fewer opportunities for upskilling and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Participants highlighted that the sector's evolving technological and operational requirements, particularly the rise of digital commerce and supply chain innovations, necessitate a greater emphasis on digital literacy and emerging industry trends. Furthermore, collaboration between SETAs, training providers, and retail companies emerged as a critical factor in ensuring programme relevance and sustainability. Effective alignment of interventions with high-demand retail skills was identified as a key determinant of both employability outcomes and sectoral productivity. Insights also

underscored the need for comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), including robust longitudinal studies to capture the long-term impact of funding interventions on employment outcomes and socio-economic mobility.

The study found that while the SETA interventions are largely effective in promoting skills acquisition, several gaps limit their overall impact. Multi-year funding and contingency planning are inconsistent, which introduces volatility and affects the sustainability of programmes. Skills development initiatives, while targeted in certain areas such as vocational training and internships, often lack sufficient alignment with emerging industry requirements, including digital skills, supply chain management, and retail technology applications. Moreover, upskilling opportunities for employed beneficiaries remain limited, highlighting a need for flexible learning models that accommodate work schedules and diverse learner profiles. Evaluation of programme outcomes, including employment placement, participant satisfaction, and skills retention, is not consistently applied, reducing the capacity for adaptive programme improvements. Additionally, outreach and awareness campaigns targeting underserved communities are not uniformly implemented, limiting equitable access to learnerships, bursaries, and skills programmes. Overall, findings indicate that the SETA interventions positively influence workforce readiness, but greater coordination, strategic funding allocation, and stakeholder engagement are essential to maximise impact across both unemployed and employed populations.

Building on the meta-analysis and key findings, the study proposes a multi-pronged set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of the W&RSETA's skills development initiatives. First, establishing stable funding frameworks through multi-year funding plans and contingency measures will ensure consistent programme delivery, even amid economic fluctuations. Second, targeted skills development programmes should prioritise identified gaps in the retail sector, including digital literacy, supply chain management, and emerging technologies, while continuously evaluating programme outcomes using key performance indicators such as employment rates and participant satisfaction. Third, strengthening stakeholder partnerships including collaborations with retail companies, training providers, and public-private initiatives will improve programme relevance, resource efficiency, and co-funding opportunities. Fourth, upskilling initiatives for employed individuals should be expanded, using flexible and modular learning models, including online and part-time courses, to ensure workforce adaptability and career growth. Fifth, increasing awareness and engagement among diverse communities is essential to

ensure equitable access to bursaries, internships, and learnerships. Sixth, robust M&E frameworks should be implemented, including longitudinal studies, to track long-term outcomes and inform adaptive strategies.

Furthermore, integrating innovative training approaches such as gamification, blended learning, and industry-aligned content will enhance learner engagement and skills retention. Eighth, expanding bridging programmes for unemployed youth that combine theoretical training with practical experience will increase employability and workforce readiness. Finally, the SETA should continuously evaluate and adjust funding allocations based on outcomes, directing resources toward initiatives demonstrating the highest impact for both unemployed and employed beneficiaries. Collectively, these recommendations aim to create a more agile, responsive, and impactful skills development ecosystem that addresses current workforce gaps, supports career progression, and strengthens sectoral productivity and sustainable economic growth.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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43. Insights into the Challenges, Opportunities, and Implications Faced by the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority Bursary Programmes: A Stakeholder Perspective (*Nicole Cunningham, Norman Mafuratidze and Semona Pillay*)

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) bursary programme was established to expand access to higher education, address skills shortages, and strengthen workforce readiness within the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector in South Africa. It was designed not only as a financial support mechanism but also as a vehicle to empower youth, address inequalities in education access, and contribute to national skills development objectives. The programme's purpose extends beyond enabling individual students to pursue qualifications; it also seeks to align educational outcomes with sectoral transformation priorities, industry labour market demands, and broader socioeconomic imperatives such as youth employment and entrepreneurship. This evaluation of the bursary programme was undertaken to assess its effectiveness, explore the demographic and academic outcomes of beneficiaries, identify systemic barriers that hinder its full impact, and make recommendations to strengthen the programme's design and delivery.

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods, two-phased approach. Phase 1 analysed bursary recipient data between 2021 and 2024 to identify demographic and funding patterns, qualification preferences, institutional performance, and completion rates. Phase 2 explored deeper insights through online surveys and virtual focus groups with bursary recipients, employers, and education providers, focusing on the adequacy of financial and academic support, alignment of funded qualifications with industry needs, and barriers to workforce readiness.

The findings reveal both achievements and critical shortcomings of the bursary programme. On one hand, the bursary has succeeded in broadening educational access, particularly for women and youth in underrepresented provinces. Approximately two-thirds of recipients were female, and most fell within the 20–23 age bracket. Provinces such as Limpopo and the Western Cape received the highest bursary allocations, showing targeted attention to geographic disparities. The programme also demonstrated inclusivity in language representation, with IsiXhosa, Sepedi, and isiZulu being the most common home languages among recipients. These trends illustrate the programme's reach and contribution to

addressing inequities in access to education. However, deeper analysis revealed systemic weaknesses. Funding allocations were concentrated in traditional qualifications such as accounting, business management, and office administration. While these areas remain important, they do not fully capture the shifting skills demands of the modern W&R sector. Critical fields such as e-commerce, digital marketing, data analytics, and supply chain management skills central to the digital transformation of retail were underfunded or largely overlooked. Employers voiced concern that graduates lack digital, analytical, and customer engagement competencies, which are increasingly critical for competitiveness and innovation in the sector.

The evaluation produced a set of concrete findings across demographic, institutional, financial, and sectoral dimensions. Firstly, it confirmed the programme's ability to target new entrants into the higher education system, with most bursaries awarded to first-time students at Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Secondly, it identified significant disparities in funding levels, with allocations ranging from as little as R10 000 to over R140 000, suggesting inconsistent financial planning and inequities in the distribution of support.

The most striking outcome is the low completion rate, which represents the programme's greatest vulnerability. With only 297 completions recorded out of thousands of bursary awards, the data indicates that access to education is not translating into tangible outcomes for most students. This undermines both the efficiency and impact of the bursary programme and limits its contribution to skills development and labour market readiness. The reasons for these poor outcomes are multifaceted: insufficient financial coverage, delayed disbursements, weak academic support structures, inadequate mentorship, lack of exposure to practical learning, and misalignment between funded qualifications and industry demand.

Employers underscored a growing gap between graduate skills and workplace requirements. The industry increasingly requires digital fluency, customer experience management, data literacy, and problem-solving skills. Yet the programme continues to prioritise traditional academic qualifications. The lack of integration between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and the bursary programme exacerbates this misalignment. Furthermore, entrepreneurship widely recognised as a vital avenue for employment creation remains peripheral in the bursary framework. Collectively, these outcomes highlight the urgent need

for the bursary programme to be recalibrated towards a demand-driven, future-focused approach.

To address the challenges identified, several recommendations emerge from the report:

- The W&RSETA bursary programme should diversify its funding focus by supporting qualifications in emerging fields such as digital marketing, e-commerce, supply chain management, and data analytics.
- The programme must strengthen academic and financial support systems.
- The programme should integrate practical learning and industry exposure.
- The SETA must establish a system of continuous Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrseta.org.za/about-us/skills-planning/completed-research>

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44. Identifying and Analysing the Factors that Influence the Submission Rates of Workplace Skills Plans and Annual Training Reports in the Mining and Minerals Sector (Nelson Chipangamate, Mayshree Singh, Pontsho Twala, Isaac Mabala, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Themba Tshabalala, Masaila Machaka and Kingwell Chirwa)

The project sought to assess the factors influencing the submission of Workplace Skills Plans and Annual Training Reports (WSP-ATRs) in the Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS).

Accurate and comprehensive WSP-ATR submissions are the cornerstone of effective sector skills planning, but the study highlights a significant compliance gap. In 2024, only 965 out of 2,291 levy-paying companies submitted their reports, and submission rates have fluctuated significantly over the past five years.

The study identified several key issues hindering compliance. There are concerning pockets of low awareness about WSP-ATR requirements, particularly among smaller and non-submitting companies. Many organisations, especially those with inexperienced staff, perceive the submission process as having a high administrative burden and complexity. A significant finding was the inconsistency in submissions, with only 40% of companies submitting in all of the last five years. Many companies still view the process primarily as a means to access mandatory grants rather than as a valuable tool for strategic skills development. Finally, some submissions are not approved due to missing signatures, indicating poor quality control.

To improve submission rates and quality, the report proposes several solutions for the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA):

- Create a comprehensive and clean employer database to facilitate targeted outreach.
- Launch a targeted awareness campaign to educate companies on the requirements and benefits of compliance.
- Enhance MQA support mechanisms, such as providing virtual boot camps and practical assistance during the submission period.
- Implement a training programme to improve the digital skills of Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs), making them better equipped to navigate the process.
- Focus on rewarding consistently compliant companies while providing targeted support to inconsistent and non-submitting ones.

The report concludes that improving WSP-ATR compliance is crucial for the MQA's ability to align skills development with industry needs and national economic goals

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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45. Exploring Beneficiation Skills that Can Be Prioritised in the Mining and Minerals Sector (Pontsho Twala, Paskalia Neingo, Paseka Leeuw, Hudson Mtegha, Kabelo Manamela, Karabo Manamela, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Themba Tshabalala, Masaila Machaka and Kingwell Chirwa)

This study addresses the critical skills needed to support mineral beneficiation in South Africa's Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS). Mineral beneficiation is identified as a transformative mechanism for economic diversification, job creation, and technological development, but the country has missed opportunities by not participating in the entire mineral value chain. A key bottleneck is a shortage of the necessary skills.

The study's key findings indicate that while a national beneficiation strategy prioritises minerals like Platinum Group Metals (PGMs), gold, and titanium, participation is limited to early-stage mining and refining, with little involvement in semi-fabrication and final manufacturing. The required skills are multi-disciplinary and vary across the value chain. Essential skills for primary stages include metallurgical and chemical engineering, while tertiary stages require industrial engineering and product design. Cross-cutting skills like project management and regulatory compliance are also crucial. Current training programmes focus on entry-level processes and have significant gaps, particularly for emerging commodities like rare earth elements and titanium.

To address these gaps, the report recommends:

- Enhancing existing training programmes to cover emerging critical minerals crucial for advanced technologies.
- Promoting practical skills through partnerships between academic institutions and mining companies, such as internships and apprenticeships.
- Collaborating with other Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), like the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MerSETA), as final manufacturing processes fall within their domain.

The report concludes that a multistakeholder approach is essential for implementation. It proposes the establishment of a National Beneficiation Skills Implementation Task Force to align industry needs with training programmes and develop a shared national strategy.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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46. Report on the Early Childhood Development Function Shift and the Implications for Skills Planning (Lesley Wood)

This report focusses on the recent move of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) responsibility from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the National Department of Basic Education (DBE). This is commonly referred to as the 'function shift' that officially took place on 1 April 2022. It answers the following key questions: What progress has been made at the national and provincial levels to develop processes and structures to ensure that the ECCE sector aligns with the policies promulgated to improve ECCE in South Africa?

A multimethod qualitative design was used to gather data via a desktop analysis of existing policies and relevant literature. Data was also collected from various government officials, the nongovernmental sector, and other registered training providers through an online Delphi questionnaire. Face-to-face focus group interviews (10) were held in six provinces with practitioners and centre managers. The online questionnaire was also followed up with online interviews with the DBE and a leading Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

Data collected from various stakeholders indicate that there is a need to standardise training and monitoring in the sector, as current providers compete, rather than collaborate with each other, and programmes vary in quality and duration. Practitioners and managers expressed fear and uncertainty about their futures due to the lack of clear and consistent communication from the provincial governments and the difficulty in completing the registration process. They also feared for their sustainability when Grade R becomes mandatory. The implications of these findings for skill planning and development are summarised in the report. There are many opportunities at the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) to partner with government and training providers to provide input into the new policies, support the new and existing qualifications, and encourage collaboration within the sector at local level. Both the DBE and the non-governmental sector expressed the desire for the ETDP SETA to collaborate with them in the future.

The full version of this document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-03/ECD%20Function%20Shift%20and%20the%20Implications%20for%20Skills%20Plannin%20Report.pdf>

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D. TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

47. An Analysis of the Method of Planning to Teach Among In-Service Technical and Vocational Education and Training College Lecturers with an Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching Qualification (*Thokozani Isaac Mtshali*)

The South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college lecturers are continuing to receive professional teaching education in attempt to ensure that they become effective lecturers and critically engage with socio-and-post secondary education issues within the African context. Most importantly, they now engage extensively with didactics and method of teaching modules which are meant to boost their pedagogical and andragogical competence. In this study, these in-serve lecturers were assessed on their capacity to plan lesson step-by-step. This study was framed through Loughran's Mastery of Content Representation (CoRe). This frame assisted to evaluate if lecturers were able to clearly define learning objectives and lesson outcomes, structurally sequence concepts to be presented to students, organise activities and necessary materials as well as develop assessments that are centred around problem-solving taxonomy.

In a qualitative research approach, descriptive research design was used for this case study. This study found that the sampled in-service TVET college lecturers demonstrated various challenges in the mastery of content representation and were unconsciously unaware of the importance of sequencing knowledge concepts and adequately plan activities that were based on problem-solving taxonomy. This was drawn from the disproportionality of their written work and verbal responses during presentations. As means to advance TVET pedagogy and method of planning and teaching to general engineering educators, this study recommended that instructors should focus on providing multiple opportunities for TVET college lecturers to engage in content representation activities in order to cater for diverse teaching and learning styles and reinforce understanding. This will ultimately increase the social and educational value of the advanced diploma qualification towards TVET college educators.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/mastery-of-content-representation-core-by-engineering-graphics-and-design-teachers/328567>

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48. Student Satisfaction in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges *(Lebogang Setsepu, Dimakatso Lebepe and Lerato Ndlovu)*

The 2013 White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) and the 2012 National Development Plan (NDP) aim to expand and improve the quality of post-school education in South Africa, with a focus on integrating various systems. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are key to this vision, intended to provide young people with mid-level skills in fields like engineering, tourism, and business to meet labour market demands and support sustainable development.

The goal is to reach 2.5 million TVET student enrolments by 2030, requiring greater access, affordability, and improved infrastructure. A Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) was conducted in 2024, to assess perceptions of teaching quality, infrastructure, support services, digital readiness, safety, and inclusion. This study builds on an earlier study undertaken as part of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) TVET Research Programme which took place from 2019-2024. This study took place in 2021 and the report is available on the following link: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/TVETStudentSatisfactionReport.aspx>

Understanding student satisfaction helps identify gaps in service delivery, which is vital for improving retention, academic success, and employability. Addressing these issues ensures that TVET institutions contribute effectively to South Africa's economic growth and social development.

The aim of the study was to gather feedback from students to identify areas that need improvement and guide changes that will enhance the student experience. The results are intended to help improve the quality of education, infrastructure, and student services at TVET colleges, ultimately better preparing students for further studies or employment.

The study used an online quantitative survey to assess student satisfaction at South African TVET colleges, collecting 5,020 responses. A structured questionnaire covered academics, support services, and facilities, using closed-ended and Likert-scale questions. Distributed via DHET channels, the survey targeted students aged 18 and above and was conducted from 30 August 2024 to 20 November 2024.

While the online format improved accessibility and anonymity, it may have introduced selection bias and excluded students without digital access. Other limitations included the use of a neutral response option and open-ended course questions, which may have affected data consistency and depth of insight.

The study showed that 72.9% of students were satisfied with the courses offered, and 61.6% found the curriculum and learning materials relevant. Teaching quality received mixed reviews where 68.2% were satisfied with lecturers' knowledge and methods, though some concerns were raised about teaching techniques, language use, and overall approach. Regarding technology in learning, 54.7% were satisfied with digital tools, while 25.2% were dissatisfied with how technology was used in classes.

Campus facilities also saw varied feedback. While 70.1% were satisfied with cleanliness and maintenance, 18.2% were dissatisfied with building conditions. Students highlighted challenges in library resources and Wi-Fi access, with 35.6% describing campus Wi-Fi as unreliable. Support for students with disabilities was reported as inadequate by some students.

Student services such as accommodation, recreational activities, and psychological and career support were rated inconsistently. Only 27.5% were highly satisfied with psychological support and career guidance, while dissatisfaction was noted with financial aid and counselling, especially due to National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) payment delays.

In terms of digital access, 86.9% of students owned smartphones, but only 18.5% had access to laptops or tablets. Many relied on home or public Wi-Fi to access learning materials.

Campus safety was reported positively by 86.3% of students, though 12.7% had concerns. Accessibility remained a challenge for 20.9% of students who struggled with public transport. Facilities for students with disabilities were often lacking.

Overall, 66.7% of students were satisfied with their college experience. Meanwhile, 54.6% were satisfied with exit support services such as career guidance and job placement, and 60.8% felt ready to enter the workforce.

The study recommends that colleges prioritise infrastructure improvements, including expanding Wi-Fi networks, enhancing student accommodation, and ensuring proper maintenance of campus facilities. There is also a need for more effective teaching methods, updated curricula, and increased support for students with disabilities. Furthermore, colleges should invest in providing students with laptops or tablets to improve access to digital learning, streamline financial aid processes, and enhance communication with students.

By implementing these targeted reforms and continuously monitoring student satisfaction, TVET colleges can significantly enhance the quality of education and better equip graduates with the skills required for employment and economic participation.

The SSS at TVET colleges revealed both positive and negative feedback. While many students expressed satisfaction with the campus appearance, recreational facilities, and some aspects of teaching. Key issues included inadequate infrastructure, such as poor student accommodation and slow Wi-Fi, limited access to technology, and inconsistent teaching quality. Additionally, dissatisfaction with student support services, including financial aid and career guidance, was notable. These findings highlight critical areas where improvements are needed to enhance the overall student experience.

The full report will be published on the DHET website: www.dhet.gov.za

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49. Challenges Experienced in the Implementation of Professional Technical and Vocational Education and Training Lecturer Programmes: Insights from Universities in the College Lecturer Education Project (*Tshidiso Seitshiro*)

The report examines the implementation challenges experienced by ten public universities currently offering professional qualifications for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) lecturers. The initiative to offer these programmes was supported by the College Lecturer Education Project (CLEP), a sub-project of the Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme (TLDCIP). The purpose of the TLDCIP was to establish and strengthen initial teacher education and post-school teacher education in South Africa. At present, eight public universities offer the Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching (Adv Dip TVT), and two public universities offer the Postgraduate Diploma in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PG Dip TVET). Both qualifications are critical for advancing the professionalisation of TVET lecturers to improve the quality of teaching in the TVET sector.

The research report used a mixed approach, beginning with distributing questionnaires to ten public universities that offer the two programmes and then following up with virtual interviews with programme coordinators from each university. The findings revealed several ranges of internal and external challenges that hinder their effectiveness in offering the professional TVET lecturer programmes. Internally, universities struggled with academic staff capacity, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and placement matters, enrolment imbalance of subject specialisations, and limited faculty or management support. Externally, the universities faced challenges such as inadequate funding for pre-service students, strained relationships between colleges and industry, and programme capacity funding issues. Despite these challenges, the universities have demonstrated innovative ways of offering these programmes.

The research report provided recommendations on how the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) can aid in addressing some of the internal and external challenges. These include expanding funding aid focused on programme capacity support and pre-service student bursaries, as well as the establishment of the Community of Practice (CoP) to facilitate collaboration and advocacy. In relation to future research, DHET can commission a research

study project to measure the impact of the Adv Dip TVT and the PG Dip TVET programmes in the TVET sector.

The strengthening of the Adv Dip TVT and PG Dip TVET is critical to ensure professionally qualified TVET lecturers, thereby improving the quality of teaching in the TVET sector.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gsCeo_E63X3IbCoKTKeINAPvYK29FzPJ

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50. Development and Execution of College Action Plans to Improve the Practice of Five Areas of Work Integrated Learning (*Nothemba Joyce Nduna*)

The Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Research Chair conducted research on the practices and challenges of WIL and found out that the practice of the following five areas of WIL need interventions: 1) the preparation of students for their workplace learning, 2) student placements, 3) monitoring, 4) assessment of students' workplace learning, and 5) building and maintenance of WIL partnerships. For the current year (i.e., 2024), the WIL Research Chair conducted Participatory Action Research (PAR) with ten (10) selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges to encourage continuous reflection, planning, and implementation of interventions to improve the practice of WIL and align such practices with current trends and new developments in the labour market. The main objective was to find out how the selected TVET colleges developed and executed college action plans to improve the practice of the five areas or elements of WIL. Data collection took place in two phases, started at the beginning of May 2024 to the end of June 2024. During the first phase, attention was focused on interviews on the development processes of college action plans. The second phase focused on interviews on the implementation or execution processes of college action plans.

The findings that were derived from the responses of the project leaders from the ten TVET colleges indicated several steps that were followed by the colleges to prepare for the development of action plans. Such steps included the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), identification of college project leaders for the WIL Research Project, organisation of institutional workshops and the establishment of college WIL Committees.

The findings also shed some light on the activities that were suggested in developed college action plans. Such activities included 1) the selection of an academic learning programme to serve as a pilot to improve the five areas of WIL, 2) the development and offering of structured work readiness programmes to prepare students for workplace learning, 3) the formation of new stakeholder partnerships and exploration of new funding sources, 4) conducting of per term student visits in work sites, 5) identification of existing and working models to assess students' workplace learning, and 6) convening of frequent stakeholder meetings. The

participation of the workplaces in the development and execution processes of the college action plans was indicated by the submission of programmes for stakeholder engagement meetings, attendance registers and signed commitment letters from the representatives of the workplaces.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-04/Development%20and%20Execution%20of%20College%20Action%20Plans%20to%20improve%20the%20practice%20of%20five%20areas%20of%20Work%20Integrated%20Learning..pdf>

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E. HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

51. The Implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on Technical and Vocational Education and Training in South Africa (*Mthokozisi Makhosonke Magagula and Omotayo Adewale Awodiji*)

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has unleashed a new period of fast technological advancements with profound implications that continue to reshape economies, industries, governance, education and most significantly, the world of work. At the crossroads of this revolution is South Africa's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, which is responsible for developing a workforce that can prosper in the dynamic 4IR environment. The implications of 4IR are especially noteworthy in the South African context for the TVET sector, which is essential to producing workforces that are both 4IR-skilled and employable. A situation where TVET graduates are not adequately equipped with the skills demanded by the evolving environment may lead intensify the risks of unemployment.

The study critically examined the implications of the 4IR on South Africa's TVET sector, contributing to ongoing scholarly discourse and advancing knowledge in the area based on the Human Capital Theory (HCT). Employing a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative, phenomenological research design, the data were collected through purposive sampling from eight key participants: Six TVET lecturers, one TVET placement manager, and a senior official from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture rich perspectives on 4IR developments pertaining to the TVET programme. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data using ATLAS.ti software.

However, the findings revealed that while 4IR offers immense potential, it also exposes significant gaps in the current TVET sector. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to update TVET curricula to reflect emerging technological trends, foster sustainable collaboration between TVET institutions and industry, and integrate 4IR technologies as instructional tools. In addition, continually enhancing the professional development and digital competence of TVET lecturers emerged as a critical response. Moreover, creativity, digital skills, and problem-solving skills are essential cross-cutting 4IR skills necessary for success in various industries if TVET graduates are to be employable.

Therefore, it was concluded that aligning South Africa's TVET sector with 4IR imperatives necessitates systemic reforms, including curriculum redesign, policy review, sustainable industry-TVET partnerships, and continuous capacity development for lecturers. These systemic reforms are significant to ensure that graduates are not only employable but also innovative, agile, and responsive to the evolving 4IR demands. The research offers valuable insights for policymakers, TVET educational authorities, employers, and researchers by providing a blueprint for skilling, upskilling, and reskilling the TVET workforce in the 4IR era. Ultimately, the study enhances practical perspectives of how the TVET sector can be positioned as a rapid response to evolving 4IR demands in South Africa.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100896>

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52. Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy in Higher Education in South Africa: Where to after Decades of Discourse and Rhetoric? (Amani Saidi)

This paper examines the historical and contemporary debates surrounding academic freedom and institutional autonomy in South African higher education. The paper traces the origins of academic freedom and institutional autonomy to the medieval and Humboldtian models of the university, where freedom from external interference was considered essential to knowledge creation. Globally, these principles have evolved contextually and remain contested, often negotiated between universities, the state and other stakeholders.

In the South African context, discourse on academic freedom and institutional autonomy started in the 1950s as the apartheid regime embarked on a programme to racialise Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This programme prompted resistance from “open universities”. The democratic era of South Africa from 1994 reframed academic freedom and institutional autonomy within principles of equality, transformation and accountability. Policies such as the Education White Paper 3 (1997) and the Higher Education Act (1997) formally recognised these rights, with the Education White Paper 3 cautioning against the misuse of academic freedom and institutional autonomy to resist transformation.

Based on its mandates, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) found itself investing time and other resources in acquiring insights into the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy and their influence on the higher education system, essentially becoming central in shaping the discourse surrounding the two concepts. Its *Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom (HEIAAF)* project (2005), subsequent *Kagisano* issue number 8 publication, and the 2024 Higher Education Conference which had the theme “Deepening the Discourse on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education”, were some of the ways in which the CHE played a role in shaping the discourse on academic freedom and institutional autonomy. In particular, the 2024 conference identified various themes such as the universities’ role in a developmental state; cooperative governance; tensions between the cooperative governance model and the neoliberal macro-level policies; managerialism within institutions; weaknesses of statutory governance structures; and the neglect of postdoctoral fellows.

This article concludes by making the argument that decades of discourse, while unifying the sector, have not resolved threats to academic freedom and institutional autonomy. It recommends that the sector considers shifting from rhetoric to a system of empirical research. This shift has the potential to assist in settling the debates on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://journals.co.za/doi/10.20853/39-4-7600>

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53. Making a Case for a Human-Centred Approach to the Adoption and Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education in South Africa (*Wendy Qampi and Amani Saidi*)

Published in the Council on Higher Education's (CHE's) *Kagisano number 15* publication, this paper emphasises the critical need for a human-centred approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education, particularly in South Africa, due to the current lack of regulatory frameworks. While AI offers significant benefits in enhancing teaching, learning, administration, and research, its unregulated adoption poses risks such as job displacement, discrimination, and exacerbation of inequalities. A key issue highlighted in the paper is that AI should be used to enhance human capabilities rather than replace them. This could be explored through the integration of local human values, notably the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which stresses interconnectedness and community, to guide AI implementation and mitigate potential harms.

Furthermore, the paper highlights specific challenges across various AI applications in higher education. For example, AI tutoring tools often lack essential human interaction, administrative AI risks unemployment, and AI for expanding access is hindered by the digital divide and infrastructure issues like loadshedding. Additionally, AI language learning tools predominantly support Western languages, potentially marginalising indigenous African languages, and AI assessment tools, if biased, can reinforce historical inequalities. Finally, the paper underscores that for AI to realise its transformative potential equitably, its adoption must be rooted in human values, address local contexts, and ensure inclusive benefits for all stakeholders in higher education.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.che.ac.za/file/7730/download?token=RpJAERbe>

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54. Artificial Intelligence Forces Higher Education to Confront its Purpose (*Sioux McKenna, Neil Kramm and Nompilo Tshuma*)

Educational institutions are grappling with generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), but many are fighting the wrong battle. Institutions need to ask fundamental questions about the purposes of a post-school education.

In our various publications on this issue, we suggest that the current response has been narrowly reactive. Universities have rushed to install AI detection software, rewritten plagiarism policies, and created an atmosphere where students live in fear of being wrongly accused. This surveillance approach mirrors the failed strategies used for traditional plagiarism detection, which the research demonstrates has done little to reduce academic dishonesty while seriously damaging trust between educators and students.

These detection tools are unreliable, flagging original student work as AI-generated based on arbitrary stylistic patterns. Students report being accused of cheating for using common phrases or punctuation that the software associates with AI.

Our research argues that the real problem isn't technical. It's philosophical. If universities define themselves primarily as credentialing factories focused on workforce training, AI is an existential threat.

True education should involve what scholars call a "transformative relationship to knowledge", the kind of intellectual struggle that fundamentally changes how students understand themselves and their world. This transformation cannot be outsourced to AI, no matter how sophisticated it becomes.

Universities should be helping students to think critically about AI's ethical implications and limitations, including engaging in the tough task of convincing students of the dangers of outsourcing their cognitive work. This is tough because many students understand higher education simply as a means of acquiring the commodity of a qualification. It requires us to rethink much of how we use our class time and how we assess.

The choice is clear: continue the arms race of detection and punishment, or embrace the opportunity to reclaim education's transformative mission. The future of higher education depends not on more surveillance, but on establishing why human learning matters in an age of AI.

Links to the relevant research are as follows:

<https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v6i1.1528>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2023.2263839>

<https://theconversation.com/ai-can-be-a-danger-to-students-3-things-universities-must-do-255652>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-07-25-turning-off-ai-detection-software-the-right-call-for-sa-universities/>

<https://theconversation.com/ai-can-be-a-danger-to-students-3-things-universities-must-do-255652>

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55. Technology Integration in Teacher Education: Challenges and Adaptations in the Post Pandemic Era (Adedayo Olayinka Theodorio, Zayd Waghid and Andrew Wambua)

University educators worldwide are integrating diverse technologies to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in post pandemic teacher education. The rapid evolution of technology and the emergence of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 pandemic necessitate a reassessment of instructional strategies, particularly to ensure that pre-service teachers can adapt and thrive in an era of education uncertainties. Key technologies including hi-flex wireless projectors, Bluetooth speakers, Internet resources (such as Google, YouTube, Quizizz, and Kahoot), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (QuillBot, Grammarly, and ChatGPT), as well as communication platforms (Zoom and Google Meet) are now central to teacher education. However, significant barriers such as limited experience, inadequate training, and socio-economic constraints hinder effective adaptation. In South Africa, for instance, there is a lack of empirical data on how these challenges are navigated in teacher education, highlighting a critical research gap. This study directly addresses the urgent need to understand the challenges and adaptations experienced by South African pre-service teacher programmes, focusing on educators' experiences. The primary research question guiding this study is: What technology integration challenges do university educators and pre-service teachers encounter in a post-pandemic teacher education programme?

This study is based on two key aspects of Vygotsky's theory: social interaction and the use of cultural tools, such as technology, to build knowledge. Social interaction matters because it helps to understand how people learn about challenges and adapt technology in teaching through active involvement. Cultural tools, mainly technology, help teaching and encourage interaction between students and teachers. Using both ideas supports the view that collaboration allows people to share knowledge about using technology in teaching.

A qualitative case study was employed, involving six purposively selected participants, to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Data was collected with an observation guide and focus group interview session. The data answered the research question and gave a better understanding of technology use in teacher education including the challenges encountered. Each participant was interchangeably observed three times in class, for a total of 12 hours, plus a two-hour interview session.

The findings show that overcoming technology incompatibility and adapting to socio-economic challenges are crucial for effective technology integration in post-pandemic teacher education. However, facilitating continuous, practical engagement among educators, policymakers, and pre-service teachers is essential to reducing these barriers related to technology adaptability in post-pandemic teacher education. The results also reveal that knowledge development relies on social engagement and the informed use of technology as a cultural tool such that dialogue and collaboration among teacher educators and pre-service teachers could help harness technology's benefits while also acknowledging its limitations in educational contexts.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s44217-024-00341-1.pdf>

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56. Demystifying Lesotho, Rwandan, and Nigerian Educators' Viewpoints on Smart Technologies Supporting Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education (Adedayo Olayinka Theodorio, Zayd Waghid, Tawanda Wallace Mataka and Oyebimpe Adegoke)

This paper explores the viewpoints and experiences of educators in Lesotho, Rwanda, and Nigeria regarding the use of Smart Technologies Supporting Artificial Intelligence (STAI) in Education within their respective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The study aims to understand how these technologies are being perceived and utilised, and what challenges hinder their effective implementation in these three African nations.

Smart technology, which operates remotely using the internet and cloud connectivity, is increasingly critical in higher education. This technology facilitates Artificial Intelligence (AI), which supports pedagogical decisions, instruction delivery, and assessment management. AI's value is growing across various sectors, including education, where newly developed smart technologies – such as interactive whiteboards, smartphones, ChatGPT, Virtual Reality (VR), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Learning Management Systems (LMSs), Quizizz, Kahoot, and Google Classroom – enable educators to use AI for personalised learning, grading, and optimising student outcomes.

These tools afford new ways to engage students, employ innovative teaching strategies, and foster student ownership of learning. AI helps address teaching challenges, knowledge gaps, and prepares students for lifelong learning by providing tutoring, personalised instruction, accessibility, and automation of administrative tasks. The integration of AI has led to the adoption of STAI, promoting learning-by-doing and independent discovery.

Despite the global trend toward integrating AI and smart technologies, many developing nations in Africa – specifically Lesotho, Nigeria, and Rwanda – face significant challenges. These challenges include limited awareness, as well as cultural, economic, and infrastructural obstacles that impede the successful implementation of STAI in higher education.

Specific issues highlighted are educator resistance due to a lack of knowledge and expertise in creating and delivering instruction using smart technologies aligned with AI. Many educators are unaware of the technical aspects of classroom AI use, and many "smart" classrooms need

upgrading. Furthermore, these three nations have distinct socioeconomic, technical, and infrastructure issues that exacerbate deficiencies in technology integration. Empirical evidence points to unique difficulties such as the unpopular and novel use of AI, a lack of technological know-how for instructional purposes, ethical issues, user attitudes, poor governmental policies, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure and network connectivity. The study addresses the gap in understanding the viewpoints of educators in these specific contexts.

Educators in Lesotho, Rwanda, and Nigeria show a nuanced engagement with STAI despite regional challenges. The first theme, STAI in Higher Education, reveals a broad awareness of advantageous technologies, from ubiquitous tools like smartphones and LMSs to specialised resources like Kahoot and Microsoft Teams. This signifies sophisticated knowledge beyond basic computer literacy. Crucially, the integration of STAI is highly individualised and context-dependent, influenced by educators' personal preferences, skills, teaching objectives, and affordability. This variability challenges uniform policy, underscoring the need for flexible, personalised professional development that empowers educators to select and effectively use tools relevant to their specific environments and student needs.

Educators are actively using STAI in higher education, aligning with constructivist learning. They leverage STAI beyond mere content delivery to create learning opportunities, solve tasks, and foster collaboration, discussion, and demonstration. This proactive approach involves giving technology-requiring tasks and introducing tools while stressing proper citation. Essentially, educators are using STAI for knowledge generation, shifting the classroom from passive reception to an active, inquiry-based, and collaborative learning environment, preparing students for the digital professional world.

Systemic infrastructural and socio-economic hurdles significantly impede the full integration of STAI in higher education. Critical obstacles include poor internet connectivity, inadequate technology supply, and affordability issues. Deficiencies in institutional policy and funding exacerbate these external constraints. Furthermore, human/technical factors like teachers' lack of skills and fear suggest a need for professional training. Fundamental extrinsic factors like poverty and lack of electricity highlight that sustained STAI improvement requires coordinated efforts extending beyond the classroom to address broader national development issues.

In conclusion, this study confirms that STAI can influence the development of students' cognitive skills, heighten their interest and motivation toward learning, and foster collaborative learning. What emerged from the data was participant having engaged with STAI in their teaching contexts, and being aware of the importance of these technologies in teaching and learning. Although some participants in this study admitted to not using smart technologies for instructional practices, often due to the existence of the obstacles described above, the bigger picture emerging from the data indicates that some participants possessed varied levels of technological knowledge in the use of STAI to plan and assess their instructions. From the findings, the researchers argue that what is needed is to increase awareness of AI amongst all educators in higher education in the three countries to serve as encouragement to both faculty members and students to use STAI for learning purposes. In so doing, those obstacles needing critical attention in the use of STAI in higher education might begin to be addressed or even overcome.

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57. Understanding the Influence of Online Learning Platforms on Preservice Teachers' Mental and Academic Wellness: A Systematic Review of the Literature (Adedayo Olayinka Theodorio, Zayd Waghid and Andrew Wambua)

Online Learning Platforms (OLPs) assist teacher educators in delivering instructional plans both synchronously and asynchronously, enabling Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) to engage virtually and fostering autonomous learning. The integration of OLPs in teacher education provides opportunities for self-directed learning among PSTs, including both first-year students and those in advanced years of study. Although some PSTs have prior exposure to technology during secondary education, OLPs in teacher education introduce distinct experiences and workloads. PSTs with previous OLP experience may be motivated to explore further, but those from low-income households often lack access to technology and sufficient motivation, which can result in frustration and disengagement. PSTs encountering OLPs for the first time or lacking access to technological resources frequently face challenges in submitting assignments online and may be discouraged from subsequent attempts without adequate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support. This issue is particularly prevalent in asynchronous learning environments, where limited student interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and difficulties with time management, ultimately affecting both mental and academic well-being.

Mental, emotional, and social well-being are crucial for achieving and maintaining strong academic performance, as motivation, interest, and psychological stability have a direct impact on educational outcomes. The integration of OLPs into course modules has been shown to affect students' mental and academic wellness. However, in the South African context, limited research has examined this phenomenon specifically among PSTs. Most importantly, a gap remains regarding the impact of OLPs on PSTs' mental and academic wellness. Addressing this gap is necessary to inform both practice and policy. Furthermore, periodic reviews and engagement with PSTs are required to understand the specific challenges associated with OLP use and their influence on mental wellness.

This study employed a systematic review of the literature as a methodology to identify, understand, and document the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating OLPs in teaching and learning, as well as their influences on PSTs' mental wellness. The findings are documented and presented for possible consideration in teacher education. A

systematic literature review was conducted to identify, understand, and document the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating OLPs in teaching and learning, as well as their effects on PSTs' mental wellness. The review aimed to address the question: How do OLPs impact PSTs' mental and academic well-being in post-pandemic teacher education? Literature was sourced from Google, the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and Google Scholar, with a focus on teacher education, OLPs, mental wellness, and PSTs within the South African context.

Relevant keywords were systematically applied to identify and contextualise the literature addressing the research question. The review outcomes indicate that barriers such as financial, resource, and technical stressors, significantly impede the mental well-being of PSTs using OLPs for learning purposes. Nonetheless, the review revealed that despite these challenges, OLPs are valuable in potentially motivating PSTs, creating a sense of belonging where such students are afforded spaces to share their knowledge, critically engage with new knowledge and engage in reflective practices. The review further affirms the role of South African university educators in always explicating empathy and understanding the challenges PSTs encounter in online learning. Promoting resilience strategies by university educators using OLPs can further mitigate the aforementioned stressors that negatively influence PSTs' mental wellness.

The study further affirmed that OLPs cannot replace in-person counselling services provided by universities for mental health concerns but should be designed to supplement and complement existing support services. Nonetheless, OLPs can assist educators and counsellors in developing digital solutions that help prevent mental health issues and strengthen PSTs' capacity to manage their well-being, thereby supporting positive academic outcomes.

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58. Black African Students' Social and Academic Identities in South African Universities Vis-à-Vis Student Drop Out: A Social Justice and Philosophical Perspective (Siyanda Mluleki Kenneth Cele, Doniwen Pietersen and Claire Gaillard)

This article examines the factors influencing university students' decisions, such as the complexities of the application process, geographical location, and financial constraints. It also explores the reasons behind student dropout, such as inadequate secondary education, burnout, lack of social support, experiences of racism, poor academic performance, and university culture. The literature review identifies a gap in research on Black African university students, particularly their integration into the university system. Cele, Pietersen, and Gaillard advance that poverty, alienation, financial difficulties, a lack of readiness, racial background, racist experiences, university culture, language problems, and a curriculum reflecting colonial legacies are some of the causes that lead to student dropout. By applying Tinto's theoretical framework, their article provides insights into the challenges students face in South African universities. Ultimately, they argue that success for students depends on social integration, which includes developing deep connections with classmates, lecturers, and academic staff. The higher ecosystem has, to some extent, a disproportionately negative impact on young people and students from working-class homes, failing to adequately prepare them for higher education spaces. A social justice approach is necessary to enhance the academic and social inclusivity of Black African students in higher education.

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59. Education in Conflict: A Struggle for Peace, Social Justice, and Leadership in Africa
(Abdelaziz Zohri, Robyn Mary Whittaker, Andrew Wambua, Abdoulaye Harouna and Fiston Muganda)

This study addresses the alarming and escalating vulnerability of education systems, students, and educators in African conflict zones, despite international commitments. While the Safe Schools Declaration (2015) aims to protect schools from attacks, the paper highlights its insufficiency. In 2022 and 2023 alone, there were approximately 6,000 attacks on education worldwide, and a disproportionate number of heavily affected countries – including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burkina Faso, and Nigeria – are in Africa. The continent also hosts 10 of the 14 countries most affected by such incidents.

Armed conflicts lead to a hidden crisis in education, resulting in the destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement, increased dropout rates, and long-term educational deficits. The study notes that international responses often treat these crises as short-term emergencies, failing to hold culprits accountable, implement postwar social protection programmes, or consistently use education for peacebuilding rather than perpetuating intolerance.

The paper notes that the field of education and conflict is relatively nascent. While much research on social justice in education focuses on in-school dynamics (curricula, teacher-student relations, traditional leadership), there is limited theorisation on the intersection of education in conflict, social justice, and informal leadership. The issue is inherently complex and requires new frameworks to unravel its intricacies.

The study utilises Johan Galtung's (1969) definition of violence, which extends beyond physical harm to include any oppression or deprivation that prevents individuals from reaching their full potential (structural and cultural violence). This definition is crucial for understanding violence as a systemic issue linked to social injustice. Drawing on Kant et al. (1983) and Hannah Arendt (1970), the authors stress that peace is not merely the absence of violence but an active pursuit, and Arendt warns against the romanticisation of violence as a primary driver of justice.

The authors share narratives gathered through their Africa Voices Dialogues (AVD), amplifying the experiences of individuals involved in conflict-affected communities. These stories highlight the destructive impact of violence but also the incredible resilience, devotion, and informal leadership shown by African youth striving to maintain education.

These narratives underscore that conflict-induced education disruption not only denies access but also can lead to the radicalisation and emotional/psychological destabilisation of children, perpetuating the cycle of violence. They also powerfully illustrate how dedicated individuals create innovative, informal systems to sustain education against overwhelming odds.

In conclusion, the paper implicitly calls for a fundamental shift in how education is viewed and implemented in conflict settings. It is not just about protection (as per the Safe Schools Declaration) or provision; it is about recognising education's power as a vector of liberation, peace, and social justice. The stories from the field serve as concrete examples of how dialogue, innovation, and self-advocacy (informal leadership) are crucial to resisting oppression and ensuring the continuity of learning.

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60. Managers' Experiences in Complying with Infrastructure Grant Conditions at Selected Gauteng Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges: A Review of Existing Studies (*Sindisiwe Thabile Ngidi and Lucia Zithobile Ngidi*)

The infrastructure grant is a cornerstone of education, human development, and national development, particularly in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Adequate infrastructure fosters human capital development, economic growth, and poverty reduction; however, funding shortages and mismanagement pose significant challenges, particularly in developing countries. This study examines the role of grant infrastructure in education and national development, with a focus on funding challenges, non-compliance with infrastructure grants, and strategies to enhance compliance in South African TVET colleges, grounded in human capital theory. This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate managerial perceptions and experiences related to infrastructure grant compliance in two Gauteng-based (TVET) colleges, specifically Tshwane North and Sedibeng. Fourteen (14) participants were purposively sampled. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis.

Study Findings suggest that infrastructure is critical for educational quality and economic progress, but African HEIs, including South African TVET colleges, face under-investment, dilapidated facilities, and non-compliance with grant conditions due to poor governance, unrealistic funding requirements, and inadequate monitoring. Innovative financing, such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and enhanced oversight are proposed to address these issues. Practical implications suggest that streamlined grant approvals, training, and robust monitoring can improve compliance and project outcomes in TVET colleges. Theoretically, human capital theory supports infrastructure investment as a driver of socio-economic development, aligning with global goals such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and SDG 9. This review underscores the need for accountability and strategic reform to optimise infrastructure reform.

Proposed strategies to improve compliance include decentralising approvals, enhancing the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) monitoring, providing ongoing training, engaging stakeholders through dedicated offices, hiring skilled personnel, and developing a clear infrastructure funding policy.

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F. TEACHING, LEARNING AND CURRICULUM INNOVATION

61. Making Sense of Algebraic Fractions: An Ethnomethodological Lens on National Certificate (Vocational) Level 3 Students' Work in High-Stakes Examinations (*Nwabisa Mbeki*)

This study investigates National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) Level 3 students' ways of working with rational algebraic fractions during high-stakes Mathematics (Maths) examinations in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Poor performance in Maths remains a persistent concern within the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector, despite targeted support initiatives. The study aims to contribute to the limited literature on NC(V) Maths, specifically exploring how students construct, pursue, and sometimes abandon solutions when simplifying algebraic fractions under examination pressure.

Using an ethnomethodological framework, the research analyses students' examination scripts from two public TVET colleges. Ethnomethodology, as pioneered by Garfinkel, provides a lens through which the researcher identifies and interprets the "textures" of student responses, those often unnoticed or discarded artefacts such as rough work, abandonment, retracing, and procedural reversals. These textures are not only reflective of cognitive strategies but also of the urgency and context-driven pressures that shape how mathematical reasoning unfolds in real time during assessments.

Findings suggest that students' engagements with algebraic fractions exhibit rational structures and procedural intelligibility, even when the final answer is incorrect or incomplete. Patterns such as not attempting to answer the question (leave blank spaces), shedding (abandoning a solution before reaching the final answer), convenience (using an incorrect procedure), or rough work indicate varied, context-sensitive approaches to problem-solving. Significantly, the most common texture observed was abandonment, where students began a solution path but did not complete it, suggesting moments of conceptual hesitation or cognitive dissonance.

The study recommends incorporating ethnomethodological insights into Maths teaching and assessment practices in TVET colleges. Lecturers are encouraged to use students' actual ways of working beyond just correct or incorrect answers as formative tools for shaping

responsive pedagogies. By focusing on the process of doing Maths, including moments of hesitation, reversal, or abandonment, educators can uncover valuable learning opportunities that are often overlooked. These partial or unfinished solutions should be seen not as shortcomings, but as meaningful evidence of students' reasoning under pressure.

Encouraging students to analyse and reflect on their own approaches fosters deeper conceptual understanding and promotes metacognitive awareness. Classroom practices should include exposure to a range of problem-solving strategies and create space for collaborative discussion, allowing students to make sense of their methods through peer engagement. This learner-centred approach not only enriches the learning experience but also supports curriculum responsiveness by aligning teaching with how students actually think and work. The study further suggests that future research investigate how group-based analysis of both formal and informal assessments can illuminate students' strategic reasoning and enhance instructional planning across the PSET landscape.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/items/cc535b0a-b9f8-41c4-9f53-d744702f4215>

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62. Differentiated Assessment implementation Between Quintiles 1-3 and 4-5 Primary Schools in South Africa: Teachers' Perspectives (*Lucky Mkhonza, Nomawethu Dumezweni and Nombulelo Sesi Nxesi*)

The 2011 Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) mandates that South African schools implement a uniform curriculum while adapting delivery and assessment methods to accommodate all learners. This requirement recognises the limitations of traditional assessment practices, which often fail to account for learners' diverse talents, abilities, and competencies. Despite the well-documented benefits for learners, the adoption of differentiated assessment has not been as widespread as expected. Literature identifies several potential reasons for this limited adoption, including ineffective school organisation and functioning, insufficient resources and materials, inadequate teacher training, a curriculum that lacks clarity on learning outcomes, insufficient parental support, and teacher perceptions. In the South African context, these factors are likely influenced by the socioeconomic status of the schools.

As such, the study aimed to compare teachers' perspectives in South African primary schools across quintiles 1 to 5 regarding the degree of implementation of differentiated assessment. Through comparative analysis, the study sought to identify the strategies and factors influencing differentiated assessment, where it is implemented and where it is not implemented, and the obstacles that hinder its delivery.

A mixed-method approach was utilised for data collection. An online questionnaire was distributed to primary school teachers across the quintiles. The schools identified for participation were sourced from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Education Management Information System (EMIS) database as well as through snowball sampling techniques, which provides various contact details and the jurisdictions of the schools. A total of 126 primary school teachers participated in the study. Responses were received from teachers across Quintiles 1 to 5, with relatively equal representation from each quintile group.

The findings have demonstrated that while differentiated assessment, as advocated by policy, aims to be inclusive and expansive, its practical implementation is not uniform across the quintiles. Instead, the extent of implementation is arguably influenced by the socioeconomic factors of the schools. Ultimately, the insights from the study seek to contribute to the literature

by encouraging debate and discourse concerning best practices for the application of differentiated assessment across quintiles.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-09/Differentiated%20Assessment%20implementation%20between%20Quintiles%201-3%20and%204-5%20Primary%20schools%20in%20South%20Africa%20Teachers%E2%80%99%20perspectives.PDF>

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63. Towards A Framework for the Assessment and Quality Assurance of Non-Traditional Learning Experiences (*Nomawethu Dumezweni, Nombulelo Sesi Nxesi and Lucky Mkhonza*)

Non-traditional learning experiences have arguably gained momentum and prevalence in the education system due to their perceived flexibility, broader outreach, responsiveness, and inclusivity. However, the speed at which these alternative learning experiences have been institutionalised parallels growing concerns and antagonisms regarding their quality. First, the sluggish and rigid response to developing effective frameworks for assessing and quality-assuring non-traditional learning experiences can be counterproductive, stifling innovation and adaptation to new demands. Second, the lack of quality assurance hinders quality improvement, compromising the overall quality of the education system. These limitations have made it difficult for stakeholders to advocate for the uptake and integration of these non-traditional learning experiences into the broader education system.

In light of these issues, the study employed a mixed-method approach to investigate what assessing and quality-assuring non-traditional learning experiences will entail, through the examination of literature and the development of survey questionnaires for participation from the following quality assurance bodies: Council on Higher Education (CHE), South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI), Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) provided valuable insights.

The results indicated the key design considerations for institutions when developing their respective frameworks for quality assurance and assessment of non-traditional learning experiences. Respondents highlighted the importance of prioritising factors such as academic integrity, student information integrity, equity of access, and quality student experiences. The study's findings are anticipated to significantly contribute to the body of knowledge regarding non-traditional learning experiences in South Africa, offering a promising future for these innovative learning methods.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-02/Towards%20a%20Framework%20for%20the%20Assessment%20and%20Quality%20Assurance%20of%20Non-Traditional%20Learning%20Experiences.pdf>

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64. Innovation in Agricultural Assessments for Students Development (*Fabian Nde Fon and Zwivhuya. L Ndou*)

In most African countries summative assessments in higher education has overshadowed formative assessment that foster student development. Summative tests are widely applied due to their standardisation, efficiency, policy alignment, and resource limitations. Some students struggle with summative and need alternative evaluations that are more hands on and oral as a mitigation strategy. This study explored oral tests as an alternative assessment strategy with formative characteristics, offering immediate feedback, critical thinking, and verbal communication, especially valuable for students in rural universities with limited exposure to English reading and writing prior tertiary education. Conducted within a third-year plant science course between 2021 and 2024, the study compared student performances in two written tests (T1 and T2) with an on-farm Oral Test (OT), where students demonstrated practical application of knowledge in real farm settings. Data were analysed using Chi-square and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Results showed that students consistently performed significantly better in OT (62–85%) than in T1 (31–57%) and T2 (30–50%). Distinctions were highest in OT, with up to 88% achieving excellence, while written tests recorded minimal or no distinctions. These findings highlight the potential of on-farm tests to enhance learning outcomes and need for careful planning prior application.

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65. Matric Mathematics Achievement as a Predictor of University Success in Mathematics-Related Fields and the Implications for Skills Planning (*Moeketsi Mosia*)

This research report examines the influence of Grade 12 Mathematics (Maths) (Matric) performance on subsequent university success in Maths-intensive disciplines. Drawing on two complementary empirical studies one employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and the other utilising Bayesian hierarchical analysis—the researcher investigates both the direct and indirect effects of Matric Maths scores on academic outcomes. The SEM study demonstrates that strong Matric performance is a key predictor of early success in introductory Maths modules, although its influence diminishes as students progress, with credit accumulation and institutional support playing increasingly critical roles. In parallel, the Bayesian analysis reveals that, while Matric scores significantly contribute to academic achievement, socioeconomic factors (notably school quintile) and progression rates emerge as vital determinants of long-term performance. Minimal gender differences are observed, yet students from lower-quintile schools continue to encounter greater challenges. Together, these findings underscore the necessity for enhanced preparatory programmes, student support initiatives, and holistic admissions policies to foster a diverse and skilled STEM workforce in South Africa.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-04/Matric%20Mathematics%20Achievement%20as%20a%20predictor%20of%20University%20Success%20in%20Mathematics%20related%20fields%20and%20the%20implications%20for%20skills%20planning.pdf>

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G. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

66. The National Qualifications Framework as an Enabler: Transitioning from Schooling into Post-School Education and Training and Work (*Shirley Lloyd*)

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was established as a transformational policy instrument to promote equity, lifelong learning, and systemic coherence across education and training. Within the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) Three-Stream Model (TSM) and the Education for Employability initiative, the NQF plays a critical role as an enabler of learner transitions from schooling into the diverse Post-School Education and Training (PSET) landscape. This paper, based on research conducted for the Education for Employability TSM project, explores how the NQF facilitates articulation across academic, vocational, and occupational pathways.

Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist research design, the study utilised document analysis, international benchmarking, and interviews with key stakeholders. Narrative and thematic analyses were employed to examine the enabling functions of the NQF and the systemic barriers that affect transition.

Findings highlight the NQF's value in providing a common language of qualifications, setting national standards, and enabling progression routes that support learner mobility. However, challenges persist: limited conceptual clarity between pathways, uneven institutional capacity, and fragmented governance arrangements across sub-frameworks undermine coherence. These tensions highlight how the NQF's ability to fully realise its bridging function can be managed.

The paper concludes that, despite limitations, the NQF remains central to enabling learner transitions from schooling into PSET. Strengthening articulation mechanisms, enhancing policy alignment, and building stakeholder collaboration are essential to realising the transformative vision of both the TSM and the NQF in widening access, equity, and employability.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ycd71mv4n3glhtv0znkwi/The-Three-stream-model-articulation-policy-and-framework-component-of-the-Education-for-Employment-project.pdf?rlkey=ep64ug9w733tsqx9jx35vq9fa&st=2ztgoe7x&dl=0>

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67. Building a Resilient Skills Ecosystem: Final Report on the Forward Path of Education and Training in Light of the Pandemic and the Fourth Industrial Revolution Shifts in the Education, Training and Development Sector (Shirin Yousuff Motala, Bongiwe Monica Mncwango and Stewart Ngandu)

The pandemic's impact manifested through multiple channels: prolonged institutional closures, rapid shifts to online education, the emergence of new technological tools, and widespread business disruptions. The sector, employing approximately 68,437 workers across 14 distinct subsectors, demonstrated varying levels of resilience and adaptation capacity. The study revealed that approximately 500,000 learners dropped out of school, while average learning time was reduced by 54% due to rotational attendance and sporadic closures.

The study aimed to investigate the structural dynamics within the Education, Training and Development (ETD) sector influenced by the Corona Virus Disease (COVID)-19 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) through one main research question: What is the impact of COVID-19 on education and training within the context of 4IR?

The research employed a comprehensive cross-sectional mixed methods design over three years, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to capture both immediate impacts and long-term structural changes.

The study emphasises that successful transformation requires a coordinated effort across all stakeholders, supported by: Sustainable digital infrastructure development, enhanced workforce capabilities, inclusive transformation strategies, and strengthened systemic resilience. The findings provide a foundation for evidence-based decision-making in policy development and strategic planning, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and adaptive ETD sector. Success will require ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of strategies to meet the evolving needs of the sector.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.etdpseta.org.za/etd/sites/default/files/2025-03/Building%20a%20resilient%20skills%20ecosystem%20ETDP%20SETA.pdf>

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68. Time to Rethink Skills Development: An Independent Review of the Sector Education and Training Authority (*Roy Havemann*)

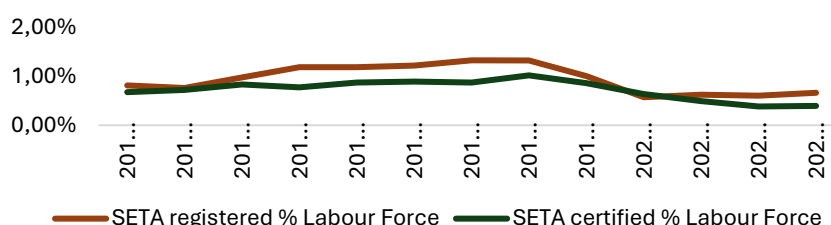
South Africa faces a serious skills shortage which is damaging long-run economic growth. The Manufacturing Survey conducted by the Bureau for Economic Research (BER), for example, shows that around half of all manufacturing businesses cite skilled labour as a significant business constraint.

The introduction of the Sector Education and Authorities (SETAs) was intended to increase skills levels in the economy. However, a recent research note by the BER highlighted that the SETAs are unperforming.

Key findings include:

- The total number of SETA skills programme registrations in 2023/24 was only 1% of the employed and 0.7% of the labour force. This compares to similar international schemes where 50% of the employed participate (e.g., in France).
- The system has received multiple audit findings. Between 2011/12 to 2023/24, across 273 individual audits, 54% were termed “unqualified with findings”, 15% were “qualified”, and 1% were issued with disclaimers or adverse audit opinions.
- A cumulative R9.147bn in irregular expenditure over the period under review, according to the Auditor General. This represents 5.5% of the total revenue SETAs received from the SDL over the 13-year period.

Figure 1: In 2023/24 barely 0.7% of the workforce (employed and unemployed) received any training



Source: Authors' compilation based on data from DHET (2025) and Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)

The paper outlines a few options:

- Option 1 is to phase out the SETAs entirely, including the levy. This will potentially increase employment (by reducing employment costs) and remove a constraint to doing business.
- Option 2 is to reduce the levy. This will reduce the deadweight loss but still keep the system in tact.
- Option 3 is to redirect the levy, e.g. to fund shortfalls in basic education, but this does not directly address the skills shortages and mismatches that the economy currently faces.
- Option 4 is to convert the system to one based on a revenue-neutral tax incentive. This will use the money to support skills development.

Overall, given the significant need for skills development, reform of the system is vital.

The full document can be accessed on the following link: www.ber.ac.za/growth

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69. Skills Mapping for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges: Leveraging District Economic Profiles for Responsive Vocational Training (*Matheko Elliot Mpe*)

Artisans play a vital role in developing key economies such as construction, manufacturing, and mining. The apprenticeship system has evolved over the years since the democratic era, with significant policy developments like the Skills Development Act (SDA), National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), and National Apprenticeship and Artisan Development (NAADS). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, and other Skills Development Providers (SDPs) continue to play an important role in offering skills to support various economic and sub-economic sectors such as mining, agriculture, and tourism.

To provide the necessary skills for the provincial economy, skills mapping and curriculum planning remain essential tools for TVET colleges and SDPs. This project aims to map and establish key skills programme priorities for SDPs across nine provinces.

The methodology employed a systematic document analysis and literature review of previously published documents. A funnel approach was used to progressively narrow the focus from broad national frameworks to specific local contexts. This began with an examination of master plans from various economic sectors, followed by strategic plans of different provinces, and then planning and reporting documents from provincial economic development departments. The analysis further incorporated Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), Sector Skills Plans (SSPs), Occupations in High Demand (OIHD) lists, and other relevant policy documents.

To complement the policy review, the study analysed labour market data from Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA's) Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), employment trends data from recruiters and economic performance indicators. This triangulation of policy documents and empirical data enabled a comprehensive understanding of both planned economic priorities and actual labour market dynamics.

The synthesised findings were then used to identify key occupational programmes that college campuses should prioritise, aligning training offerings with the economic activities, growth

sectors, and employment opportunities within their respective communities and districts. This evidence-based approach ensures that programme development responds directly to local economic realities and labour market demands.

There have been efforts in the past few years for TVET colleges to increase the provision of occupations that are responsive to local economic needs. However, review of the data indicates that the colleges have experienced major limitations in providing key vocational skills in both primary and secondary economic sectors. This includes provision of skills in areas such as food-related manufacturing, textile and clothing, provision of water and municipal services, and supporting the creative and performing arts sectors. Although in recent years there has been an increased effort to supply the Occupations in High Demand (OIHD), the efforts have been at a limited scale. The limitations experienced have largely been in human resources and infrastructure. This has resulted in low production of occupations on the critical and scarce skills lists, limited support to emerging sub-sectors such as online commerce, and limited focus on the informal economy.

The district economy was essential in understanding the key economic sectors that the colleges should focus on. Although primary sectors such as agriculture and mining are still creating employment and absorbing many graduates, the secondary and tertiary sectors, such as manufacturing, retail, finance and construction, have been creating a considerable number of jobs.

The profiles indicate that TVET colleges and SDPs should invest in infrastructure and building capacity to provide all the needed skills for district economies. The key occupational programmes that should be prioritised across many districts include manufacturing, engineering and related fields, finance, banking and business-related services, wholesale, retail and trade, renewable energy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and municipal services related technical occupations.

A critical insight from the profiling was the shifting structure of employment in many of the provinces. The sectors, such as finance and insurance services, are experiencing growth of jobs for the highly skilled, while sectors such as retail have availability of both middle-level professionals and low-skilled workers.

The engaging process of skills mapping based in robust district economic profiling, is not an academic exercise but an important exercise for South Africa's socio-economic development. By systematically linking the output of SDPs and TVET colleges to the specific demands of provincial and district economies, it can be ensured that its investment in education and training yields valuable returns. This approach empowers TVET colleges and other SDPs to become agile, responsive players of skills development, directly supporting the key sectors that rely on a capable artisan and other key in the workforce. Aligning training with economic geography is the most effective strategy to reduce unemployment, drive local economic growth, and build the skilled vocational skills backbone required for a prosperous nation.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://nadsc.dhet.gov.za/NAD/Research/Research-Reports.aspx>

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70. The Development of a Career Management Skill Framework for South Africa (Lesego Aphane and Rènètte du Toit)

As part of its commitment to piloting policies that foster cross-departmental collaboration, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), through funding from the European Union (EU), commissioned two studies to inform the development of a Career Management Skills Framework (CMSF) for South Africa.

On 20 April 2017, South Africa gazetted the National Policy for an Integrated Career Development System (No. 40795 Vol. 622), which guides career development services across all government spheres. The Policy advocates for the development of foundational skills as a mechanism to enable citizens to make informed lifelong career choices in an ever-changing world. The Policy seeks to build quality and responsive career services whose function is to 'develop career management skills and widen citizens' access to lifelong career development services rather than only helping people to make immediate decisions. Its vision is to provide credible, high-quality career information to citizens throughout their lives. Building on this foundation, the CMSF aims to help individuals understand the changing nature of employment, its opportunities and challenges, and to support smoother transitions from education to work.

Career Management Skills (CMS) are commonly referred to as a set of competencies that enable individuals to gather, evaluate, and use information about themselves and the working world to make informed career decisions. The framework is designed to provide teachers, parents, Career Development Practitioners (CDPs), employment service providers, employers, and other career supporters with a consistent set of competencies to help South Africans manage learning, work, and life transitions effectively. The framework will be more of a structured model or organising tool that defines, categorises, and guides the development of CMS.

To inform the framework's development, DHET commissioned two studies under the Education for Employability (E4E) project through a policy dialogue:

South Africa-Focused Study

This study assessed the availability of career management frameworks in the country, through:

- Desktop Research: Reviewing South Africa's socio-economic context, relevant strategies and policies, CMS curricula, and youth employability initiatives.
- Expert Interviews: Consulting professionals from diverse sectors via virtual and in-person interviews.

Findings highlighted the urgent need for a structured CMSF to help individuals make informed decisions and navigate non-linear career paths. Given challenges such as poverty, inequality, high youth unemployment, and skills mismatches, a CMSF could promote employability, equity, and inclusion. While the Constitution and National Policy provide a foundation, they do not offer a comprehensive framework. Creating such a framework require greater coherence across existing practices and a strong response to South Africa's specific socio-economic context.

The CMSF aims to make individuals aware of the knowledge, skills, and mindset that they need to manage their learning, development, and careers, work or livelihoods effectively. A well-managed career, work activity, or livelihood not only enhances individual fulfilment and well-being but also contributes to broader societal progress and economic development. By providing a structured approach to career planning and career management, the framework wants to assist individuals to take control of their futures, unlock their full potential, and positively impact both their communities and the national economy. The CMSF therefore serves as a guiding tool, equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to navigate their learning, development, and careers/work/livelihood effectively and adapt to an ever-changing world.

International Comparative Study

This study reviewed CMS frameworks in European and other Global North countries, providing insights into how cultural, economic, and educational factors shape the design and implementation of CMS. These international perspectives inform and strengthen the South African framework.

In addition to the studies, DHET convened policy dialogue events with experts from South Africa and the Global North, supported by a Technical Working Group of South African specialists guiding the process.

The studies recommend that an effective CMSF should be simple, user-focused, and based on a shared understanding of terminology. It should enhance employability, work across sectors, and involve diverse stakeholders to ensure inclusivity. Leveraging existing resources, integrating digital tools such as e-portfolios, and providing practical support are key to adoption. Built-in evaluation and a community of practice will sustain relevance, improvement, and long-term impact.

Together, the two studies provide a solid foundation for the CMSF. The South African study demonstrates the pressing need for a structured CMSF to support citizens navigating education, training, and employment, while the international study offers lessons from global frameworks, showing how context shapes career development. The findings underscore that a tailored, inclusive, and user-focused framework—grounded in local realities and informed by international best practices—is essential to equip South Africans with the skills, knowledge, and resilience to manage their careers successfully in a dynamic labour market. A draft framework has been developed and is currently under stakeholder review.

The full documents can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/op2p89fxwr8tj362tkhn9/Development-of-a-LCMSF-for-SA.pdf?rlkey=gsgyvqx2mc3sbygsod2fmcclq&st=uwwmdzx6&dl=0> and

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/op2p89fxwr8tj362tkhn9/Development-of-a-LCMSF-for-SA.pdf?rlkey=gsgyvqx2mc3sbygsod2fmcclq&st=1yfazvgx&dl=0>

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71. Green Hydrogen Skills and the Potential Role of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises, Co-Operatives and Small-Scale Start-Up in South Africa (*Kedibone Moroane-Nkhobo, Qaqamba Matha, Gift Mothopeng, Wendy Poulton, Nicola Jenkin, Presha Ramsarup, Meryl Plasket, Nosipho Sikhosana, Hakelo Chauke, Bruce Young and Marista Fey*)

Green hydrogen has gained prominence in recent years as a potential solution for decarbonising sectors that are difficult to abate, such as steel, shipping, and aviation. These industries cannot be addressed through energy efficiency, fuel switching, or electrification with low-carbon sources like renewables. The sector is still in its early stages of development, and there are high levels of uncertainty regarding its viability compared to other options, the time for commercialisation, and the size and demand for the product and its derivatives, such as green ammonia. Nevertheless, countries with abundant renewable resources, such as South Africa, are exploring green hydrogen's potential. If commercial and regulatory obstacles can be overcome, green hydrogen could contribute to achieving net-zero emissions and stimulate the local economy.

The study aimed to investigate the potential role Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), co-operatives and small-scale start-ups have in green hydrogen. The objective of the research was to identify global best practices in green hydrogen skills development in general and for SMMEs, co-operatives and small-scale start-ups specifically, identification of key points of localisation opportunities for SMMEs, co-operative, small-scale start-ups and future work programmes to support the development of the required skills, taking the market uncertainties into account. The research project utilised a qualitative research approach, specifically employing purposive sampling. The results indicated that the green hydrogen industry in South Africa holds long-term potential but is presently in its nascent stages. The policy, regulatory, market, and business frameworks are still emerging. Consequently, SMMEs, co-operatives, and start-ups are not yet making a substantial impact. However, according to the Green Hydrogen Commercialisation Strategy, their involvement may accelerate with increased investment, especially after 2030, when hydrogen's commercial viability becomes clearer. Furthermore, potential areas were identified where SMMEs, co-operatives and small-scale start-ups could contribute across the green hydrogen production value chain. These areas include the production stages of green hydrogen. It is crucial to equip these businesses and other stakeholders in South Africa with the necessary readiness to seize opportunities that arise when localisation becomes a reality.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.chieta.org.za/about-us/what-we-do/research-skills-planning/reference-documents/>

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72. The Role of the Local Government Sector in Promoting Renewable Energy and the Implications on Skills Development (Sybert Mutereko, Elvin Shava, William Musazura, Nduduzo Ndebele and Alfred Odindo)

As the world groans under the effect of global warming, it becomes obvious that sourcing alternatives to fossil fuel, which is one of the causes, is no longer an option. In light of this, all hands must be on deck to fight the common enemy. In the context of South Africa, local government – as one of the arms of government and the closest to the grassroots – plays a critical role in the transition from being fossil fuel dependent to relying on a low-carbon generated environment. Thus, reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, adopting renewable energy, improving energy security, and advancing sustainable energy development in South Africa requires active participation and promotion from local governments.

Local government has the statutory responsibility to effect some of the changes needed for this transition. However, little has been seen in this regard. The Municipal Systems Act (2000) gives local governments the right to set up a department to oversee and run sustainable energy provision. Unfortunately, most local governments in South Africa have yet to harness this potential. They are either deficient in capacity, resources, or implementation.

This report reviews the role of local government in the promotion of renewable energy in South Africa. The review is based on various relevant scholarly works on local governments and the field of renewable energy. Understanding the role of local government in promoting renewable energy is critical to determining how it promotes renewable energy initiatives or projects within its jurisdiction.

The review explored local government involvement in renewable energy in terms of policy development, implementation, and regulations. For instance, local governments are expected to develop policies that prioritise and promote the use of renewable energy sources and create a favourable environment that attracts renewable energy industries, which in turn leads to increased job opportunities and grows the economy of the municipality. Policies such as tax holidays and subsidies are viable ways of encouraging investment in renewable energy at the community level. Additionally, policies on partnerships with private individuals and organisations regarding renewable energy ventures are essential. More importantly, community engagement offers many benefits in terms of renewable energy initiatives and

projects as local governments educate the communities through regulations on public awareness campaigns and outreach programmes. This involvement creates a sense of ownership and promotes acceptance. Thus, the projects within the municipalities are protected and secured.

Furthermore, the review examined the technical and environmental feasibility of implementing renewable energy systems in local municipalities. Transitioning into a green energy economy is complex and, as such, depends on parameters such as technological development, economic viability, social acceptance, and an enabling environment for sustainability. Various technologies are critical for supporting renewable energy at the municipal level. For instance, green hydrogen, wind energy, hydro, biomass, solar, wind, and concentrating solar thermal power are all examples of renewable energy sources. Thus, the review concentrated on these technologies and how local governments offer technical assistance and support to residents and businesses for installing renewable energy systems while ensuring proper design and installation.

Similarly, investment in technical training to build capacity among the staff and the youth within communities was considered, as this has been identified as a way of reducing and eliminating technical skills shortages in the municipalities. Successful renewable energy initiatives and projects at international and regional levels have been examined while considering how these successes can be adopted and replicated in South Africa. Countries like Germany, Japan, Denmark, and the United States of America (USA) were studied in conjunction with best practices from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, and lessons for South Africa were drawn. Factors such as community-based projects, eco-models, transition towns, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) through a policy framework, institutional arrangement, capacity building, and education were identified as potential solutions. In addition, promoting renewable energy initiatives in sectors and using waste-to-energy options to convert organic waste into biogas or biofuels, reducing landfill waste, and producing energy were also described.

However, in the process of the review, several issues were raised that must be addressed to ensure that local government participates in the renewable energy field. Thus, local governments must establish clear renewable energy policies and integrate them into their development. They must also have renewable energy policy targets to ensure implementation

and monitor achievements. Likewise, local governments should heavily invest in technical training to enhance capacity among both staff and the youth in communities. In addition, knowledge sharing and collaboration among local governments on successful renewable energy initiatives or projects must be encouraged. Likewise, international best practices must be studied and applied in South Africa.

This article is research is part of a series of research commissioned by the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The article is located on the following link: <https://www.flipsnack.com/BE95BDAA9F7/civil-engineering-august-2024/full-view.html?p=23>

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://lgseta.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/THE-ROLE-OF-THE-LOCAL-GOVERNMENT-SECTOR-IN-PROMOTING-RENEWABLE-ENERGY-AND-THE-IMPLICATIONS-ON-SKILLS-DEVELOPMENT1_compressed.pdf

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73. Implications of Key Change Drivers to Skills Development in the Health Sector *(Menzi Methetwa and Simbulele Shabalala)*

The health sector is vital to population well-being, especially for vulnerable groups. Change drivers significantly shape occupational patterns, workforce needs, and service delivery, leading to evolving roles and rising demand for new skills. Organisations face Hard-To-Fill Vacancies (HTFVs) and skills gaps, requiring innovative solutions and adaptive strategies to sustain effective, equitable, and responsive healthcare systems.

The rationale for this study laid in the need to better understand how key change drivers influence the health sector, specifically in terms of occupational patterns, skill requirements, and organisational strategies.

The study objectives included:

- To identify and describe major change drivers impacting on skills demand and supply in the health sector.
- To explain mechanisms through which major change drivers impact skills demand and supply in the health sector.
- To assess the extent to which education and training interventions prioritised by organisations in the health sector are aligned to identified training needs

A cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting organisations in the health sector that do not ordinarily submit Work Skills Plans (WSPs) or Annual Training Reports (ATRs). Primary data was collected via an online survey distributed to 18,211 healthcare professionals, yielding 108 completed responses (0.59%). Quantitative data analysis, including Chi-square tests and logistic regression, was used to determine associations between change drivers, HTFVs, and skills gaps.

The study found that:

- Predominant change drivers were budget/funding constraints (73%), lack of training programmes (69%), and limited capacity to train (62%).
- HTFVs were concentrated among medium and large organisations, with psychologists, occupational therapists, and dietitians identified as the most affected occupations.

- Skills gaps were more prevalent in micro and small organisations, particularly in management, financial, and technological skills.
- Statistical analysis confirmed that organisational size and lack of training programmes significantly explained HTFVs, while changes in job roles were significantly associated with skills gaps.
- Education and training interventions prioritised by organisations were well-aligned with identified needs, with occupation-specific technical training, management training, and technology training emerging as top priorities.

Addressing budgetary limitations, expanding training capacity, and aligning curricula with evolving occupational demands are essential for reducing HTFVs and skills gaps. Prioritised interventions in occupation-specific training, management development, and digital competencies are well-positioned to build a resilient and adaptable health workforce. The study recommends ring-fencing discretionary funding to support these interventions and ensure sectoral training priorities remain evidence-informed and responsive to change.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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74. The Identification of Skills Needs for Persons with Disabilities and the Role that can be Played by the Post-School Education and Training Sector to Address Skills Needs (*Tshepang Kobue and Menzi Mthethwa*)

Persons with disabilities (PwDs) face persistent barriers in accessing education, training, and employment in South Africa, despite policy frameworks promoting inclusion. This study investigates the skills needs of PwDs and the role of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector including the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) in addressing these needs. The research is aligned with national priorities such as the National Development Plan (NDP) and Employment Equity Act, as well as the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on inclusive education and reduced inequalities. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating secondary data (Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Department of Labour (DoL), Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), HWSETA Work Skills Plan (WSP)/Annual Training Report (ATR)) with primary evidence from 30 organisations representing PwDs and four government departments. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, and policy/document reviews. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of South Africa (UNISA), with informed consent and data protection protocols adhered to.

Findings highlight incremental improvements in PwD participation in education, with Special Needs Education enrolments showing steady growth and Grade 12 achievement rates improving to 80% by 2024. However, the quality of passes remains a concern, with declining proportions of bachelor-level passes constraining progression to higher education. While enrolments of students with disabilities in higher education have increased (3.8% CAGR), participation (1.2%) and completion rates (1.8%) remain disproportionately low relative to national disability prevalence (7.5%). Labour market representation is equally limited PwDs account for only 1.2% of the workforce, below the 2% national target.

The study identifies diverse skills needs across disability types, persistent challenges in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) implementation, and low uptake of assistive technologies. Stakeholders emphasised the need for tailored vocational training, inclusive PSET curricula, employer partnerships, and expanded funding opportunities. HWSETA has a critical role to

play in financing inclusive programmes, supporting caregiver training, and driving stakeholder collaboration to align training initiatives with disability needs.

Recommendations include strengthening inclusive transition pathways from basic to higher education, expanding RPL opportunities, investing in disability-friendly infrastructure and assistive technologies, and implementing employer awareness and incentive programmes. A coordinated strategy across government, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and civil society is essential to improve educational throughput, employability, and economic inclusion for PwDs.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.hwseta.org.za/research/>

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75. Assessing the Implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance-Related Skills to Determine the Requirements for Skilling and Upskilling of the Minerals and Mining Sector Workforce (Gillian Ceiridwen Michalowski, Wessel Pretorius Botha, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Masaila Machaka, Kingwell Chirwa and Themba Tshabalala)

This study examines the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and the status of Just Energy Transition (JET) skills within the Minerals and Mining Sector (MMS). The study highlights that these concepts are critical for mitigating climate harm and reducing fossil fuel dependency, with significant implications for skills development.

Key findings reveal that ESG principles are currently implemented primarily to meet legislative requirements and maintain Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listing status, rather than as a core strategic activity. There is a significant alignment between JET and ESG, suggesting they can be managed within a cohesive framework. However, the study found a notable deficiency in the awareness of JET skills within the MMS, with no coherent framework to guide skills development. Current legislation addresses environmental protection broadly but lacks specific provisions for JET-related skills development.

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) is urged to adopt a proactive approach, as the knowledge gap could hinder the timely implementation of necessary training interventions. The report outlines several recommendations for the MQA and its partners, including:

- Developing informational materials and awareness sessions on JET and ESG.
- Creating a mining specific ESG framework that incorporates JET aspects.
- Undertaking a detailed, cross-sectoral skills needs analysis to identify specific requirements, timelines, and geographic areas.
- Updating the curricula, infrastructure, and equipment of training institutions to align with emerging needs.
- Providing funding and incentives for JET-related training and reskilling initiatives.

The report concludes that collaborative, cross-sectoral efforts involving a wide array of stakeholders are imperative to respond effectively to evolving skills needs driven by JET and ESG.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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76. Identifying and Analysing the Specific Mining and Minerals Sector-Related Skills Development Needs in the North-West Province (*Pontsho Twala, Janet Munakamwe, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Themba Tshabalala, Masaila Machaka and Kingwell Chirwa*)

This research analysed the skills development needs of communities in the North-West province, a region that, despite its rich mineral resources, faces severe socioeconomic challenges, including an unemployment rate of 40.1%. The study also aimed to inform targeted interventions to address these issues enabling participation not only in the Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS) but also other key economic sectors in the province.

The study found that the province has a youth-dominated population, with most community members having completed matric, which provides a foundation for further education. However, unemployment is high, and many who were previously employed in mining have been retrenched, highlighting a need for reskilling programmes. A significant number of residents are self-employed, indicating an entrepreneurial spirit that requires support. There is a demand for mining-related skills, but agriculture was also identified as a key sector for employment. Digital literacy was noted as the most critical cross-sector skill.

Another major finding was the disconnect between mining companies and communities, with residents feeling their skills needs are not well understood. Barriers to training were also identified and these include a lack of information, inaccessible facilities, and restrictive entry requirements. Furthermore, there is very limited community awareness of the MQA and its initiatives.

Based on these findings, the report proposes several interventions:

- Developing targeted skills programmes for the youth that align with their interests and local industry demands.
- Expanding access to post-school education through a community-wide career guidance campaign.
- Leveraging cross-sector collaboration, especially between mining and agriculture, to create wider economic opportunities.

- Supporting entrepreneurship by collaborating with government agencies that provide business training.

The report concludes that a multi-stakeholder approach, built on strategic partnerships with local government, industry, and educational institutions, is essential for success.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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77. Examining the Skills Levels and Knowledge Gaps of Existing Occupational Health and Safety Representatives in the Mining and Minerals Sector (*Jennifer van der Walt, Wessel Pretorius Botha, Gillian Ceiridwen Michalowski, Joseph Komane, Nelly Mashaba, Masaila Machaka, Kingwell Chirwa and Themba Tshabalala*)

This project sought to evaluate the skills and knowledge of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) representatives in South Africa's Mining and Minerals Sector (MMS).

OHS representatives play a crucial role as intermediaries between management and the workforce, but the study finds their training and career progression face significant challenges.

The key findings indicate that current OHS training programmes provide only foundational knowledge and are considered too basic to meet the complex responsibilities of representatives, especially following recent amendments to the Mine Health and Safety Act (MHSA). The report identifies a need for additional training in technical skills for hazard identification, incident investigation, and soft skills like leadership and communication. Furthermore, the study highlights numerous barriers preventing OHS representatives from advancing into OHS officer roles, including a lack of formal qualifications, limited career pathways, and workplace challenges like insufficient managerial support and intimidation. The report also notes an opportunity to enhance training through modern technologies like virtual reality (VR) and gamification.

To address these issues, the report provides several recommendations for the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA):

- Revise existing OHS training programmes to include advanced technical skills, soft skills, and planning capabilities.
- Align training with formal National Qualifications Framework (NQF) standards to create a pathway for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) towards an OHS officer diploma.
- Incorporate the recent MHSA amendments into all MQA training programmes.
- Address career progression barriers by developing intentional career paths, mentorship programmes, and leadership training for OHS representatives, particularly those in full-time roles.

The study concludes that implementing these recommendations will enhance the competency of OHS representatives, facilitate their career advancement, and contribute to a safer and more productive mining and minerals sector.

The full document can be accessed at the following link:

<https://mqa.org.za/research-reports/>

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78. Free State Provincial Sector Skills Plan (*Maréve Biljohn, Constance Motsitsi, Celeste Campher, Tafadzwa Maramura, Chris Hendriks, and Casper Olivier*)

The provincial government in South Africa's Free State Province is a significant component of the provincial economy, involving government services, healthcare, education, and municipal operations. However, this sector faces significant challenges in meeting occupational demands in both traditional and emerging occupations. These challenges are mainly due to persistent skills shortages in healthcare, engineering, and information communication technology, which threaten service delivery, whilst the growing demand for digital transformation expertise remains largely unaddressed. Furthermore, the lack of structured workforce development programmes limits the ability to train and retain qualified personnel.

Against this background, a recent study aimed at developing a Provincial Sector Skills Plan (SSP) for the Free State Province was undertaken as a strategic initiative by the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA), in partnership with the Free State Provincial government. The report from this study identifies the following three priority skills actions for the Free State provincial government for execution under the guidance of the PSETA through relevant projects.

Skills Priority 1: Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Skills Planning and Development

- Develop a standardised M&E framework for skills development aligned with national and provincial strategies.
- Improve training impact assessments through structured data collection.
- Align M&E reports with workforce planning to improve capacity-building efforts.
- Strengthen policy enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with M&E requirements.
- Improve interdepartmental collaboration through regular information-sharing sessions.
- Establish a centralised M&E database accessible to all relevant departments.

Skills Priority 2: Enhance Partnerships

- The Provincial Skills Development forums should include representatives from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as well as the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector.
- Advisory Boards of HEIs and TVET colleges should include representatives from the Free State provincial government and its entities.
- Joint identification and design of programmes by the provincial government and HEIs that could fill skills gaps, and meet the skills supply required by the provincial government.
- Form partnerships with industry to identify interventions to address critical skills shortages.
- Establish a forum comprising industry stakeholders, provincial government representatives, and HEIs who will conduct skills forecasting and workforce planning for the province.
- Form public-private partnerships to identify interventions that address critical skills shortages and meet the social and economic goals of the province.

Skills Priority 3: Establish a Workforce Development Framework

- Undertake a skills audit.
- Establish a competency-based training evaluation system.
- Establish a workforce development framework.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://pseta-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/andrical_pseta_org_za/EXC4BHntTZtBqRrVpPyWTn4Bs4KqpaoFJkT12e1AeY4UAA?e=YkuOfO?

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79. Legislative Sector Skills Needs Analysis (*Maréve Biljohn, Constance Motsitsi, Gerrit van der Waldt, Tafadzwa Maramura, Liezel Lues and Chris Hendriks*)

As South Africa navigates through complex issues such as social injustice, economic transformation, unemployment and environmental sustainability, its Legislative sector remains critical to sustaining and safeguarding its Constitutional democracy. The Legislative sector, comprising Parliament and the nine Provincial Legislatures, plays a critical role in the country's democratic governance, policy-making processes, and legal framework. Its significance lies in several key areas, such as enacting laws and policies, representing the public, providing oversight and accountability, budgetary allocations and financial oversight, Constitutional safeguards and rule of law, as well as policy formulation and political discourse. Resourcing the Legislature's Administrative function with adequate skills is central to the performance of these key areas and the Legislators' ability to carry out its mandate. Therefore, addressing skills needs in the administrative function of South Africa's Legislative sector is essential for fostering effective governance and achieving the nation's broader development goals.

A recent skills needs analysis study of the sector's Administrative function aimed at strengthening the sector's capacity and effectiveness, was undertaken as a strategic initiative by the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) in partnership with key legislative institutions. PSETA, as one of the 21 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), plays a critical role in facilitating targeted skills planning and quality learning interventions across government institutions. This study represents a foundational step in aligning skills development efforts with the specific mandates of the Legislative sector, and reveals significant findings relevant to key skills change drivers, skills gaps, skills development, and professionalisation efforts.

The report from this study identifies the following priority actions for execution by the Legislative sector under the guidance of the PSETA through relevant projects:

- Priority Action 1: Legislative Sector-Specific Qualifications
- Priority Action 2: Collaboration and Engagement
- Priority Action 3: Visibility, Advocacy and Awareness
- Priority Action 4: Forums and Best Practice Sharing
- Priority Action 5: Strategic Career Development

- Priority Action 6: Future-Fit Skills Development Planning
- Priority Action 7: Targeted Skills Development Initiatives
- Priority Action 8: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Impact
- Priority Action 9: Culture of Continuous Learning
- Priority Action 10: Innovative Training Methods
- Priority Action 11: Strategic Budget Allocation

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://pseta-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/andrical_pseta_org_za/EcnxYjgo8spHvROCCnfHPcIBSsuwDNc_oGjtHbX4c9IFyA?e=IS0D7y?

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H. GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

80. The Role of Special Economic Zones in the Promotion of Local Economic Development in the Communities (*Matodzi Ralushai*)

This article examines the role of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in promoting Local Economic Development (LED), focusing on their employment impact, sectoral alignment, and regional integration. It also highlights the policy and governance challenges that limit their effectiveness and suggests ways to improve their developmental outcomes.

The research followed a mixed-methods research. Qualitative data were gathered from 30 key informants representing national institutions, SEZ authorities, private sector players, and municipalities in South Africa.

The data suggests that SEZs play a significant role in fostering social cohesion and collaboration in LED. The qualitative results clearly demonstrate the role of SEZs as the catalyst for human capital development and industrial growth. The findings show strong agreement on the importance of professional skills for SEZs administrators and local government officials. The qualitative findings revealed that strong communication and stakeholder engagement skills were frequently cited as essential for SEZ's success. SEZ administrators and LED officials must effectively negotiate with investors, manage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and engage with local communities. Findings reflected further that skills enable SEZ administrators and LED officials to plan, coordinate, and oversee SEZ initiatives effectively. Additionally, the findings highlight that SEZs require technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and financial management to attract investment, drive economic development, and integrate successfully with local communities. Strengthening capacity-building programmes in these areas will improve SEZ performance and ensure long-term sustainability.

The survey data revealed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) combined agreed while a lesser percentage of 1,4% disagreed and 7% remained neutral as to whether social programmes within SEZ address community needs such as affordable housing, healthcare and education. With regards to SEZs having adequate coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems to track their performance, a majority of respondents (68%)

strongly agreed, a lesser percentage of 7,1% combined strongly disagreed while 24,3% of the respondents remained neutral. These findings demonstrate the presence of enabling systems and structures in SEZs to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), ensure economic growth, including steering the District Development Model (DDM).

Qualitative responses demonstrated that collaboration between SEZs and municipalities under the DDM framework is crucial but faces several operational challenges.

The majority of respondents (83%) strongly agreed, while 17.1% remained neutral, and no respondents strongly disagreed nor disagreed that understanding trade and investment regulations is essential for SEZ administrators to navigate the legal and regulatory environment. Another question was posed to the respondents on whether SEZ personnel must have the technical knowledge in infrastructure development, including logistics, transportation and utilities. The majority of respondents (87,1%) combined agreed, while the minority of respondents (5,7%) strongly disagreed and 11,4% chose to remain neutral. These findings demonstrate that SEZ officials need to have specific skills in areas such as logistics and proper skills to comply with the legal environment.

Qualitative responses agreed with qualitative findings, adding that strategic planning and project management are the essential skills for SEZ administrators and LED officials. Respondents highlighted that SEZs operate in complex environments requiring long-term planning, resource management, and coordination with multiple stakeholders. Managing large-scale SEZ projects also requires advanced project management skills, including time management, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement.

The quantitative data shows that most respondents, 34,8% strongly agreed; 42% agreed that SEZs have successfully attracted FDI, while a lesser percentage of 4,3 % combined disagreed, while 19 % remain neutral. These statistics correspond with the literature on SEZs, which affirms that in South Africa, SEZs have benefitted mainly from FDIs, which are crucial in turning around the country's economy.

The analysis of qualitative findings regarding the role of SEZs in attracting FDI indicated that leading SEZs such as COEGA and Dube Tradeport are excelling, although the availability of red tape in government is viewed in SEZs globally as a deterrent to speedy decision-making

and attracting investments. Findings reflected that in South Africa, SEZs experience the dilemma as the red tape associated with political authority determines the level of investment, type and place where potential investors could interact with SEZs. The red tape, if not managed, may negatively affect investor confidence and largely affect local economic development in the communities.

The data analysis reveals that SEZs have played a crucial role in driving economic development worldwide. South Africa can learn valuable lessons from both the successes and challenges of SEZs in countries such as China, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates, which have adeptly utilised SEZs to catalyse economic advancement by drawing foreign investments, nurturing industrial clusters, and ensuring regulatory efficacy. A salient insight derived from China's experience is the paramount importance of robust institutional frameworks and accountability systems designed to mitigate corruption and facilitate effective management. Similarly, Dubai has revitalised its economic landscape through the expedited development of SEZs designed explicitly for targeted industries, thereby illustrating the efficacy of strategic planning in promoting economic progress. Nonetheless, international experiences also indicate that it is imperative to meticulously evaluate local conditions when implementing SEZ frameworks, given that social, political, and economic contexts differ markedly across various regions.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by the Local Government Sector Education & Training Authority (LGSETA) (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The full article can be accessed on the following link:

<https://dullahomarinstitute.org.za/multilevel-govt/local-government-bulletin/archives/volume-20-issue-2-june-2025/the-role-of-special-economic-zones-in-the-promotion-of-local-economic-development>

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81. Deepening Democracy through Municipal Councillor Oversight (*Matodzi Ralushai*)

As a result of the wide-spread and intense criticism directed at local government for failing to deliver on its Constitutional mandate, a necessity arose for an in-depth study to evaluate the role of municipal councillors in their duty to provide oversight in ensuring policy implementation and accountability. In light of this, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) commissioned Enterprises University of Pretoria (UP) to conduct research regarding to the extent to which municipal councillors succeed in their oversight role.

Following a mixed-method research design both in-depth structured interviews and a questionnaire were used to probe the perceptions of four target groups regarding municipal councillor capacity and tools for conducting their oversight role. The responses obtained were triangulated to gain a comprehensive perspective of the status of municipal oversight.

The key factors identified that limit the capacity of councillors as intermediaries in service delivery include the following:

- Divisive party politics and factionalism in some municipalities;
- Lack of technical and conceptual skills;
- Limited comprehension of the responsibilities of portfolio oversight committees; and
- Poor understanding of ward demarcation and the geographical spread of constituencies.

On the part of councillors, the general inability of councillors to interpret technical project reports seriously hampers their oversight function. Such reports include estimates and calculations of the budget, environmental impact assessments, and feasibility studies. It is encouraging to note that the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the National and Provincial Treasuries, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) in provinces have undertaken numerous capacity building programmes aimed at equipping all councillors, new and old, with knowledge and skills for their roles. However, it seems that these initiatives do not adequately cover the broad spectrum of aspects needed for the proper functioning of oversight committees.

Views of respondents in terms of current competency of councillors in conducting their oversight role, were almost split with 42.3% of the respondents rating the levels as “average”,

while 25% gave positive rating of “good” and 21.1% rated the levels as “poor”. The majority of local government experts expressed their concern regarding the adequacy of current oversight capacity and rated the role and competency of councillors as “very poor”. Fourteen percent indicated that the degree of success and the competency levels vary from one municipality to another and also between the different types (i.e. metro and local) and the location of municipality (i.e. urban vs rural).

At the same time, positive inputs reflected the inclusion of former mayors in the oversight committees and the fact that knowledge was being transferred between experienced and less experienced councillors. Additional encouraging aspects regarding oversight include the relative high levels of dedication of some councillors and their commitment to promote the effective functioning of oversight committees. A particular constructive aspect is the use of study groups among councillors to ensure that they are adequately prepared for meetings as well as the continuous sharing of information and knowledge prior to oversight meetings.

It is recommended that an integrated training programme be designed with the assistance of all relevant role-players such as the LGSETA and SALGA, to continuously provide training to oversight committees. The focus should be on in-service training and cooperation. Respondents strongly supported the notion of compulsory and continuous annual refresher training of councillors, over and above the normal induction training.

The use of enhanced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems such as real-time tracking of municipal projects should be promoted as it will increase the use of cutting-edge technology and innovation to conduct oversight. Improved access to documents and information on a central database should be made available. All previous committee reports need to be readily available on a ‘Cloud’ that is accessible at any time. It is further recommended that a suitable Information Technology (IT) Platform and/or Help Desk be established to support councillors in their oversight function. A buddy-system should also be encouraged whereby higher capacity municipalities assist those who are not performing as per expectations. It is also advised that a Council Programme of Action be compiled in which councillors and officials have clear rules of engagements, expectations and a schedule to report back to community on the performance of previous and current years. Ethics management, professionalism drives, and anti-corruption initiatives should be integrated in line with the proposed Municipal Integrity Framework.

Consequences and other punitive measures should be considered for municipalities that ignore or disregard public participation due to a lack of skills and knowledge.

By working to ensure that local government is responsive, accountable, and representative, councillors play a critical role in promoting the well-being of their constituents and in strengthening local democracy. Transparency in local governance and community participation will be enhanced once councillors, especially ward councillors, are empowered to successfully use their oversight structures to monitor and evaluate performance of municipal structures. However, councillors require more specific and targeted capacity, specifically in terms of oversight structures and mechanisms for financial oversight, local government legislation and supply chain management processes and procedures.

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<https://dullahomarinate.org.za/multilevel-govt/local-government-bulletin/archives/volume-18-issue-2-june-2023/deepening-democracy-through-municipal-councillor-oversight> and

<https://www.flipsnack.com/BE95BDAA9F7/civil-engineering-september-2025/full-view.html?p=42>

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://lgseta.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RESEARCH-REPORT-MUNICIPAL-OVERSIGHT-2022-2023_compressed-1.pdf

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82. Knowledge Management: The Missing Link for Sustainable Local Governance *(Matodzi Ralushai)*

South African organisations face various challenges, one of which is the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment. The energy crisis, service delivery protests and corruption as well as the fragility of our democratic institutions, have become the backdrop for the nation's governance challenges. In addition, a VUCA environment place long-term projects and programmes constantly at risk, hindering organisational decision-making and planning.

Although several studies exist on Knowledge Management (KM) in the South Africa, KM has not been studied in-depth and very little empirical research exists on how to effectively implement KM in specifically the South African local government sector. KM can be considered a rapidly developing discipline and considered the most creative and innovative management concept to have emerged over the last quarter of a century. KM can be understood and interpreted on the individual and organisational levels. It is a dynamic non-linear process including concepts such as retaining, acquiring, creating, applying, structuring, and sharing (ubuntu) knowledge. It is built on the belief that the most valuable resource of organisations is the knowledge of its people, hence KM has two main objectives - to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to encourage innovation that leads to increased organisational performance. This said, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) commissioned research to provide an overview of KM in the local government sector.

The literature review confirmed that the effective implementation of KM is dependent on leadership, culture, structure, processes, technology, and politics. Implementing KM in any organisation is difficult as several factors can influence the success or failure. In total 25 municipalities were sampled – 306 questionnaires were completed, and 17 focus groups conducted with a randomly selected group of senior and middle manager across the nine provinces. The research results paint a bleak picture in terms of the understanding, application, and integration of KM in the local government sector. This was highlighted by the quantitative results (questionnaire) and confirmed in the qualitative results (focus group discussions and discussions with key informants).

Respondents indicated some understanding of the concept KM but were not sure how this is aligned with other mandatory processes such as the integrated development plan and or skills development processes. This is the result of a leadership and management deficit and a lack of effective communication of the value to be gained from harvesting knowledge. For KM to succeed requires decisive and ethical leadership to drive the KM agenda. The problem or an absence of a KM culture was highlighted. The culture of an organisation is the result of what the organisation rewards or punishes. People behave themselves into a culture. A culture where employees create, acquire, share, and learn from one another was found to be wanting. The foundations of ubuntu – sharing knowledge and learning and growing is not emphasised sufficiently. The tone is set at the top, however if leaders behave (govern) contrary to what is said, then no employee will misunderstand the message.

The how part of KM involves procedures and processes that is expressed through policies and practices. The KM policies and procedures section also scored low as confirmed in the focus groups. This must be supported by an organisational design that should support KM - this is absent. These processes must be supported by the appropriate technology and the platforms. Technology is an enabler, and all processes must be identified and considered to ensure optimisation to build the KM value chain. The empirical evidence points to a different reality in the local government sector in terms of technology as an enabler.

KM and the knowledge worker as coined by Drucker in 1959 (Armstrong, 2006), stand at the centre of all organisational activities and the successful implementation will have as an outcome, strong institutions - Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. These must be co-designed involving as many of the organisational actors and include representatives of labour as highlighted in the literature. This will ensure legitimacy and ensure that knowledge workers at all levels engage in KM activities, creating a coaching and mentorship regime.

The LGSETA as the authority for skills development must lead the knowledge and knowledge management revolution through mobilising all available resources and working in concert with the primary identified strategic partners (South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the Department Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)). It is recommended that the strategic partners also identify implementing partners such as the Municipal Institute of Learning (based in Durban and a leader in the field of KM) and Institutions of Higher Learning.

Municipalities and municipal entities wishing to embark on this change management journey should work through the recommended implementation framework (Governance5iQ) that is applicable on the micro (municipal) and macro (strategic) levels. The implementation framework is based on five questions. (1) Why we do what we do? (vision) (2) How is it being done? (mission) (3) How will we know at any given moment that we are on track? (Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)) (4) What happen if we not on track? (consequence management) (5) How do we lead and learn? (knowledge management).

The proposed recommendations to achieve KM in the local government sector have far reaching implications for (individual) development and capacity building (institutional level) within the local government sector. The effective implementation of knowledge management in the South African local government sector will result in the institutionalisation of the organisational processes to ensure that evidence informed policy and programmes decisions are made. This critical organisational paradigm shift is a move away from a focus on process only, to outcomes that is considered more important for the long-term sustainability of the organisation. This will ensure that KM is mainstreamed and will lead to good governance outcomes (ethical culture, good performance, effective controls, and legitimacy) as envisaged by King IV and championed by KM ambassadors (politicians).

The empirical evidence presented is clarion clear - KM is the missing link for sustainable local governance and the biggest threat to the democratic project in South Africa.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The article can be accessed on the following link: <https://dullahomarinstitute.org.za/multilevel-govt/local-government-bulletin/archives/volume-18-issue-2-september-2023/knowledge-management-the-missing-link-for-sustainable-local-governance>

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83. Enhancing Evidenced Based Human Resource Development Implementation Capabilities in Local Government (*Matodzi Ralushai*)

Research concluded by the University of the Free State (UFS) (2024) to assess the applicability of evidenced based Human Resource Development (HRD) practices for local government concluded that HRD is not being effectively measured and managed despite the 26 year old enabling HRD policy framework (Skills Development Act, 1998 and the Employment Equity Act, 1998). The evidence point to a lack of understanding, application, and integration of evidenced based HRD in the local government sector. This was highlighted by the 572 participants in 17 municipalities across five provinces. The participants included, managers, non-managers and HRD professionals.

From the gathered evidence it is concluded that ethical values are poorly practiced in municipalities. This is evident in the lack of managerial commitment to equal opportunities for the development of people and the lack of sufficient support for the development of people. People development is not a priority and performance management is not taken seriously. The competencies and contributions of staff to service delivery is not fully recognised. There is a clear lack of ethical conduct by managers contrary to the code for ethical leadership.

A HRD policy problem is evident in municipalities. There may be HRD policies but the implementation is not consistently done and staff are not informed sufficiently of the content of HRD policies and how this affects them. The HRD policy stands in isolation and the links with the Individual Development Plan (IDP) (strategy) and internal transformation (employment equity and performance management) are poor. The different role players as identified in the Municipal Staff Regulations are also not explicitly identified.

Skills development audits are poorly conducted with the result that HRD interventions are not undertaken in line with employee staff development plans. The municipality does not apply a variety of approaches such as formal and informal development and employees are not presented with opportunities to practice new competencies post skills development interventions. There is no agreed procedure for the implementation of HRD in the workplace and it is broadly recognised that the policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) could potentially be beneficial for specifically blue collar workers. But RPL is not implemented efficiently and effectively in municipalities.

Although the Municipal Staff Regulations stipulate that line managers in departments should perform a more hands on role in HRD, evidence indicate the contrary. HRD plans for departments are not in place. The organisation of HRD in municipalities is problematical and line managers are not equipped to manage the implementation of HRD projects. HRD outputs are not included in the key performance areas for line managers and HRD interventions are not monitored by the department managers. Skills Development Facilitators (SDF), the principal HRD internal consultants, are not trusted, nor considered as knowledgeable subject matter experts. They are not taken seriously. The role of the SDF in most municipalities is reduced to an administrative clerk instead of the senior change management facilitator demanded from the functionary. Line managers, HRD professionals and non-managers are also not collaborating effectively to achieve HRD objectives.

The statutory training committee system has been in operation since 1998, but there is low awareness of the function of the training committees and their representation throughout the organisation is a cause for concern. Committee members do not understand their roles and responsibilities and employees do not receive regular feedback on matters pertaining to HRD. From the evidence it is concluded that councillors and shop stewards (key internal stakeholders) do not understand their HRD roles and responsibilities. And senior managers are not supportive of HRD programmes of employees, this despite people management being identified as a key competency for senior managers. The Local Government Sector Education Authority (LGSETA), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) could be collaborating better as the evidence suggests but they are not doing it. Finally the employees are not aware of the potential impact of the Municipal Staff Regulations on municipalities.

Municipal Staff Regulations place the municipalities on a complete new trajectory with a renewed emphasis on increasing organisational capabilities through linking organisational structure and strategy and a focus on performance and development. In the process potential new organisational capabilities and knowledge that could potentially benefit the municipality are developed but not harvested and applied. There is also a glaring absence or awareness of change management plans. They are considered risks for effective HRD implementation.

From the research findings it is further concluded that key indicators in support of knowledge management are not implemented effectively. More than half the participants indicated that

they do not know about knowledge management, indicating a clear lack of communication. The performance and development system is not being implemented effectively and data analytics are not used to inform HRD decisions. It is also not known amongst the research participants whether HRD systems integrate with existing municipal Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems.

The Work Skills Plan (WSP) evaluation report is the only tool used by the LGSETA to evaluate municipal HRD performance (capability). However, it is not applied consistently across the provinces. LGSETA as the authority on HRD should align to the Auditor General's office and audit HRD performance of municipalities. Evidenced-based HRD practices provide municipalities with an institutional model to ensure that HRD performance of managers is included as part of material irregularities reporting (Public Audit Act). An increase in HRD management controls will ensure that municipalities become more capable, responsive and agile to address the plethora of challenges (financial and human resources) facing local government in South Africa. Human resources (people) are the most important strategic resources in municipalities and the effective management of HRD will foster trust and increase municipal implementation capabilities. This will place local government on a completely new trajectory with effective and efficient management of HRD and knowledge at the centre of the transformation efforts of local government. This will contribute to sustainable development goal 16 (strong institutions) and hasten the professionalisation of local government as advocated by SALGA.

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84. The Role of Municipal Leadership in Accelerating Transformation and Service Delivery in the Local Government (*Sybert Mutereko, Elvin Shava, Tigere P. Muringa and Barbara-Lynn Mutula-Kabange*)

This extensive research examines and assesses the various roles of municipal leadership in expediting transformation and enhancing service delivery within local government in South Africa. The scope of this study's objectives includes the understanding of the effects of transformation on the provision of services, the examination of practises at the international and regional levels, the identification of impediments to leadership, the assessment of the capabilities of transformational leadership, and the evaluation of the potential contribution of the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA). Additionally, the research offers practical suggestions to empower municipal leaders and improve service delivery. Furthermore, it aligns local governments with the current service delivery trends at the global and regional levels.

The study used a mixed-methods methodology to gather and analyse quantitative and qualitative data.

The study findings uncovered five key roles of municipal leaders in bolstering service delivery and transformation within local government: influencing reform, fostering a sense of responsibility for change, exploring reform alternatives, and framing citizen participation. The study delves into the effects of transformation on service delivery within the local government sector. It scrutinises how alterations in administrative, political, and organisational frameworks influence the provision of essential services to community members. It evaluates whether these changes hinder or enhance service delivery efficiency. Additionally, international and regional literature concerning the enhancement of service delivery within local communities is reviewed, thereby presenting a wealth of valuable insights. This section offers best practices, case studies, and global perspectives, thereby providing crucial contextual information for the implementation of local government service delivery initiatives. The findings reveal a diverse array of best practices and models. For example, initiatives such as improving water and sanitation in South India, providing employment opportunities for rural Romani communities, and implementing mobile health clinics are highlighted. Furthermore, the TransMilenio Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System in Bogotá, Colombia, and organic waste recycling efforts in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, are showcased as successful examples of transformative projects.

These case studies underscore the multitude of approaches available for enhancing service delivery across various regions. The study reviews the literature on the impediments faced by local government leadership, encompassing both administrative and political aspects. This analysis sheds light on municipal leaders' challenges in providing efficient and effective services to their communities. Findings indicate that many municipal leaders are linked with the ruling party, influencing decisions and appointments based on political loyalty rather than merit. Additionally, the study reveals that politicisation of the public sector has muddled politics and administration, causing conflicts, inefficiency, and corruption. The blurred line between political and administrative functions has led to confusion in policy priorities, hindering implementation. Tensions between executive municipal functionaries and municipal administrators have impeded service delivery, resulting in protests and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the study analyses and elucidates the essential competencies necessary for effective transformational leadership in the context of the local government sector. The abilities, qualities, and methods that have the potential to exert a positive influence on the perspective and efficacy of local government bodies are highlighted. These include the ability of municipal leaders to implement emotional, ethical and visionary leadership. Furthermore, having critical, conflict and change management skills is essential to fostering innovation and creativity while promoting good communication, team building and boosting workplace morale in local government. Having a culture of continuous learning within the local government is regarded as a prerequisite for developing the much-needed critical, good financial management skills that help municipalities budget funds and use them accordingly to render public goods and services in communities under their jurisdiction. Finally, the report focuses on the impact of the LGSETA in enabling municipal leadership to effectively guide and enhance service performance by implementing a strategic framework. This body encompasses evaluating the training and resources accessible to local officials.

Findings from this study reveal that the LGSETA equips South African municipal executives to improve service delivery by evaluating municipal leaders' competencies to address service delivery needs. Capacity building and training address corruption and maladministration that hamper service performance. LGSETA also advises on leadership development skills audits. Collaboration and partnerships help local governments to get funding from stakeholders. Moreover, LGSETA promotes knowledge management, innovation, digital inclusion, and local government leadership to improve public service delivery. Finally, key strategies and actions are proposed to enhance the role of municipal leadership in accelerating transformation and service delivery in the local government sector in South Africa. The report firstly recommends

that South Africa thoroughly examine its legislative framework to enhance the autonomy granted to municipalities. Secondly, South African local government policymakers, municipal officials and leaders prioritise the depoliticising of local government structures and their decision-making processes. Thirdly, the report suggests that political parties need to augment and enhance institutional integrity and honesty within municipalities. They should be reestablishing public confidence in local government by the local communities, thereby ensuring that municipalities are progressively meeting their socio-economic needs over a period. Finally, to mitigate some of the leadership challenges emanating from local government, the LGSETA must promote a learning culture of continuous learning that is crucial for developing skills needed in local government and for improving public service delivery.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za).

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

https://lgseta.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/THE-ROLE-OF-MUNICIPAL-LEADERSHIP-IN-ACCELERATING-TRANSFORMATION-AND-SERVICE-DELIVERY-IN-THE-LOCAL-GOVERNMENT1_compressed.pdf

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85. The Implementation of the Municipal Staff Regulations in South Africa: Challenges, Successes and Future Directions (*Matodzi Ralushai*)

The 30-year South African government review reveals that economic, political, spatial, and institutional disparities hinder municipalities' ability to deliver services. An estimated 29% of municipalities are on the verge of operational collapse, pointing to systemic dysfunction rooted in governance failures and limited capacity. Research conducted by the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State (UFS) in partnership with the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) over the past three years confirms the poor state of knowledge management, the lack of evidence-based Human Resource Development (HRD) practices and the persistent barriers facing women in local government.

The Municipal Staff Regulations (MSR) were introduced in 2021 as a policy intervention to professionalise local government and standardise human resource practices. The MSR provide clear guidelines for organisational design, recruitment and selection, performance and development management and skills development. The MSR also provide a competency framework for a more objective and accurate assessment of individuals enabling the municipality to select and recruit the right people, in the right job and at the right level of work and competence. In addition, it sets the institutional framework for talent management and succession planning in local government.

UFS was tasked to undertake an assessment of the role of workplace training systems to support the implementation of the MSR in South African municipalities. The objective of the research was seven-fold.

1. To assess the readiness of municipal staff and institutions to implement the MSR;
2. To explore the municipal capabilities to support implementation of the MSR;
3. To explore the challenges facing managers in implementing MSR;
4. To investigate what constitute good management and leadership practices in municipalities to support the MSR;
5. To identify gaps and challenges in the training systems that hinder the effective implementation of the Regulations;

6. To provide a comprehensive analysis and actionable recommendations for improving workplace training systems; and,
7. To facilitate the implementation of the MSR and to provide concise recommendations to the LGSETA for the enhancement of the workplace training systems to support the implementation of the MSR, taking into account the regional and international experiences.

The research methodology was twofold: a literature review was conducted that relied on primary and secondary data; the literature review was complemented by semi-structured interviews. A total of 32 municipalities participated in the study that included local, district, and metropolitan municipalities, and one municipal entity across the nine provinces. In the process, 240 interviews were conducted with senior, middle and junior managers, directors, municipal managers, trade union leadership, political office bearers and consultants. The study also involved focus group discussions with officials of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) and consultants.

Drawing on the 7-C implementation framework of De Coning, Cloete and Burger, "Policy implementation" in F. Cloete, C. De Coning, H. Wissink & B. Rabie, (eds.) *Improving public policy for good governance* (2018), the study evaluated the regulatory framework and its practical implications for municipalities.

The research findings emphasise the importance of administrative capacity for successful policy execution. Many municipalities struggle with inadequate resources and bureaucratic inefficiencies that slow down progress. Additionally, the findings underscore the necessity of collaboration among various stakeholders, including municipal managers, human resource professionals, and trade unions. Effective communication regarding the MSR's goals and roles is vital, as many stakeholders expressed confusion over the policy and whether MSR is a "must or a may," indicating a need for clearer guidelines and consistent messaging.

Despite these challenges, several municipalities have demonstrated notable successes in aligning their governance practices with the MSR. This was observed in two municipalities in the Western Cape and another municipality in KwaZulu-Natal that have effectively integrated their recruitment and human resource processes with the MSR, illustrating their potential to enhance governance. Additionally, the adoption of performance management systems and competency-based hiring practices contributed to increased accountability and transparency

within certain municipalities, reinforcing the effectiveness of structured regulatory frameworks in local government operations.

To enhance the implementation of the MSR, the report recommends the development of structured HRD programmes that include coaching, mentoring and training, tailored to equip specifically line managers in their new role as defined by the MSR. The report also recommends the establishment of a help desk in collaboration with professional bodies such as the Institute of Municipal People Management of South Africa (IMPISA), the Institute for People Management (IPM) and the Institute of Local Government Managers (ILGM). It further recommends that the implementation of the MSR take on an evidence-based approach as per the methodology employed by the office of the Auditor General.

To facilitate consistent and objective assessment, the development of standardised metrics for measuring MSR implementation success is recommended to ensure comparability across municipalities. In addition, the consideration of tailored implementation models is crucial, as municipalities differ in context and capacity. Exploring alternative approaches that align with these variations can enhance the effectiveness and adaptability of MSR initiatives.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The full article can be accessed on the following link:

<https://dullahomarinstitute.org.za/multilevel-govt/local-government-bulletin/archives/volume-20-issue-2-june-2025/the-implementation-of-the-municipal-staff-regulations-in-south-africa-challenges-successes-and-future-directions>

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86. Improved Integrated Planning and Continuous Improvement in the Local Government Sector (*Matodzi Ralushai*)

The purpose of this article is to report on the findings of a survey conducted among senior municipal officials (36), municipal political leaders (36), and local government experts (8) regarding the levels of organisational preparedness, institutional readiness and overall resilience of South African municipalities. Resilience challenges, skills required, and interventions proposed were extracted based on interviews conducted. The study was guided by a comprehensive theoretical framework comprising contingency theory, resilience theory, complex adaptive systems theory, institutional theory, organisational learning theory, and change management theories.

Following a qualitative research design, the study included a comprehensive literature review and primary data collection from three key target groups: senior municipal officials, political leaders of municipalities, and experts and academia in local government. The research focused on understanding the challenges municipalities face in resilience planning, identifying international best practices, assessing municipal preparedness, and determining the skills and interventions needed to improve governance effectiveness. An interview schedule was compiled and piloted with a small sample of each target group. Fieldworkers contacted participants telephonically to arrange the online interview. The project was subjected to the stringent and rigorous ethical clearance procedures at the University of Pretoria (UP).

The study found that municipalities face significant challenges in achieving resilience and readiness due to governance inefficiencies, financial constraints, fragmented planning processes, and a lack of skilled leadership. A key theme emerging from the study is organisational resilience and readiness, which requires municipalities to anticipate and withstand various stressors, including economic instability, climate change, and infrastructure failure. Theoretical frameworks such as contingency theory, organisational learning, and complex adaptive systems provide a basis for understanding how municipalities can develop adaptive strategies. The study highlights the importance of early detection systems, data-driven decision making, and strategic collaboration in strengthening municipal preparedness. An audit of local, district, and metropolitan municipalities revealed significant disparities in readiness levels, with many municipalities rated as only moderately prepared. The most critical barriers include governance and political interference, financial and resource constraints, and

institutional capacity gaps. While metropolitan municipalities tend to be better equipped, smaller and rural municipalities face considerable challenges due to staffing shortages and financial instability. Lack of or poorly coordinated community engagement and involvement of private stakeholders further hamper effective planning, and such planning is often met with resistance when implemented.

The challenges facing South African municipalities are multi-faceted, requiring an integrated approach that considers financial sustainability, governance stability, service delivery, and economic development. Solutions must be tailored to local conditions while fostering collaboration between municipalities, provincial and national government, and the private sector. Addressing these issues requires a long-term commitment to institutional strengthening, professionalisation of local government, and innovative fiscal and service delivery models. To enhance municipal resilience and improve the effectiveness of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), several key recommendations have been identified:

- **Expanding Integrated Planning:** Extending the IDP lifespan beyond five years to include more comprehensive sustainable planning. Linking IDP planning to capital expenditure plans with clear timeframes for execution would ensure that municipalities are not only focusing on disaster management but are also considering broader, long-term resilience in their planning processes.
- **Collaboration and Integrated Planning:** These are essential, requiring better coordination among municipal departments, politicians, and management to ensure accountability and collective decision making. Appointing departmental champions can help drive implementation across various sectors. Involving private sector partners, technical experts, and academia will strengthen IDP implementation and decision-making.
- **Strengthening the District Development Model (DDM):** Adopting a “one plan, one budget” approach to improve integrated planning and avoid working in silos. Joint planning between local and district municipalities with long-term strategic focus as well as regular engagement between district and local municipalities will ensure individual municipal IDPs align with intergovernmental priorities.
- **Capacity Building and Skills Development:** Prioritise training and empowering municipal staff to understand their roles in IDP development and implementation. This can be combined with mentorship programmes, refresher courses, and bursary schemes for municipal staff. Municipalities can leverage funding from the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA), South African Local Government

Association (SALGA), Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), and others. In addition, various participants recommended participating in provincial treasury workshops to upskill municipal employees.

- Performance Management and Continuous Improvement: This must be embedded in municipal operations by linking performance agreements to capacity-building initiatives, conducting skills gap assessments, and implementing regular performance reviews. Tools such as resolution matrices, consequence management, and oversight from COGTA and SALGA can enhance governance efficiency.
- Enhancing community engagement and public participation: Crucial for building trust and accountability. Strengthening ward-based planning, community forums, and feedback mechanisms will lead to more meaningful public involvement.
- Creating a Culture of Positive Change and Ethical Leadership: Transparent communication, institutional memory preservation, and consequence management. Leadership should encourage peer learning, innovation, and performance-based recognition. Experts recommended a team-based approach and fostering of a suitable organisational culture as critical for overcoming the challenges of implementing policies. A collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach, alongside the right culture within the municipality, may help drive better outcomes.
- Research and Data-Driven Decision Making: Conducting studies on community needs to inform targeted interventions.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za). The full article can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.flipsnack.com/BE95BDAA9F7/civil-engineering-september-2025/full-view.html?p=42>

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87. Waste and Recycling Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises: Coping with Crisis Scenarios (*Matodzi Ralusha*)

In 2011, the South African government developed a green accord to address socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, urbanisation, and continuous environmental degradation as a result of poor waste management practices (Death, 2014). Commitment 5 of the Green Economy Accord focused on implementing green techniques in waste management through waste recycling, reuse, and recovery. With this in mind, Mutereko et al (2023b) examined progress in best practices for waste recycling, reuse, and recovery at the local municipality level. They found that waste management is poor due to a lack of efforts across the waste value chain. One of the issues raised was the lack of education on managing waste at the household level. The report argued that the lack of adequate information to support policy implementation and decision making was also attributed to the outdated South African Waste Information Centre (SAWIC) database. Not only is upgrading the site expensive, but there are no precise approaches to collecting reliable data. In addition, the formalisation of waste pickers is a challenge, as is the case globally, and local governments are not capable of leading waste initiatives due to a lack of adequate skills and financial constraints. Moreover, a study by Muswema et al (2018d) found that Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are struggling to operate viably in the waste recycling sector. Thus, a deeper scrutiny of how these SMMEs can be assisted is recommended.

Using a mixed method approach that integrated a systematic literature review, stakeholder interviews, and online surveys, a study was conducted by the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) to explore the role of waste management and recycling in promoting local economic development during turbulent times.

The research highlights that SMMEs in the waste recycling sector are burdened by problems across the value chain. These challenges affect their ability to operate optimally. This burden is worsened by natural disasters, including pandemics, extreme weather conditions, and geopolitical issues such as war and conflicts, which all negatively impact the ailing industry. However, the findings revealed that this challenge requires a holistic approach across the waste value chain, involving both local and national governments while considering local dynamics.

The study highlights the role of local municipalities in supporting SMMEs in the waste and recycling sector to promote local economic development during turbulent times. The analysed results of the study revealed that within the waste and recycling sector, SMMEs hold considerable promise for generating both economic growth and environmental benefits. Additionally, these businesses can simultaneously revitalise local economies and advance sustainability efforts. However, they often face challenges stemming from limited resources, skills, and capabilities. Concerted effort and support aimed at overcoming these limitations is therefore essential. A collaborative approach across government, businesses, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), financial institutions, and communities is equally crucial. By forming strong partnerships and creating a supportive ecosystem, stakeholders can empower SMMEs to succeed and drive the transition to a circular economy.

This article is part of a series reporting on research commissioned by LGSETA (Contact: matodzir@lgseta.org.za).

The full article can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.flipsnack.com/BE95BDAA9F7/civil-engineering-august-2025/full-view.html?p=32>

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CURRENT AND PLANNED RESEARCH



I. JUST ENERGY TRANSITION AND GREEN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

1. Getting Skills Right in the Food and Beverage Manufacturing Sector for Industrialisation, Development, and a Just Transition (*Stephanie Allais, Tolika Sibiya, Meryl Plasket, Nokuthula I. Sibia and Nkgaugelo Kgasago*)

The overarching research theme of the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority's (FoodBev SETA) Research Agenda 2024/25 to 2025/26 is *Getting skills right in the food and beverage manufacturing sector for industrialisation, development, and a just transition*. The research aims to explore sectoral, workplace, and occupational level skill formation issues, with a view to developing insights that could inform more nuanced and focused policy and programme interventions.

The research team, comprising researchers from both the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL) and the FoodBev SETA, has completed over 225 interviews across 54 workplaces in a range of food and beverage micro, small, medium and large companies in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape and over 20 interviews with industry associations.

The research will result in five reports around different themes, namely:

1. Training patterns in workplaces in the food and beverages manufacturing sector: Implications for planning and supporting training.
2. Workplace-learning around Food Loss and Waste (FLW) in the food and beverages manufacturing sector: Implications for training and support.
3. Priorities and possibilities for supporting training for production workers and artisans with a focus on a just transition in the food and beverages manufacturing sector.
4. Insight into workplace skills planning dynamics to strengthen sector skills planning (including recommendations for changes to national systems).
5. Getting skills right in the food and beverage manufacturing sector for Industrialisation, development, and a just transition.

All the five research reports will be concluded by March 2026, and the final report will be available on www.foodbev.co.za.

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2. Equipping South Africa's Workforce for a Just Transition Through Up-Skilling and Re-Skilling (*Presha Ramsarup, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Victoria Hepplethwaite, Wendy Poulton and Sam van Heerden*)

The research undertaken by the Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL), University of Witwatersrand (Wits) continues to help advance insights in skills formation systems that ultimately, shape policies, practices, and learning pathways that leave no one behind.

REAL in partnership with Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), undertook a study, aimed at supporting the Just Energy Transition (JET) Implementation Plan by identifying skills needs and mapping reskilling and upskilling options for at-risk workers in Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. The study explored ways to align these interventions with emerging skill demands, especially at intermediate levels, to improve employability and job security. The study showed that JET sectors vary widely in development: Mpumalanga's coal-reliant economy facing job losses but offers potential in renewables and electric mobility, while the Eastern Cape's automotive sector is vulnerable to global new energy vehicle (NEV) shifts, requiring diversification. Both provinces show promise in renewables, NEVs, green hydrogen, and sustainable agriculture, but lack detailed skills impact data and worker participation in planning—making collaboration, inclusive planning, and evidence-based action critical as South Africa advances its JET agenda.

The study was supported the International Labour Organization (ILO) with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) funding.

The research is summarised in the presentation below:

https://pccommissionflo.imgix.net/uploads/images/Skills-Indaba-Presentation_Victoria-Hepplethwaite6890.pdf

The report will be available soon, as follows:

REAL website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/real/> and other social platforms:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/the-centre-for-researching-education-and-labour-real-wits-university-79174322b/>

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3. Reskilling Miners in Mpumalanga for the Hemp Value Chain (*Presha Ramsarup, Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Lwanda Maqwelane*)

The Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL) in collaboration with Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), undertook a pioneering study for the Presidential Climate Commission that offers one of the first concrete roadmaps for reskilling coal mine workers in Mpumalanga, addressing both job losses in declining industries and environmental degradation. Instead of focusing on abstract job-loss projections, the research developed evidence-based reskilling pathways: developing a new industrial hemp value chain using phytoremediation (using plants to clean up contaminated soil and water), directly linking new economic opportunities with environmental restoration. The study's methodological innovation lies in a framework matching coal-sector "source skills" with hemp-industry "target skills," showing significant overlaps, particularly for plant and machine operators whose abilities suit post-farm processing for biofuels, hempcrete, and industrial fibres. The study also identified systemic barriers, including policy incoherence, fragmented markets, and an ill-equipped public skills system. It concluded that reskilling must extend beyond short courses, calling for demonstration projects and cross-sector collaboration to build a new industrial ecosystem and realise a Just Transition for Mpumalanga's workers and communities.

The report will be available soon, as follows:

REAL website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/real/> and other social platforms:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/the-centre-for-researching-education-and-labour-real-wits-university-79174322b/>

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4. Skills for Climate Resilient Development and Adaptation: Surfacing Environmental Practice and Care Work and Learning Pathways to Advance Inclusion in the Just Transition (*Presha Ramsarup and Heila Lotz-Sisitka*)

This research, in partnership with Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), explores new entry-level occupations emerging in response to climate change. These new forms of work contribute to creating new pathways for youth while rehabilitating ecosystems. Aimed at informing the skills system and making these roles more visible and viable, the research focuses on four workstreams: Climate and Care Work, Water Security, and Food Systems Rehabilitation. The insights will be key for building a proactive skills development system that validates emerging occupations, identifies required skills, and supports youth pathways—contributing to South Africa's Just Transition and climate change response.

The report will be available soon, as follows:

REAL website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/real/> and other social platforms:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/the-centre-for-researching-education-and-labour-real-wits-university-79174322b/>

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5. A Skills Ecosystems Approach to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises to Benefit from the Just Energy Transition (*Glynnis Vergotine, Presha Ramsarup and Kate Mlauzi*)

Skills are key to advancing a Just Energy Transition (JET) and enabling inclusive, sustainable economic transformation, requiring a focus beyond individuals to include organisations and systems that drive systemic change. Using a skills ecosystem approach, the study examined how place-based strategies can support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Mpumalanga's Nkangala District Municipality (NDM) across agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and tourism. The study analysed the ecosystem through three lenses: horizontally (local networks/relationships), MSMEs have weak links to networks, education, and tailored training; vertically (policy alignment), policy support exists but is undermined by misalignment, implementation gaps, and mismatches with MSME needs; and in mediation/coordination (role of intermediaries/institutions), the absence of strong intermediaries limits effective connections between policy and local development. The research calls for strengthening the skills ecosystem to better support MSMEs and provides recommendations for action in NDM.

Quick Links

https://www.afd.fr/sites/default/files/2025-09/pr372_va_web_v1.pdf

REAL website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/real/> and our other social platforms:

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REAL on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjfWpy9mWkX-tRTsWWTFkGA/videos>

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RESEARCH PRACTICE

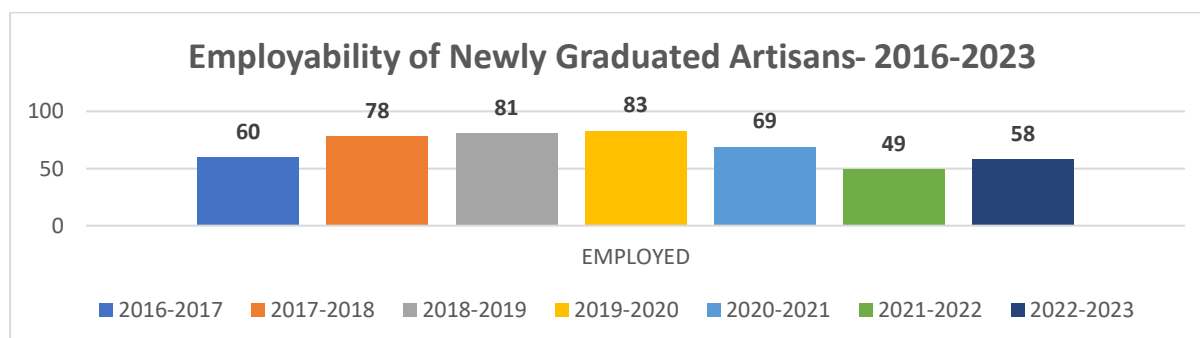


1. The Employability of Artisans: Key Lessons from a Decade of Tracing Apprentice Graduates (*Matheko Elliot Mpe*)

Tracer studies have emerged as a crucial tool for assessing the long-term effects of apprenticeship programmes, offering valuable insights into the career trajectories, employment outcomes, and skill development of former apprentices. Over the past decade, organisations implementing these studies have accumulated valuable lessons that can inform more effective programme design and evaluation. This essay examines key lessons learned from conducting tracer studies for apprentices, with a focus on methodological approaches, data management, survey design, and strategies for improving apprentice outcomes.

Annual tracer studies were conducted using the existing database of newly graduated artisans to track employment outcomes and career trajectories. Graduates from each cohort were contacted 6-12 months post-completion through phone surveys and structured questionnaires. The database provided contact information, training specialisation, and trade test dates for systematic follow-up. Data collected included current employment status, job relevance to training, income levels, and further skills development undertaken. Response rates were documented, and non-respondents were followed up through alternative contact methods (e.g. telephone) where available. Findings were aggregated annually to inform programme improvements and measure long-term employability outcomes.

The employability of newly graduated artisans has been traced through National Apprenticeship and Artisan Development Support Center (NAADSC) since 2016 and indicates that 68% overall employability has been achieved over the years. The highest period that resulted in 83% of employability was 2019-2020 while the lowest point was 2021-2022 remains the lowest point with 49%.



The key lessons in conducting the studies include the building and maintaining a reliable database for apprentices, designing short and engaging questionnaires, collecting all the essential information when enrolling apprentices and updating the information regularly.

The tracing of the data over the past decade has shown a strong indication that the apprenticeship should approach a more targeted approach in improving the programme outcomes.

The following key lessons are important for programme implementation:

- Align Training with Market Demands.
- Balance Technical and Soft Skills.
- Establish Strong Employer Partnerships.
- Provide Business and Entrepreneurship Training.
- Create Certification and Quality Assurance Systems.
- Post-graduation support.

Artisan employability is shaped by multiple interconnected factors: the country's overall employment landscape, sectoral growth patterns, and the specific skills apprentices acquire. Enhancing employability requires a comprehensive system that continuously develops graduates' capabilities beyond technical training alone.

Rather than treating employment outcomes as the sole measure of success, implementers should recognise employability as one critical element within a broader ecosystem of factors requiring sustained attention and improvement. This holistic approach acknowledges that even well-trained artisans need supportive labour market conditions, entrepreneurial opportunities, and ongoing professional development to translate their skills into sustainable livelihoods.

Author:

- Mr Matheko Elliot Mpe is the Deputy Director at National Artisan Development (NAD) Chief Directorate, INDLELA (Mpe.M@dhet.gov.za).

2. The Road to Inclusion: Fostering Equity in South Africa's Post-School Education and Training (*Sesi Mahlobogoane and Refiloe Mohlakoana*)

In a world striving for greater fairness, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), is taking proactive steps to ensure our Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions are a model of social inclusion and equity. As the Social Inclusion and Equity Directorate, officials embarked on a series of roadshows to various Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and some universities, not just to raise awareness, but to build a foundation for lasting change.

The roadshows were a multi-faceted initiative designed to achieve several critical goals. First, officials aimed to showcase the work of the Directorate and highlight the importance of social inclusion within the PSET landscape. This was about more than just presenting policies; it was about demonstrating the Department's commitment to creating environments where every student and staff member feels they belong. Secondly, the roadshows served to bring awareness to the pressing issues that still plague institutions from socioeconomic barriers to systemic discrimination. By opening up a dialogue, officials encouraged a collective acknowledgment of these challenges.

A key objective was to establish relations with key stakeholders. Participants included a diverse group of individuals: staff members, council members, acting principals, Student Representative Council (SRC) members, and DHET Regional Office members, including the Regional Managers. This broad representation was vital, as it ensured that the conversation around social inclusion was heard by those who can effect change at every level of an institution.

Perhaps the most impactful aspect of the roadshows was the direct engagement with TVET colleges to help them in drafting their own social inclusion policies. Officials provided guidance, resources, and templates, empowering these institutions to create bespoke policies that address their unique contexts and challenges. This hands-on approach moved beyond theory and into practical, institution specific action.

The roadshows were a powerful reminder that social inclusion is not a top-down mandate but a collaborative journey. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by the participants demonstrated a clear readiness to embrace this change. By working together with students, staff, and leadership we are not only drafting policies but building a more equitable and just PSET system for all of South Africa. A full report of the social inclusion interventions in the PSET system will be available in March 2026.

Authors:

- Ms Sesi Mahlobogoane is a Director at DHET (Mahlobogoane.S@dhet.gov.za).
- Dr Refiloe Mohlakoana is an Assistant Director at DHET (Mohlakoana.R@Dhet.gov.za).

3. Association of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development Continuing Professional Development and Learning Repository 2025 (*Ria Walsh*)

The Association of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development (APPETD) Continuing Professional Development and Learning Repository 2025 reflects the Association's unwavering commitment to advancing excellence, innovation, and inclusivity within the private Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector.

Throughout the year, APPETD hosted a series of impactful online and face-to-face workshops and masterclasses designed to strengthen institutional capacity, enhance professional expertise, and promote innovation across the private education and training landscape. Each session offered practical tools, policy insights, and leadership strategies aligned with the evolving priorities of the PSET system.

Key themes explored during 2025 included cybersecurity in education, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and personalised learning, organisational transformation, inclusive curriculum design, remote and hybrid work practices, and transitions from legacy to occupational qualifications. These focus areas supported private providers in aligning with policy, compliance, and quality assurance developments while fostering forward-thinking approaches to learning and institutional growth.

This initiative reaffirms APPETD's role as a central platform for knowledge sharing, professional development, and advocacy, providing members with ongoing access to expert insights and sector-leading practices. By curating these valuable learning experiences, the repository ensures that members remain informed, connected, and equipped to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities shaping education and training in South Africa.

Repository Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/q44by3d1vyfctrh8ul3k6/APPETD-Repository-2025.pdf?rlkey=lb2e619v1bbzutd0acwmvy4li&dl=0>

Author:

- Ms Ria Walshe is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at APPETD (ceo@appetd.org.za).

4. Community of Practice on Digital Education in Learning and Teaching (*Laura Czerniewicz*)

The Community of Practice on Digital Education in Learning and Teaching (DELT CoP) serves as a collaborative and supportive network of professionals, academics and other stakeholders within the higher education sector who share common goals and interests relating to innovation and the integration of technology into learning and teaching.

Among other activities, it is intended to expose members to policy, best practices and innovations in technology mediated teaching and learning. Over time, these engagements should lead to the establishment of a digital transformation peer learning community that will eventually be expanded to include all member institutions of Universities South Africa (USAf).

Objectives

- To build collegial relationships and networks across the sector.
- To increase knowledge through case-based learning, knowledge, information and resource sharing.
- To provide a space for reflective practice.
- To undertake joint scholarly projects.
- To influence policy.
- To encourage visiting scholars and exchanges.
- To collaborate on common learning and teaching challenges and innovations

The Digital Education CoP maintains a bibliography of open resources, selected to be of use to all working in digital education in South Africa: https://bit.ly/Digital_Education_Open_Bibliography. All the resources are freely available via the links provided.

The bibliography comprises three parts. The first part consists of resources created by South African institutions. On the whole, these have been produced for individual institutions, but often have wider use across the sector. Many of these allow for adaptation.

The second part consists of general resources from outside South Africa which the CoP has assessed to be useful to the South African higher education sector.

The third part lists collections of digital education resources collated all over the world. There are a massive number of resources available through these collections; they contain many riches and will take time to explore.

This article can be accessed on the following link:

<https://usaf.ac.za/community-of-practice-on-digital-education-in-learning-and-teaching-delt-cop/>

The DELT COP Newsletter can be accessed on the following link:

<https://mailchi.mp/b2ff24ed6c68/currents-in-digital-education-oct-25?e=98a63fd469>

Author:

- Prof Laura Czerniewicz is a Professor in the Centre for Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town (UCT) (laura.czerniewicz@uct.ac.za).

5. Use of Virtual Technology to Support the Moderation of Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks and Practical Assessment Tasks (*Fulufhelo Nephawe*)

The article published in Association for Educational Assessment in Africa (AEAA) Newsletter focuses on the quality assurance of the October 2024 virtual moderation of the Integrated Assessment Tasks (ISAT)/Practical Assessment Tasks (PAT) conducted by Umalusi in 10 National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) programmes at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

Over the years, the evaluation of ISAT/PAT, as opposed to the theoretical tasks, presents validity challenges emanating from issues such as a lack of training resources (equipment, consumables, and tools) and subjective scoring by the lecturers at TVET colleges. Most practical tasks require the assessor's judgement and moderation in real-time when the students are conducting the tasks.

As part of its quality assurance mandate, Umalusi deploys its external moderators to assessment sites to verify and monitor the ISAT/PAT conduct while the students are demonstrating their work. The conduct of ISAT/PAT is therefore externally moderated to confirm their alignment with assessment principles, compliance with assessment guidelines, as well as to confirm that learning has taken place.

To address the identified gaps, such as cost and efficiency, in 2024, Umalusi pursued virtual moderation to be on par with the rapid technological advancement. The advancement into electronic assessment, electronic marking, and electronic invigilation provided an opportunity for Umalusi to shift towards electronic quality assurance of the ISAT/PAT.

The virtual ISAT/PAT moderation allowed for increased ISAT/PAT moderation samples from 30 to 120 subjects. Through the virtual moderation, colleges produced improved quality practical assessments and curbed the malpractices of allocating inauthentic marks to students without effectively implementing the tasks. The successful implementation of virtual moderation was achieved without incurring moderation costs, such as travel, accommodation, and meal costs for the external moderators.

The full article can be accessed on the following link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gR9BeI01oI4BqgQFuV5PBatidiH9SN8Y/view?usp=drive_link

Author:

- Mr Fulufhelo Nephawe is an Assistant Manager for Quality Assurance of Assessment Post-School Qualifications TVET at Umalusi (Fulufhelo.Nephawe@umalusi.org.za).

RESEARCH EVENTS



1. Presentation of Six Case Studies about Recognition of Prior Learning to the First East African Conference held in Kampala, Uganda on 12 and 13 December 2024 (Shirley Lloyd)

The presentation of six case studies which each demonstrate the diverse applications and contexts within which Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was implemented, was part of the conference presentations at the first East African Conference held in Kampala, Uganda. The presentation of the case studies was requested, to develop common knowledge about the RPL practice in several contexts, and to grow the practice of RPL at sites of intersection professional practice. The presentation draws on the work done by Dr Shirley Lloyd mainly, and personal experiences and practices in designing RPL solutions and implementing RPL projects in diverse contexts over numbers of years. It is based on a RPL manual which is a dynamic document and will develop and grow as the common knowledge about RPL design and practice grows. This presentation to the East African Community is meant to grow a cohort of RPL practitioners who will be credible and careful curators of RPL design and implementation for the common good of people, and agency driven by a passion for transformation and redress. The presentation is underpinned by the legislative and policy environment which is found in, *inter alia*, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, No. 67 of 2008, the RPL Coordination Policy of the Minister: Higher Education, Science and Innovation (2016), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) RPL Policy document (2021), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) RPL Policy document, and the Quality Council for trades and Occupations (QCTO) RPL policy. None of the examples used in the presentation are exhaustive; others exist, or may emerge as RPL practice is further developed.

The link to the presentation is located on the following link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/pvuzohzakotpo3yt0a01i/First-East-African-Conference-on-RPL_Case-Studies-from-South-Africa.pdf?rlkey=xv330xx5l20h5djsp7yuw0fu2&st=q6n7wezb&dl=0

Author:

- Dr Shirley Lloyd is an Educator, a Public Servant, and a Social Entrepreneur (shirleylloyd41@gmail.com).

2. Colloquium on Expanding Access to Higher Education when the Capacity of Public Universities to Enrol Students is Limited (*Amani Saidi*)

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) hosted a Research Colloquium on 18 September 2025, under the theme: Expanding Access to Higher Education when the Capacity of Public Universities to Enrol Students is Limited.

Since 1994, South Africa has pursued transformation through democracy, equality, and social justice, with education central to dismantling apartheid's legacy and advancing inclusion. Policies such as free primary schooling, no-fee schools, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and curriculum reforms expanded access and improved outcomes, reflected in rising National Senior Certificate (NSC) achievements. Full-Time candidates enrolled to write the NSC examinations, and those who have met the requirements for the NSC have significantly increased over the recent years. While these gains signal progress, public universities face limited capacity to absorb growing demand, threatening equity and mobility. This motivates the research colloquium to explore sustainable strategies for expanding higher education access.

The aim of the colloquium was to provide a platform for leading academics, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, students and government officials, among others, to critically engage with novel ideas emerging from research, policy innovations, and institutional strategies on how to address challenges posed by the surge in numbers of qualifying matriculants seeking admission into the higher education system, when the capacity of public universities to enrol students is limited.

The objectives of the colloquium were:

- To deepen the national discourse on modalities for expanding access to higher education when the capacity of public universities to enrol students is limited.
- To encourage engagement with multidimensional and multidisciplinary perspectives on reimagining expanding access to higher education when the carrying capacity of public universities is relatively inelastic.

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the CHE (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

3. Summary of the Proceedings of a Research Colloquium (*Amani Saidi*)

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) held a colloquium on 27 June 2025 at Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre, under the theme: Staff Profiles in South African Public Universities: Three Decades into Democracy.

The purpose of the colloquium was to reflect on the transformation of staff profiles in South African public universities since 1994, focusing on race, gender, qualifications, and employment equity. Key points raised were on transformation progress from 1994 to 2022, which showed increase in Black and Female academic staff. There was also noticeable growth in Black representation across academic ranks, especially junior lecturers and professors. Research-intensive universities lag behind historically black universities (HBUs) and Universities of Technology (UoTs) in transformation. The engagement also highlighted challenges of high reliance on temporary academic staff and a mismatch between student enrolment growth and staff growth.

Also discussed were extracts from the VitalStats (VS) publications to assess whether the public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are staffing for success. This also projected that temporary academic staff exceeds permanent staff. When it comes to Student-Staff Ratios, UoTs exhibited the most strain, academic staff grew by just above 2%, whereas enrolments grew by just above 13%. Comprehensive Universities and Traditional Universities showed more consistent staffing patterns. Staffing disparities across clusters affect student success. Another point of discussion showed that national demographic shifts demonstrate that White staff declined from 1994 to 2023 while Black staff increased. With these shifts, institutional comparisons show that Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) showed slower staff growth but faster management growth while Historically Advantaged Institutions (HAIs) experienced a higher average annual growth rate. Emerging trends show gradual increase in Black academics with doctorates and a rise of Black women in leadership roles.

The discussion on funding trends revealed that National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding currently surpasses block grants. The discussion also highlighted that institutions face pressure due to over-enrolment and student debt. Academic staff Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) was higher than student FTE growth from 2015 to 2018. Student-to-staff ratios increased from 26:1 in 2015 to 30:1 in 2023 with variations among various academic

disciplines. A slight increase in research output per academic staff member by institutional type was displayed as well as a notable average annual growth rate of staff FTEs according to personnel categories from 2015 to 2023.

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the CHE (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

4. Special Issue of the South African Journal of Higher Education on the State of Quality of Higher Education in South Africa Three Decades into Democracy (*Amani Saidi*)

Earlier this year, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) organised a Higher Education Conference on the theme 'State of Quality of Higher Education in South Africa Three Decades into Democracy'. The conference took place from 26 to 28 February 2025 at Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre, Johannesburg. The conference provided a platform at which role players and stakeholders in higher education engaged in reflecting on how much has been achieved during the last three decades in terms of foregrounding quality in the provision of higher education, and how much still remains to be achieved in this regard going forward.

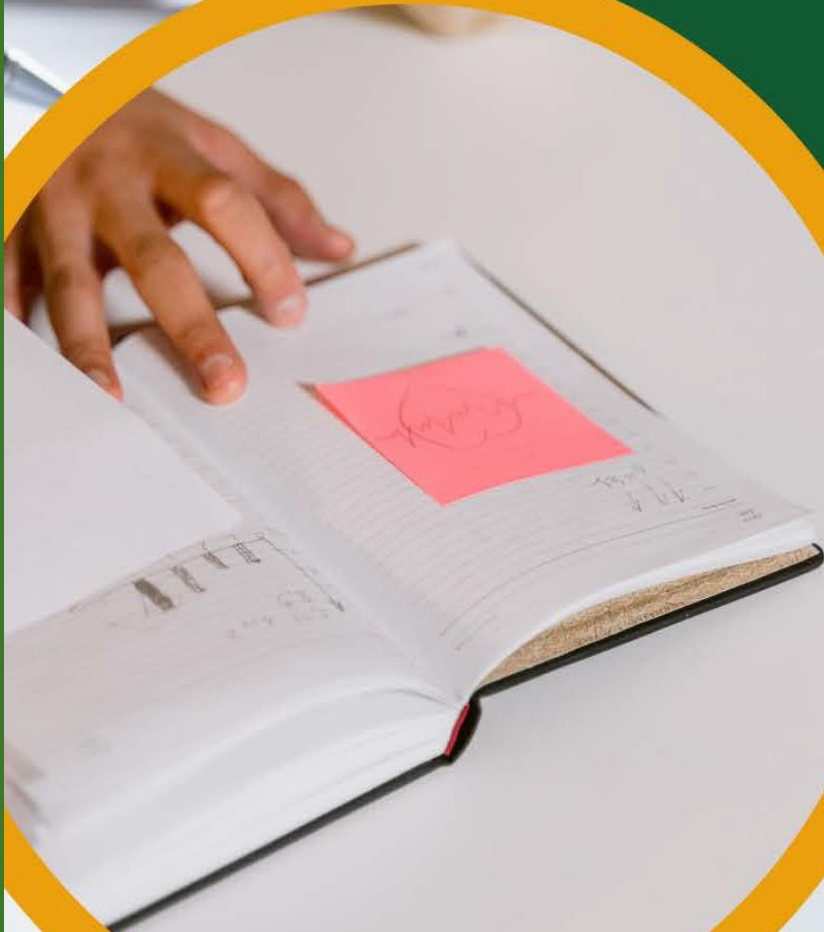
The CHE has subsequently entered into an agreement with the South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE) to publish a special issue of the journal during the third quarter of 2026 (Volume 40, Issue Number 4). This special issue intends to carry up to 16 scholarly papers prepared from the presentations at the conference in February 2025. The CHE invites those who presented at the Higher Education Conference in February 2025 to develop their presentations into manuscripts, and to submit the manuscripts to be considered for publication in the special issue of the SAJHE referred to above.

The SAJHE is a reputable journal recognised by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and therefore authors affiliated to public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) earn research output subsidy funds for publishing in the journal. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the journal's guidelines for authors. These can be accessed from: www.journals.ac.za/index.php/sajhe/information/authors.

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the CHE (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

REVIEWS



1. Insights into South Africa's National Youth Employment Programme: The National Pathway Management Network (*Andrew Paterson and Jaya Sojen*)

This contribution brings together insights from a literature and document review conducted for an Evaluation of South Africa's National Pathway Management Network (NPMN), a programme within the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative. It draws on and synthesises a range of evidence, to show how the NPMN as an online network of networks plays a central role: in supporting youth to prepare and search for jobs; and mediates youth and employer interactions to facilitate online matching of demand and supply. The NPMN encompasses youth, public and private organisations, employers, social networks and online resources. Its core function is to seamlessly connect partner networks, mobilise employers from the private and public sector on the demand side, and open up pathways to employment on the supply side.

The problem that the NPMN addresses in South Africa is high unemployment of young people across a wide age-range, over an extended time period. This is reflected in the population of marginalised youth known as 'NEETs' (not in employment, education or training). There is also a consistent gender imbalance among NEETs where males have better access than females to labour markets and employment chances.

The review identifies a vast network of partners and stakeholders of the NPMN spread throughout South Africa. In pursuing its objectives of broadening the access to online employment opportunities and employment pathways for unemployed youth, the network draws on diverse actors at different levels of the system.

The size and diversity of the population of NEETs directly informs the multifaceted design and architecture of the NPMN. Challenges for generating equitable education, training and career support call for solutions delivered both online and face-to-face at scale.

The review highlights the complexity of the implementation context of the NPMN and factors such as data interoperability that may challenge its intended outcomes, form, focus and sustainability. The words of a participant reflect how: 'we've learned that there's no straight line from learning to lifelong earning anymore, young people today are far more likely to zigzag in and out of a series of short-term jobs and hustles'

The full Literature and Document Review can be accessed on the following link:

https://www.jet.org.za/resources/npmn-evaluation-document-and-lit-review_final-1.pdf/@@display-file/file

Authors:

- Dr Andrew Paterson is a Research Associate at JET Education Services (andrew@jet.org.za).
- Mr Jaya Sojen is a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officer at JET (jaya@jet.org.za).

2. Higher Education Monitor No. 17 - Changing Trends in the Size and Shape of Postgraduate Programmes (Council on Higher Education) (*Amani Saidi*)

The Council on Higher Education's (CHE's) Higher Education Monitor No. 17 examines the shifts in postgraduate education over a 15-year period. It reveals that while overall postgraduate enrolment grew by 53%, it remained stagnant at 14% as a proportion of total university enrolments. The study highlights a significant surge in doctoral enrolments, which increased by a massive 150%, while master's and postgraduate diploma/honours enrolments saw more modest growth at 36% and 50%, respectively. A key driver of this growth, particularly at the doctoral level, has been the influx of international students, especially from the Rest of Africa (RoA), whose numbers increased by 123%. This influx has been crucial for sustaining doctoral programmes and has contributed to a "brain gain" for South Africa, as many of these graduates remain in the country post-graduation.

The demographic landscape of postgraduate studies has transformed significantly, with black students now comprising 80% of enrolments, up from 65% in 2005. Similarly, female students now represent the majority, with their share of enrolments increasing from 52% to 57%. However, the report underscores that significant inequalities persist. Black students remain underrepresented in Research-Intensive Universities (RIUs) and certain fields of study. While graduation rates have improved, with a 103% increase in the annual number of graduates, inefficiencies in the system persist, evidenced by low throughput rates and long completion times. These challenges are particularly pronounced for black South African students, who face financial constraints, inadequate undergraduate preparation, and a lack of mentorship.

The report also highlights that the limited demand for doctoral studies among black South Africans is not merely a result of financial pressures but a combination of systemic issues. These include insufficient bursary funding, a disconnect between schooling outcomes and higher education demands, a lack of career guidance, and poor supervisory support. To address this, the study recommends a holistic approach, including restructuring undergraduate curricula to build research skills, implementing structured doctoral programmes with strong mentorship, and providing adequate, "living" scholarships to support students financially. The report argues that without addressing these multifaceted barriers, efforts to attract and retain black South Africans in postgraduate and academic careers will have limited success.

The full report can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.che.ac.za/publications/monitoring/higher-education-monitor-no-17-changing-trends-size-and-shape-postgraduate>

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the CHE (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

3. Briefly Speaking No. 34 - Honorary Degrees and Professorships and the Inappropriate Use of Academic Titles (Council on Higher Education) (Amani Saidi)

This *Briefly Speaking* number 34 examines the contested terrain of honorary degrees and professorships, and the wider misuse of academic titles. While universities are legally permitted to confer honorary awards in recognition of exceptional contributions, these are not academic qualifications and carry no entitlement to professional privileges. Nevertheless, growing instances of honorary titleholders insisting on being addressed as “Doctor” or “Professor” blur the distinctions between earned and honorary status, potentially undermining the credibility of higher education.

The *Briefly Speaking* piece situates honorary degrees in a long international history, tracing their evolution from the University of Oxford’s first recorded award in the 1470s to contemporary controversies across Europe, the United States of America (USA), and Africa. The piece also recalls how awards to political leaders and celebrities have been hotly contested. This article looks at the awards of honorary degrees and professorships in South Africa and reflects on some of the concerns raised about them in the literature.

To address these concerns, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has developed a guide which presents the criteria for awarding honorary degrees and professorships, and was compiled in response to concerns about inconsistent practices and demonstrable and potential misuse of honorary academic titles. The guide, for example, stipulates that only public universities may confer honorary degrees; that recipients should not be serving politicians or university affiliates; and that awards must not be linked to financial contributions. Also, the guide emphasises that honorary titles should be used only within the awarding institution or acknowledged under “Awards and Honours” on a curriculum vitae and not presented as formal qualifications.

This *Briefly Speaking* piece highlights the broader issues surrounding the status of academic titles. Even within the academy, titles can reinforce hierarchies at odds with many universities’ egalitarian values. Ultimately, the misuse of honorary titles damages public trust, diminishes the perceived value of higher education, and fuels anti-intellectualism. The piece concludes by making the argument that while universities are at liberty to confer honorary degrees and

professorships, it is important that their conferral be carefully managed to safeguard the integrity of academic titles and the authority of universities.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.che.ac.za/news-and-announcements/brieflyspeaking-no-34-honorary-degrees-and-professorships-and-inappropriate>.

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the CHE (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

4. Special Issue on Trust in Higher Education (*Amani Saidi*)

The September 2025 special issue of Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTaL), presents a collection of thought-provoking papers on the theme of Trust in Higher Education. Originating from the Higher Education Close-Up (HECU) 11 conference held at Rhodes University (RU) in Makhanda, South Africa, from July 3-5, 2024, the contributions address the complex and increasingly fragile nature of trust within the sector. The special issue examines trust as a cornerstone of higher education - essential for collaboration, cooperation, and the functioning of institutions - operating on multiple levels, from students and academics to researchers and the public. Collectively, the three think pieces, nine papers, and concluding poem offer a multifaceted and critical examination of this complex construct, arguing that it is not a simple given but must be actively built, earned, and maintained to overcome systemic challenges and foster a more ethical academic ecosystem.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://epubs.ac.za/index.php/cristal/issue/view/199>

Author:

- Dr Amani Saidi is the Director for Research and Monitoring at the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (Saidi.A@che.ac.za).

5. Book Summary: Caring for Students Who Need it Most in Open Distance E-Learning Environments - This Is (Not) Hidden Philosophy (*Doniwen Pietersen*)

This book by Professor Doniwen Pietersen redefines digital learning as a transformative space, challenging the impersonal, one-size-fits-all status quo. By merging critical pedagogy, care ethics, and social justice, it centres student agency and co-creation. Moving beyond traditional models marked by power imbalances, it offers actionable strategies and case studies from developing universities. The book serves as a manifesto for humanising online education, providing educators and policymakers with the tools to build inclusive, democratic learning ecosystems that foster intellectual growth and socio-emotional well-being, thereby making it a vital force for equity and empowerment.

The book can be accessed on the following link:

<https://wipfandstock.com/9798385251636/caring-for-students-who-need-it-most-in-open-distance-e-learning-environments/>

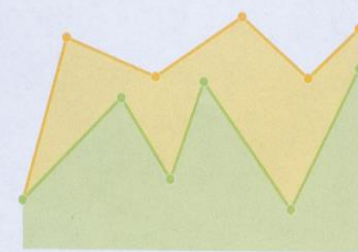
Author:

- Prof Doniwen Pietersen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Foundations at UNISA (epietecd@unisa.ac.za).

STATISTICS AND FACT SHEETS

Number of students enrolled in p...

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
0	49 712	48 122	71 753	22 239	31 441
0	0	0	0	0	554
0	0	0	0	0	1 0
37 582	63 394	47 156	58 400	23 128	
6 685	19 524	16 127	19 467	29 70	
2 615	1 816	4 181	5 012		



Easy Pie Charts



1. Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: 2023 (*Nthabiseng Tema*)

Since 2010, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has consistently published the annual Statistics on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) in South Africa report, and the most recent report for 2023 was published in June 2025. These reports are important tools for decision-making and strategic planning across various levels of the PSET system, and are key in tracking progress toward the targets outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP).

In addition to providing the most recent statistics on 2023 student enrolment and completion, the report encompasses a diverse range of information. The information in the report includes: statistics on staffing levels at PSET institutions; information about Workplace-Based Learning (WBL); and financial data notably that pertaining to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the National Skills Fund (NSF), the Skills Levy Fund and voted funds.

Data for the various sectors is gathered from multiple sources, namely: the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS); annual survey data for registered private colleges and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges; CET Management Information System (CETMIS); manual collection of data from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); annual reports submitted by registered private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); National Artisan Development (NAD) Database Management System, the DHET levy system; NSF annual reports and the National Examinations Database for TVET, CET and private colleges.

In summary, the report highlights that in 2023, more than 1.3 million students enrolled at public and private HEIs, with public HEIs accounting for the majority (1 071 715), while private HEIs enrolled 286 454 students. Graduates in public and private HEIs were 220 758 and 60 927 respectively. TVET colleges had 564 089 students enrolled in 2023, with 50 572 completing National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) exit levels (N3 and N6) and National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) Level 4. Private colleges on the other hand enrolled 80 785 students, and 11 915 completed N3, N6 and NC(V) Level 4 in 2023. In the CET colleges sector, 120 081 students were enrolled in 2023, and 10 535 achieved the

General Education and Training Certificate (GETC): Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Level 4 qualification.

In the 2023/24 financial year, approximately R22.4 billion was collected through the Skills Development Levy (SDL) fund. In accordance with the Skills Development Act, approximately R4.5 billion (20.0%) was allocated to the NSF while R17.9 billion (80.0%) was disbursed to Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

The amount allocated to SETAs was spent on discretionary grants (R11.1 billion), administrative costs (R2.4 billion), while approximately R4.5 billion was paid back to levy-paying firms in the form of mandatory grants. The amount allocated towards discretionary grants is aimed at encouraging stakeholders to contribute towards skills development through PIVOTAL programmes such as learnerships, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), bursaries, skills programmes, Adult Education and Training (AET) programmes and candidacy.

In 2023/24 financial year, SETAs registered 148 960 learners in learnerships, internships and skills programmes, and 84 105 learners obtained certificates in these programmes. Furthermore, 18 144 learners registered in various artisanal learning programmes, of which 15 074 were in scarce skills trades. In the same period, 16 277 learners completed their artisanal learning programmes, with a significant majority (13 878) completing in scarce skills trades. The NSF supported 208 skills development projects in 2023/24 financial year, benefitting 31 135 individuals.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

[dhet.gov.za/DHET Statistics Publication/Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa, 2023.pdf](https://www.dhet.gov.za/DHET_Statistics_Publication/Statistics_on_Post-School_Education_and_Training_in_South_Africa,_2023.pdf)

Statistics on PSET Reports for the previous years (2010-2022) can also be accessed on the following link: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/HRDPlanningNew.aspx>

Author:

- Ms Nthabiseng Tema is the Director of Information Systems Management at DHET and also serves as the DHET's Higher Education and Training Information System (HETIS) Officer (HETIS.officer@dhet.gov.za).

2. Empowering Youth: Trends in Post-School Participation among 18–24-year-Olds by Statistics South Africa *(Risenga Maluleke, Solly Molayi and Seble Worku)*

In 2024, only 33,5% of South Africans aged 18–24 are enrolled in educational institutions, with 19,7% in primary or secondary schools and 15,5% in post-secondary education, according to the General Household Survey (GHS) 2024 data. Financial constraints are the main reason for non-attendance, cited by nearly 31%, while 15% feel satisfied with their education level. This represents an improvement since 2017, when over 51% reported financial barriers. Challenges persist, particularly in transitioning from Further Education to completing Grade 12. Regional participation rates vary, with Gauteng and the Western Cape having the highest attendance, while Limpopo has shown the most significant growth. Overall youth participation increased from 2002 to 2024 by five percentage points.

The Post-School Education and Training (PSET) statistics report for 2023 reveals that a significant majority of graduates from public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), specifically 55,4%, and over a third (34,6%) from private institutions belong to the 18–24 age demographic. Among these young graduates, approximately one-third (33,7%) from public institutions attained Bachelor's degrees, while over half (53,3%) of their peers from private institutions secured undergraduate degrees. Furthermore, nearly 38% of graduates from public institutions received higher certificates, in contrast to around 25% of graduates from private institutions who earned undergraduate certificates and diplomas.

The GHS results show that individuals from middle- to high-income households have higher participation rates in post-school education, with 27,4% of youth aged 18–24 in higher education coming from the wealthiest quintile compared to just 14,1% from the lowest quintile. It emphasises the benefits of acquiring a tertiary qualification for lifetime earnings and quality of life, while also noting that a lack of adequate educational credentials negatively affects a nation's innovation and labour market. Despite increased funding in South Africa's higher education system, it still struggles to meet the growing demand for access and to address equity disparities.

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) released the report "Education Series Volume V: Higher Education and Skills in South Africa" to analyse the post-secondary education system. It incorporates diverse data sources, primarily from the Department of Higher Education and

Training (DHET), to enhance understanding and inform policy. Key findings include that females constitute a higher percentage of post-school graduates, a trend that has been increasing since 2000. Additionally, many undergraduate students either drop out or take significantly longer than expected to complete their studies.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-92-01-05/Report-92-01-052017.pdf>

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3. VitalStats 2023: Council on Higher Education (Amani Saidi)

VitalStats 2023 is the latest edition in a series of publications by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) that visually presents vital statistics on South Africa's higher education sector using various graphs. Since its inception in 2012, the series offers audited datasets primarily from the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), supplemented by data from other sources like Statistics South Africa and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This edition covers comprehensive data on all 26 public universities, categorised into traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities, with data covering the period from 2018 to 2023. It also includes private higher education data from the Higher Education Quality Committee Information System (HEQCIS), although this coverage is limited in scope.

The publication is organised into color-coded sections displaying data on student enrolment and completion, qualification levels, student headcounts by field of study and institution type, staffing details, and cohort analysis of students starting qualifications in 2017, with special separate analysis for distance and part-time students at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Notably, *VitalStats 2023* does not cover state funding for public higher education, postgraduate student data, or research output; these are provided in a separate issue titled *Supplement to VitalStats 2023*. Together, these publications offer an enriched, user-friendly resource for understanding the structure and trends of higher education in South Africa.

This publication, and previous *VitalStats publications* can be accessed on the following link:
<https://www.che.ac.za/publications/vital-stats>

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4. Fact Sheet on Adult Illiteracy in South Africa (*Mamphokhu Khuluvhe*)

The Fact Sheet provides key data on the extent and patterns of adult illiteracy in South Africa, with a focus on gender, age, provincial, and population group differences. It highlights areas where targeted interventions are needed to reduce disparities and strengthen inclusive, lifelong learning opportunities.

Key findings include:

- Decline in national adult illiteracy from 15.8% in 2013 to 9.7% in 2023—but approximately 3.8 million adults remain illiterate.
- Persistent disparities across gender, provinces, and population groups—particularly among older women, Black Africans, and residents of rural provinces.
- Generational improvements in literacy rates among younger cohorts, highlighting the importance of sustained interventions for older adults.
- Strategic importance of Community Education and Training (CET) colleges and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programmes in addressing the continuing demand for adult literacy development.

The information is intended to support ongoing efforts across the Department to improve access to literacy programmes and achieve more equitable outcomes in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/adult-illiteracy-in-south-africa-2025/>

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- Ms Mamphokhu Khuluvhe was the Director of System Monitoring and LMI at DHET.

5. Fact Sheet on Gender Parity in Post-School Education and Training: Access, Completion, and Labour Market Status (*Mamphokhu Khuluvhe*)

This publication provides a comprehensive analysis of gender disparities in access to, and completion of, Post-School Education and Training (PSET), as well as associated labour market outcomes in South Africa. Using the Gender Parity Index (GPI) as a key metric, the Fact Sheet highlights significant achievements, persistent challenges, and areas requiring focused interventions to ensure equitable participation and outcomes for all genders.

Key highlights include:

- Continued growth in female participation and completion across PSET institutions.
- Areas of concern regarding male underrepresentation, particularly at Community Education and Training (CET) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.
- Persistent gender disparities in labour market outcomes, despite educational gains for women.
- Comparative insights positioning South Africa's gender parity in tertiary enrolment favourably at a global level.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/gender-parity-in-pset-2025/>

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6. Fact Sheet on Are We Producing Enough Doctoral Graduates in South Africa? (Mamphokhu Khuluvhe)

This Fact Sheet examines the progress made towards the goal of increasing the number of doctoral graduates in South Africa. The National Development Plan (NDP) sets the targets to increase the number of doctoral graduates as part of the broader goal to strengthen the country's research and innovation capacity.

A summary of the key findings include:

- The number of doctoral graduates per million of population produced in 2023 was 58. This is a huge improvement from the 36 doctoral graduates per million of population produced in 2013.
- The proportion of academic staff holding a doctoral degree has risen steadily, reaching 52.7% in 2023.
- A milestone was reached in 2023 when gender equality was achieved in doctoral graduation rates (50% male, 50% female).
- The Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) fields accounted for 48% of doctoral graduates in 2023, a decline from 52% recorded in 2013.
- Despite the progress made in increasing doctoral graduates, the country is still far from meeting the NDP targets.

Stakeholders are encouraged to engage with this analysis to support the formulation of targeted, evidence-based strategies to enhance equitable access and strengthen the contribution of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system to South Africa's developmental objectives.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/are-we-producing-enough-doctorial-graduates-in-south-africa-2025/>

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7. Fact Sheet on Gender for Students in Post-School Education and Training Institutions, 2023 (*Nthabiseng Tema*)

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) publishes, among others, annual statistics on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Institutions, which also cover enrolment and graduates' data by gender. The annual statistics assist the Department in tracking progress toward improved access; however, gender analysis on this aspect is limited. Gender analysis of access to PSET Institutions is an important indicator as it gives an indication on the provision of education and equality in terms of accessing PSET Institutions.

In summary, the Fact Sheet indicates that in 2023, total enrolment in public and registered private PSET institutions reached 2.1 million, with females comprising 62.6% and males 37.3%. Female enrolment was higher across most PSET sectors, except private colleges. When it comes to graduates/completions, a total of 354 707 students completed their qualification or part-qualification in public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Community Education and Training (CET) and private colleges. Females accounted for two-thirds of all completions (66.0%) compared to 34.0% males. Across all PSET sub-sectors, the proportion of female graduates was higher, with the highest shares observed in CET colleges (77.6%) and TVET colleges (72.4%).

In public HEIs, female participation was higher in all fields of study, especially in Education, where almost three-quarters of students enrolled were females. The proportion in the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) field was nearly equal for males and females. In terms of graduates, females dominated completions in almost all fields of study, except for Doctoral degrees, where males slightly outnumbered females.

Females accounted for more than 60% of both enrolments and graduates in private HEIs. Business, Commerce, and Management Studies were popular among both genders. Females dominated Health Sciences and Social Services, while males led in technical fields such as Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology, Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences, Physical Planning and Construction, and Agriculture and Nature Conservation.

TVET colleges analysis reveals that female enrolment was higher in almost all qualification categories, except skills programmes, where males had a higher participation. Female enrolment was higher in programmes such as Management Assistant and Office Administration, while males leaned towards Electrical Infrastructure and Construction and Engineering Studies.

In the CET colleges, females comprised 70.9% of enrolments and 77.6% of completions, and significant gender gaps were observed in General Education and Training Certificate (GETC): Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Level 4 and Grade 12 enrolments. Private colleges were the only sub-sector where males had slightly higher enrolment (58.3%), however, completions were higher for females (58.2%). Males dominated National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)), Report 191, and skills programmes, while females had a higher proportion in Occupational Qualifications and Report 550/National Senior Certificate (NSC).

These results highlight the continued dominance of female participation and completion across almost all sub-sectors and qualification types in the PSET system. However, the female unemployment rate continues to be higher than that of males, suggesting that educational attainment alone does not guarantee equitable access to labour market opportunities. This highlights the need for policies that go beyond access to education, focusing also on addressing structural labour market barriers and improving pathways from learning to employment for women.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dhet.gov.za/Planning%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Coordination/Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Gender,%202023.pdf>

Fact Sheet on Gender for the previous years (2019-2022) can also be accessed on the link: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/HRDPlanningNew.aspx>

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8. Fact Sheet on Highest Level of Educational Attainment in South Africa (*Mamphokhu Khuluvhe and Welcome Gwantshu*)

This Fact Sheet provides a comparative analysis of South Africa's Highest Level of Educational Attainment (HLEA). In examining trends in education and training outcomes across different demographics, it highlights areas of success as well as identifying persistent gaps.

Highlights from the analysis include:

- In 2024, the share of individuals completing secondary education rose from 27.6% in 2023 Quarter (Q)3 to 33.2% in 2024 Q3, and degree attainment increased from 5.8% in 2023 Q3 to 7.1% in 2024 Q3.
- The proportion of individuals with no schooling decreased from 3.8% (1.01 million people) to 2.1% (653 000), with the proportion of those with less than primary education falling from 9.8% (2.59 million) to 6.1% (1.89 million).
- In 2024, the modal share of both males (37.8%) and females (36.2%) had not completed secondary education.
- Females outperformed males in higher education, with 7.9% attaining a degree compared to 6.2% of males.
- The proportion of individuals with completed secondary education also grew for both genders, increasing by 5.3 percentage points for males and 6 percentage points for females.

Stakeholders are encouraged to engage with this analysis to help formulate targeted, evidence-based strategies to improve equitable access to Post-School Education and Training (PSET) and contribute to South Africa's development goals.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/highest-level-of-educational-attainment-in-south-africa-2025/>

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9. Fact Sheet on New Entrants in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges: 2023 (*Nthabiseng Tema*)

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) regularly publishes annual statistics on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions. However, the report does not cover information pertaining to new entrants in Technical and Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) colleges. This gap has prompted the development of the Fact Sheet on New Entrants in TVET colleges.

Data on new entrants in TVET colleges is crucial for assessing the demand for new enrolments and the necessity for adequate physical facilities. It also offers insights into the capacity of TVET colleges to accommodate potential new entrants. Due to the nature of enrolment cycles in TVET colleges, the Fact Sheet on New Entrants allows for better tracking of programmes that attract first-time students and assesses the demand for specific programmes over time.

In summary, the number of new entrants in TVET college qualifications in 2023 were 186 318, and this was 5.5% (9 770) higher compared to 2022 (176 548). The majority of 2023 new entrants enrolled in Report 191 and National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)), and the same trend was observed in previous years. Within Report 191, almost half of male students (20 206 or 49.7%) enrolled in Engineering Studies. While the majority of female students also enrolled in Engineering Studies, their share was lower (17 965 or 25.5%). Large gender disparities were observed in Management Assistant and Public Management programmes, where female enrolments exceeded those of males by 5 648 and 4 706 respectively.

In the NC(V) qualification, the highest number of female students enrolled in Office Administration (7 918 or 22.1%), whereas male students predominantly enrolled in Electrical Infrastructure and Construction (5 316 or 29.4%). The largest gender gap was observed in the Office Administration programme, where 6 189 more females were enrolled than males.

Further analysis showed that 55 188 of the new entrants had written the Grade 12/National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations in 2022, and nearly one-third obtained a Diploma pass (31.8% or 17 573), followed by 23.0% (12 669) who had incomplete results and 21.1% (11 636) obtained a Bachelor pass.

The full document can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dhet.gov.za/Planning%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Coordination/Fact%20Sheet%20on%20New%20Entrants%20in%20TVET%20Colleges,%202023.pdf>

Fact Sheet on New Entrants in TVET Colleges for the previous years (2019-2022) can also be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/HRDPlanningNew.aspx>

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10. Fact Sheet on Access to Tertiary Education in South Africa: Country Comparisons Using the Gross Enrolment Ratio (*Mamphokhu Khuluvhe*)

This Fact Sheet presents a comparative analysis of South Africa's participation in tertiary education using the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) as a benchmark. The GER provides a globally standardised measure for assessing participation in tertiary education and enables comparisons across countries and regions.

Highlights from the analysis include:

- Gradual improvement in South Africa's GER from 24.0% (2019) to 27.2% (2022); however, this remains substantially below the average for upper-middle-income countries (62.3%) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states (78.4%).
- Notable gender differentials, with female enrolment rates consistently exceeding those of males.
- Comparative underperformance relative to other Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) countries and peer economies, underscoring the need for strategic interventions to accelerate access, particularly for historically disadvantaged groups.
- The findings provide important contextual evidence to inform South Africa's higher education policy development in line with the National Development Plan (NDP) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Stakeholders are encouraged to engage with this analysis to support the formulation of targeted, evidence-based strategies to enhance equitable access and strengthen the contribution of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system to South Africa's developmental objectives.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/access-to-tertiary-education-in-sa-country-comparison-using-gross-enrolment-ratio-2025-copy/>

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11. Highlight of Key Achievements – 30 Year Period (*Mamphokhu Khuluvhe*)

The Fact Sheet outlines the Department's progress in transforming the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system since 1994.

The document provides a snapshot of achievements across universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, skills development programmes, student funding, infrastructure, and legislative reform. It reflects the Department's commitment to building an inclusive and responsive PSET system that supports social and economic development.

The Fact Sheet is accessible on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) website at www.dhet.gov.za and the Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) website: <https://lmi-research.org.za/publications/> or, directly, on the following link:

<https://lmi-research.org.za/publication/30-years-highlight-of-key-achievements-2024/>

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