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ETDP SETA Synthesis Report

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ETDP SETA
Tracer Study Synthesis Report

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Introduction

Purpose of Evaluation

The overall objective of this evaluation was to established the extent to which the ETDP SETA funded programmes implemented between 2011 and 2016 were effective. This means that the purpose of this evaluation was to determine whether the programme outcomes have been achieved, to assess the quality and relevance of the programmes and their efficiency. The first method of this evaluation applied in each phase was a graduate tracer study which sought to (a) locate graduates and establish from them the actual and perceived achievements of the programmes; and (b) determine what the outcome of the programmes have been for participants as well as the sectors where graduates are located. This evaluation was commissioned by the ETDP SETA for use in programme improvement, and to provide evidence toward policy recommendations in the future restructuring of the SETA.

Background and context

Based on the Five Year Sector Skills Plans (2011 -2016) of the ETDP SETA, which were conducted to gather information on the supply of and demand for skills in the ETD sector; a myriad of skills development priorities were identified and recommendations made which led to various interventions introduced from the years 2011/12 to 2015/16. The programmes were aimed at providing the beneficiaries with relevant skills to achieve competencies in occupationally directed programmes from intermediate and high level skills. These interventions were developed in response to the needs of the various ETD constituencies. As part of its 2015/16 Annual Performance Plan (APP), the ETDP SETA was expected to conduct a learner-tracking and tracing study of skills development beneficiaries funded by the ETDP SETA, and evaluate the impact of the programmes as implemented during 2011/12 – 2015/16 financial years. In line with the ETDP SETA's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to ensure programme efficiency and effectiveness (with a focus on quality and relevance), the evaluation looks at programme outcomes for ETDP beneficiaries from 2011/12 – 2015/16 in order to establish whether six of the eight Programmes outlined in the SSP 2011/12 have achieved their intended objectives. The learner tracking and tracing study seeks to (a) locate participants and establish from them the actual and perceived achievements of the programmes; and (b) determine what the outcome of the programmes has been for participants as well as the ETD sector. The overarching goal of this initiative is to enhance evidence use in programme improvement, and to provide evidence toward policy improvement in the sector as a whole.

This report is a consolidation of the three phases of the evaluation. Thus, the methodology utilised in each phase, the findings gathered in each phase as well as the conclusions and recommendations of each phase will be presented in this document.

Structure of Synthesis Report

The remainder of the report consist of four parts. The first will introduce main evaluation findings, reporting on key results and interpretations. The second part will reflect on recommendations, presenting key recommended courses of action to be considered by the SETA subsequent to a rigorous process of identifying various programme issues, thereby suggesting mechanisms to be considered in addressing identified issues. The report will then present major lessons learnt in the evaluation process, this is the most significant part of evaluations. This process allows for continuous learning towards improving future organisational practice in achieving more sustainable impact. Lastly, the report will "lay ground" for responding to evaluation findings by suggesting key organisational

procedures to be followed based on the prescripts of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) guidelines in responding to the evaluation.

Main Findings

Phase One

The following key findings from phase one:

- Firstly, the general satisfaction of graduates with the programmes is very high. Close to all respondents suggest that the various training programmes were of a high quality that they were relevant to their careers and that that content expectations were met. Generally over 75% of the graduates agree with these sentiments. The lower rate of satisfaction for bursary graduates is largely explained by comments regarding late payment of fees to universities, and a cited inadequate amount of the bursary. These comments were further reinforced in the suggestions for improvement, where improving some administrative functions and having clearer communication with learners could alleviate a number of these concerns.
- There is a strong trend emerging of a low employment rate across all sub-programmes. Further, where there is employment, a large proportion tends to be outside of the ETD sector, thereby diminishing. This may be a result of a lack of clarity on programme objectives or insufficient selection criteria in the earlier years of the NSDS III where a large number of sub-programmes were supporting learners with further study in fields outside of the ETD sector, for example, law and engineering. In other ways, the low employment rate within the ETD sector may be a result of an inadequate process for identifying the necessary scarce and critical skills of the sector, resulting in the training of young people for the wrong jobs. Alternatively, the qualifications may be considered poor quality or articulating at the wrong level required for the available jobs. This is an area that will require further investigation.
- Thirdly and in keeping with data from other sources, the outcomes for graduates of university courses (bursaries) are markedly better than for the other sub-programmes. Graduates from university have a higher income, take less time to find employment and have a higher rate of employment – all of which puts the debate for increased access to higher education into stark relief.
- Preliminary results also show that there is a huge demand for further education and training. At present many of the graduates are continuing to study, and many more are looking to enrol in the near future. Again, this speaks to the necessary level of qualification for the available jobs – for example, those that are currently studying are mostly internship and learnership graduates who need to up-grade their qualifications to progress in their careers. The extent to which the SETA provides opportunities to graduates to continue their studies in the ETD sector is not clear – especially as there is a fairly low rate of people doing more than one sub-programme in the last five years.

Phase Two

The following key findings from phase one:

- In considering descriptive results from the survey, majority of respondents in both programmes (school programmes and higher education programmes) perceived training

content as appropriate and related to their working context. There were insignificant levels of opposing views, opposing views sustained a consistent rate of less than 10% across the two levels of disagreement. Similarly, a considerable amount of respondents in both programmes perceived training content as relevant to their working context, with more than 90% of respondents indicating a positive reaction in relation to perceptions of relevance. The majority of respondents in the higher education sample agreed that training materials assisted them in understanding the course.

- In relation to the quality of training facilitation, the majority of respondents in both samples agreed that the facilitators were adequately competent, that training was well facilitated, which may be attributed the experience and familiarity of the facilitator to the training context. In addition, teaching staff in the teacher development sample were asked about the subject content and pedagogy. The majority of the teaching staff agreed that the training focused more on subject content and methodology.
- Case study data revealed a general sense of programmes being valuable and relevant to the work they do. Most programmes provided respondents with relevant knowledge and skills which have assisted them in improving their performance in executing their functions. Course material is said to be of good quality, with some respondents using it as a reference points even after the conclusion of training programmes.
- Although most training programmes appeared to be perceived as relevant by most respondents, there were also perceptions of irrelevance particularly on programme 2. Lecturers in one of the TVET colleges indicated that they were being placed in programmes that were not related to the courses they teach. Some lecturers were not happy with the facilitation on the moderator and assessor courses. Such lecturers believed that the mentioned programmes were rushed and facilitators were not sensitive to the needs of trainees, it appeared that the interest was more in remuneration than actual interest in delivering good quality learning programmes.
- The study found that the school level sample suffered from relatively more confounding factors. Whilst school teacher and management generally reported a positive reaction to the programmes, the data failed to show explanatory linkages among the different levels of results. In fact, a positive reaction to the design and quality of the training had no significant effect on changes in behaviour which in turn, had showed no influence on performance and institutional reform.
- Contrary to the finding regarding structural linkages, the descriptive analysis showed that individuals generally reported better individual performance and institutional performance. In general, the individual employees have observed positive impact of the programmes on both their professional and personal lives. To be more specific, the programme has reportedly improved individual performance and increased peer-sharing and further learning within respective institutions. In isolated cases, individual employees who have gone through the programmes have attributed promotion, salary increases and better career security to the ETDP-SETA programmes.
- Respondents significantly raised concerns regarding the application and on-boarding processes of the various programmes. In particular, there was a concern that there were many instances where inadequate need-analysis and consultation with the employees prior to allocation to courses were conducted. This finding called for better consulting mechanism with the targeted employees.

Phase Three

The following key findings from phase one:

- In responding to the set of evaluation questions posed, the study resumed by considering lessons and explanation of the programmes and programme logic from key internal and external documents. Through this document review, the study found that individuals from the group of organisations here-in originally referred to as 'constituent organisations'; received the same designs of training programmes as the individuals from organisations in the first and second phase. In fact, the envisaged outcomes and programme logic are identical. This is despite the fact that the group of organisations in phase three broadly serve a support-role within the sector, including employee well-ness, community building, research and enterprise development.
- The study then analysed survey responses from 199 individuals across an entire cohort of 'constituent organisations' in each of the programme years. In responding to the four evaluation questions, the study concludes the following in respect to each of the four questions:
- The content, relevance, delivery and overall quality of the study was reportedly excellent as majority of respondents strongly a displayed appreciation of the programmes. Following this, on average, over 80% of the respondents reported that they found the lessons and skills applicable in their work place, and that the skills have showed improvement in individual performance. However, whilst respondents showed positive reaction to programme delivery and effectiveness; the acquired skills were found to have not translated into career progress, neither in the form of salary nor "upward mobility" in the workplace. This said, as good as these programmes are to individual performance, unfortunately, the resultant qualification and improvement in performance may not necessarily be regarded as basis for promotion or career progression among the sample of 'constituent organisations'.
- Finally, a deepened study of the effectiveness of ETDP-SETA programmes was analysed in the form of case studies. Whilst the various case study commonly show a strong appreciation of the quality and relevance of the programmes, and the fact that respective programmes have clearly (stated with examples) brought about positive growth and performance at the individual level; However, it was highlighted – in numerous cases- that enough application of the skills learned to bring about organisational change and subsequently improve sector performance depended on a lot more than individual training. In fact, the biggest criticism among this group of organisation is the weak sense of employee support (post training) showed by respective management. Lastly, it was further clear (through research observation and respondents) that generally the organisations do not necessarily "celebrate" or value the culture of learning and professional development. This observation was also confirmed by the findings from the survey as the outcome of "promotions" and salary increase was rated the lowest by respondents.

KEY RECCOMENDATIONS

Immediate:

- The SETA should seek professional assistance to review its data management processes and aim for an integrated data management system.

Short Term:

- SETA needs to review its admin and finance performance to identify "points of backlog" causing delayed payment for bursaries.
- A review of university costs and benefit should be conducted to ensure that the offering is in line with the latest university cost-structure
- The SETA should invest (through professional facilitation) in building and clarifying programme theory of change to link organisational mandate; activities to impact
- In schools and basic education institutions; the SETA should identify other funders and skills development agents with which the SETA can collaborate. This is likely to enhance envisaged impact
- There is a strong need for the SETA to design and implement a more systemic needs-analysis mechanism across the various programmes

Mid-term:

- With so much investment into skills development of unexpected learners; the absorption rate is low. The SETA should invest into further research towards understanding the true determinants of trainee absorption into permanent employment
- The SETA needs to review its position in investing in Grade 12 re-writes, and ascertain appropriate subsequent programmes which allow probable progression into the sector.
- The SETA should further invest into a programme monitoring system which will low for real-time performance tracking and adjustment, including proper management of programme records
- The SETA should commission a design of a programme aimed at capacitating respective management in creating conducive environment for skills enhancement and performance.

Long-term:

- To improve absorption into permanent employment; the SETA should consider facilitating employment signalling by creating a platform for trainees and employers to interact. This can be in the form of an app.
- The SETA should consider means to control skills level of facilitators. Especially related to awareness of participant demographic qualities such as socio-economic background; prior exposure to training; language etc.

LESSONS LEARNT

- In considering various approaches to evaluate training effectiveness; it was clear that various organisations follow different approaches. In fact, it was further clear that in different programmes, different aspects of training are evaluated whiles all are referred to as measures of impact/effectiveness. This was found to be the case even in the SETA community in which the mandate is common. In order to ensure ease of comparison and appropriate assessment of training effectiveness, a befitting evaluation framework for training effectiveness needs to be developed. An appropriate training evaluation framework is likely to guide the monitoring

and evaluation of SETA-funded training programmes. A framework would assist in explaining the programme logic through laying out key components of training initiatives and the logical arrangement towards achieving desired results; thus providing a context for evaluating training programmes. In the absence of a framework, training programmes rely on a retrospective theory of change which may be inaccurate as it relies on subjective understanding of programme evaluators. An appropriate framework would ensure that there is an increased understanding of the programme's goals with a clear outline of casual links in the results chain, also reflecting on potential assumptions and risks which could affect the programme success.

- The initial evaluation design did not consider the state of organisational data systems, as such, the initial design did not account for limitations of the data and "gaps" in its integrity. In constructing evaluation Terms of Reference; it is critical to allow for scoping of the data quality and systems in order to design an appropriate evaluation approach. Thus evaluation TOR`s should factor in data scoping exercising towards ensuring that the most appropriate and feasible evaluation approach is selected. This will provide ease to the evaluation process, ensuring a smooth flow of training evaluations in avoiding experienced data challenges.

- This evaluation incorporated a number of programmes with different training interventions within each. Whiles all programme were evaluated, the evaluation could not capture all the critical lesson offered by experiences in each intervention. In order to deepen lessons from programme evaluation, it is wiser to reduce the number of programmes evaluated as a time. Smaller groups of programmes can be commissioned individually. This will allow for greater depth and understanding of deeper underlying issues in individual training programmes. Although the evaluation provided an extensive assessment of ETDP-SETA programmes, the approach is inherently unable to capture granular elements of individual training programmes which could be instrumental in making necessary adjustments in ensuring that intended training objectives are realised.

WAY FORWARD

Organisational Response

DPME guideline No. 2.2.5, makes provisions for state entities to provide a formal response registering their position in relation to evaluation recommendations. The provision acknowledges that state entities may not always agree with all recommendations provided by evaluators hence entities are allowed to indicate recommendations they accept as valid and feasible, and substantive reasons provided in areas of disagreement with particular recommendations. The formal management response ensures that recommendations that are agreed are identified for taking forward.

Whiles the DPME guidelines were mainly intended for application in government departments, as a state-organ, it is best practice that the ETDP SETA closely follows the guidelines. The key prescripts of this guideline are as follows:

Step 1: The Evaluation steering committee should plan for the presentation of emerging results to senior management as draft reports are received prior to final reporting.

Step 2: Once The Evaluation final report is produced, the evaluation Steering Committee should convene a meeting to finalise and approve the report as technically acceptable in a minuted meeting.

Step 3: The DG of the DPME would then write to the respective department(s) with a table summarising the evaluation recommendations, requesting a response indicating whether they agree or not with individual recommendation, and providing justification on areas of disagreement.

Step 4: The management response (in a format as per DPME Guideline 2.2.5) is expected within 30 days from the date of receipt of the letter from the DG.

Step 5: The report/management response is then submitted by the respective Department to the to the Cabinet Committee within 3 months from receipt of the DG`s letter

Step 6: The evaluation Report should then be presented to relevant Clusters, and then Cabinet for final approval.

Step 7: An Improvement Plan should be prepared within 4 months after the letter from the DG of the DPME.

Step 8: A progress report should be provided by the respective department ten (10) months after the letter from the DG indicating the progress on implementation of the improvement plan.

Step 9: Communication channels should then be initiated subsequent to Cabinet approval, towards circulating the evaluation report on the DPME`s website accompanied by the management response and the relevant improvement plan, also providing these to respective Portfolio Committees.

Continuous Improvement Plan

The evaluation system is aimed at improving performance, decision-making, and fostering accountability. The learning subsequent to evaluations needs to feed in to strategic decision making processes within entities. Once common consensus has been reached on recommendations, the DPME requires state entities to draw up an Improvement Plan indicating how evaluation recommendations are to be addressed. Improvement Plans are used as means to encourage utilization of evaluation recommendations towards ensuring that evidence from evaluations influences plans, policies and budgets. In addition, this process also promotes accountability through reflecting on key custodians responsible for the implementation as well as respective time frames. The overarching purpose of the Improvement Plans are to strengthen respective programmes/projects/policies/plans through the planning for the application of learning components. Similarly, this process allows for tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations, thus keeping key stakeholders abreast on the progress of recommended courses of action in improving the delivery of a programme, project or policy. Improvement Plans may reflect on changes a policy or programme, amendments to the implementation strategy or even changes to budgetary allocations following reasonable justification for changes.

Capacity Development

In light of findings and observations by the evaluators throughout evaluation experience and engagement with the client; the following gaps in capacity to manage programme data and the evaluation process were identified:

- The evaluation encountered numerous challenges as a result of poor data systems. The current data system practice reflects a lack of data integration and inconsistencies in relation to data formatting. Poor data systems could negatively affect evaluation results as programme data plays a central role in shaping evaluation results. The SETA needs to improve its data systems in order to ensure accuracy in data management and thus increasing reliability in evaluation results.

- The evaluation commissioning process also encountered challenges in relation to discrepancies around the evaluation design and approach. However, consensus was reached through engagements in understanding the most appropriate evaluation design which would adequately respond to the evaluative needs of the SETA. Evaluation Commissioners should possess the necessary evaluative expertise in shaping evaluation designs and approaches that appropriately address the needs of respective institutions. CLEAR AA and other similar institutions with expertise in Evaluation Capacity Development could be useful in offering tailored evaluation capacity building programmes in capacitating evaluation commissioners to be able to carry their function effectively in ensuring that evaluations achieve their intended goals of improving performance.

- Similarly, the absence of a clear training programme logic affected the framing of the evaluation. In the absence of a programme Theory of Change (ToC), the study relied on a retrospective analysis of a potential theory of change. The SETA needs to develop a logical ToC outlining how and why a desired change is expected to happen.