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## **Evaluability Assessment towards Measuring Impact of PSETA Qualification**

### **1. Background and Introduction**

The skills development landscape in South Africa has seen numerous changes brought about by among other things technological advancements and changes in government policies and priorities. These changes arguably requires accompanying innovative developments in the skills planning and development arena. At the centre of this are the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) who are mandated to ensure that the skills development system is abreast with the economic and technological demands of their respective sectors and is responsive to such changes.

The role of a SETA ETQA is to quality assure training providers systems, processes, procedures, training delivery, support and oversee assessments and unit standards and qualification development in order to achieve high quality education and training in their relevant sector in line with the Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998.

However, these functions have changed with the introduction of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) taking over the responsibility for all qualifications registered on the Occupational Qualifications Sub Framework (OQSF) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Therefore ETQAs are currently in transitional phase from unit standard based qualifications to QCTO as well as other functions. The PSETA ETQA has been delegated the Quality Assurance Partner (QAP) functions by the QCTO going forward, which entails the following:

- Accreditation of Skills Development Providers;
- Monitoring provision of training by the Skills Development providers;
- Conducting verification – Assessments and achievements;

- Registering Education Training and Development Practitioners – Assessors and Moderators;
- Certification of Learners;
- Maintaining Learner Management Information System (MIS); and
- Uploading Learner data to the National Learner Records Database

The ETQAs are required to continuously review and quality assure skills development programmes that are provided by the SETAs. Thus, the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) has to continuously review and evaluate the impact and outcomes of its qualifications and skills development programmes in the Public Service sector. This evaluation practice further ensures that the qualifications and skills development programmes are aligned with the policies and regulations that governs its functions.

This research article presents a modest attempt aimed at exploring the feasibility of programme evaluation of the PSETA qualification. The PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification National Qualification Framework (NQF) level 6 will be used as a case study. The delivery of high quality training requires a combination of quality developed qualifications, quality aligned learning tools/materials and accredited training providers who possess sound skills to deliver excellent quality training. Maintaining quality in these three critical areas ensures that the learners produced are equipped with quality employability skills.

The quality of qualifications offered by PSETA are of critical importance in the Public Service sector as it ensures that PSETA supplies the Public Service sector with quality graduates who are able to compete equally in the labour market with their counterparts/peers holding equivalent qualifications from the University of Technologies (UoTs) .

It is critical for this paper to concede that this is the first PSETA research aimed at assessing the impact of its qualification(s). As a result it was important that the approach of the study be designed as an evaluability assessment so that it serves as a baseline for follow-up impact assessments of the PSETA qualifications. Evaluability

studies are traditionally used for planning evaluation projects and they involve engagement with stakeholders to clarify intervention goals and how they are expected to be achieved, development and evaluation of a logic model, and ultimately provision of advice on whether an evaluation can be carried out or further development work on the intervention should be completed first<sup>1</sup>. This will allow PSETA to assess the availability of measurable indicators which will assist in determining whether impact has been achieved in the follow-up studies. Furthermore this will identify the availability of sources of information a full scale evaluation is conducted.

It is reasoned that this approach will be a good way for PSETA to strike a balance between responding to the growing need of conducting impact evaluations for its learning programmes and qualifications with the limited resources that are available. Since this is the first study of its kind by PSETA it was important that this study be approached by establishing the prospects of measurable impact before resources are committed to a full scale evaluation. This required the identification and review of existing data sources, as well as engagement with the stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the qualification. The findings of this paper therefore will be central for PSETA in making recommendations for future impact evaluation studies.

The study will further be guided by the following research questions:

- What are the expected outputs and outcomes of the PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification NQF level 6?
- To what extent is the qualification moving towards the expected outputs and outcomes?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification NQF level 6?
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## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Skills Development Act (SDA)**

The PSETA like all other twenty (20) SETAs is mandated in terms of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No.97 of 1998, as amended), to facilitate skills

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, P. and Campbell, M. (2015). Evaluability Assessment: a systematic approach to deciding whether and how to evaluate programmes and policies. Accessed at: [www.whatworksscotland.ac.uk](http://www.whatworksscotland.ac.uk)

development for the Public Service sector. According to Section (10) of the Act, a SETA must develop, annually update and implement a Sector Skills Plan (SSP) in accordance with the National Skills Development Strategy. As part of the implementation of the SSP findings PSETA is mandated to develop qualifications that respond to the sector's skills needs.

## **2.2. PSETA Qualification development process**

### **2.2.1. Curriculum development**

The PSETA's qualification development process is informed by the SSP findings and a series of stakeholder consultations with all government departments involved. The following steps are followed in the curriculum development process:

Firstly, pre-scoping meeting is set for the identification of an occupation on the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) for the proposed qualification development. The pre-scoping meeting members comprise a small sample group of stakeholders (from government departments), Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) staff and field expert specialists for guidance.

The second process and step is the scoping meeting which involves broad stakeholders and other SETAs if required for qualification sharing.

The third step is the determination of the development quality partner (DQP) which can be a SETA and a professional body and Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) which deals with assessment of the qualification. The DQP is made up of group of subject matter experts or industry experts with more than five years' experience and qualifications.

The fourth step, once the qualification development is agreed upon, the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is signed between the QCTO and DQP & AQP. Followed by project plan with timelines.

The fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) step, five (5) meetings for the development of the qualification facilitated by the Qualification Development Facilitator (QDF) which include the following activities:

Task establishment as per OFO;

Determine the theory component using the tasks and benchmarking with at least three (3) countries;

The sixth step, submission of the qualification to go through the QCTO moderation committee.

The seventh step, the qualification goes through public comment;

The eighth step, the qualification goes to QCTO council for approval;

The ninth step, the qualification goes to South Africa Qualification Authority (SAQA) committee for registration and recognition committee.

The 10<sup>th</sup> step, the qualification goes to SAQA Council for approval; and

The 11<sup>th</sup> step, after approval of qualification by SAQA council, the qualification is then registered and ready for offering. The qualification is then in the public domain for all institutions or specific institution with restriction.

### **2.2.2. Modules development**

Most SETAs have been using Unit Standard approach in their qualifications. The unit standard is defined as individual components of a qualification that are credit bearing, meaning they earn credits towards as qualification. Key ingredients in a unit standard are specific outcomes and related assessment criteria. A Module is a component of a course or subject that is credit bearing with its own approved aims and outcomes and assessment methods. The Public Administration PSETA qualification is Unit standard based and not modular based as compared to Council of Higher Education which is modular based. The minimum credits required for completion of the qualification is 240.

### **2.2.3. Number of Credits**

The total number of credits is informed by the module content and curriculum. The PSETA qualification in Public Administration: Diploma has a 240 credits minimum as a requirement for acquiring a diploma.

## 2.3. University of Technology (UoTs) qualification development process

### 2.3.1. Curriculum development

The curriculum development for University of Technologies is done through Council for Higher Education<sup>2</sup> (CHE), to which a minimum of 360 credits is required for the qualification.

## 2.4. PSETA qualifications (23 qualifications)

PSETA has developed 23 qualifications to date with 12 qualifications currently dormant and 11 qualifications active with learners. All qualifications are currently available on the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) website. The table below reflects all qualifications, both active and dormant. This study focuses on the National Diploma: Public Administration at NQF Level 6 with SAQA ID: 57897 which is part of the active qualification with learners, both employed and unemployed. The qualification was reregistered with SAQA in 2012 and in 2015 and is currently still active until 2023.

Table 1: List of PSETA qualifications

Prog. ID	Qualification Title / Learning Programme Title	NQF Level	Min Credits
86946	Further Education and Training Certificate: Democracy, Active Citizenship and Parliamentary Services	Level 4	126
57824	Further Education and Training Certificate: Public Administration	Level 4	146
58346	Further Education and Training Certificate: Public Administration Management	Level 4	150
49197	Further Education and Training Certificate: Social Housing Supervision	Level 4	146
49257	National Certificate: Conflict Management and Transformation	Level 5	124
49055	National Certificate: Foreign Economic Representation	Level 6	160
66869	National Certificate: Home Affairs Services	Level 5	120
49107	National Certificate: Inspection and Enforcement Services	Level 5	140
48761	National Certificate: Mission Administration	Level 5	133
64330	National Certificate: Mission Corporate Services Management	Level 6	154
65649	National Certificate: Official Statistics	Level 5	120
57804	National Certificate: Public Administration	Level 3	157
50060	National Certificate: Public Administration	Level 5	141

<sup>2</sup> Council for Higher Education, Framework for Programme Accreditation, November, 2004.

Prog. ID	Qualification Title / Learning Programme Title	NQF Level	Min Credits
64670	National Certificate: Public Financial Oversight and Accountability	Level 6	128
57805	National Certificate: Public Sector Employment and Skills Development Practices	Level 5	160
50585	National Certificate: Public Service Communication	Level 6	129
50583	National Certificate: Public Service Communication	Level 5	120
49196	National Certificate: Social Housing Property Development	Level 6	147
49198	National Certificate: Social Housing Property Management	Level 6	121
64329	National Diploma: Diplomacy	Level 7	240
57827	National Diploma: Public Administration	Level 7	260
57897	National Diploma: Public Administration <sup>3</sup>	Level 6	240
91994	Occupational Certificate: Office Administrator: Public Service Administrator	N/A	52

### 2.5. Uptake of PSETA qualifications by training providers.

PSETA has a total of 385 training providers currently registered on the PSETA Management Information system. The majority of the training providers are located in the Gauteng province (229), followed by Limpopo (47). Mpumalanga has 23, KwaZulu-Natal 22, 18 in the Free State, 15 in the Eastern Cape, 13 in North West, 10 in the Northern Cape and lastly eight in the Western Cape. The bias distribution towards the Gauteng province can be attributed to the higher economic activities in the province. Even though the spread is biased towards Gauteng, the current spread has provided PSETA with an enabling environment to respond to the transformation imperatives mentioned and highlighted in the National Skills Development Strategy III.

### 3. Methods and Procedures

This section details the procedures and approaches that were employed by the study in order to meet its objectives.

To achieve its objectives and answer the research questions the study relied on the programme theory of the PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification NQF level 6 as conceptualised by the PSETA Education and Training Quality

<sup>3</sup> <http://regqs.saqa.org.za/viewQualification.php.id=57897>

Assurance (ETQA) unit. Programme theory allows the study to link the inputs and activities of the qualification to the possible outcomes and outputs<sup>4</sup>. The outputs and outcomes of the qualification as a result were assumed by the researchers based on the explicit analysis of the activities and inputs of the qualification.

Programme theory-based evaluation is adopted for the reasons that it allowed the study to not only test whether the relationship between the qualification activities and impacts/outcomes are realistic or not, but also to provide findings on what the qualification is doing well or not doing well, which can be further linked to the potential impact of the qualification, using a cause and effect chain approach. The approach allowed the researchers to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the inputs and activities in the programme theory and consequently argue about the impact and outcomes of the qualification. The adoption of this approach is based on the recognition that activities and inputs are not ends unto themselves<sup>5</sup>.

This approach required that the researchers have a clear understanding of the PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification which served as a prerequisite for the evaluation of the qualification. Since the explicit programme theory was never developed at the inception of the qualification, the researchers held a face-to-face interview with key informants from the PSETA ETQA unit who are responsible for the design and accreditation of the qualification in question. The interviews were aimed at soliciting information that would feed into the programme theory, particularly the information which pertained to the objectives, inputs and design of the qualification.

It is this information which assisted the researchers to identify the causal factors that will play in the development of measurable impact of the qualification. Therefore the researchers had to re-design the programme theory for the qualification for the purposes of conducting the evaluation of the qualification. The links between the inputs/resources and outputs/outcomes were based on the analysis and assumptions of the researchers. So the researchers analysed all the inputs and activities in the program theory stemming from the key informants interviews, as well as the data from

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<sup>4</sup> W.K Kellogg Foundation (undated). Developing a Basic Logic Model for your Program. Accessed at <https://cyfar.org/sites/default/files/W.%20K.%20Kellogg%20Foundation,%202004.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Rogers,P,J. (2008). Using Programme Theory to Evaluate Complicated and Complex Aspects of Interventions. *Evaluation*, Vol 14(1): 29 – 48. SAGE Publications. Los Angeles. Accessed at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1356389007084674>

training providers displaying the learners who have completed the qualification, this analysis was then linked to the possible outcomes/outputs of the qualification. It is the inputs/activities which were utilised to further deliberate upon the strengths and weaknesses of the qualification design and implementation.

The key informants' interviews were guided by the interview guide which was designed by the researchers. The interview guide was divided into three sections. Section (A) consisted of administrative details and explanation of the research background and objectives to the respondents. Section (B) required the respondents to provide information on the inputs and activities of the qualification. Section (C) consisted of questions that were asking the respondents about their perceived impacts and outcomes of the qualification, and the recommendations on how the qualification inputs/activities can be improved in order to maximise the impact of the qualification. The questions on the interview guide were typically open-ended questions, this allowed the researchers the opportunity of probing further on responses that required further probe and clarity.

### **3.1. Limitations**

The results and recommendations of this study need to be interpreted in line with the limitations of the study. The following limitations were noted by the researchers in designing and conducting the study:

- The context in which the qualification is implemented and the providers of the qualification varies even though the SAQA qualification framework provides guidelines, therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other contexts.
- The Impact and outcomes for the study were mostly assumed by the researchers based on the analysis of the inputs and activities in the design and implementation of the qualification.
- The impact and outcomes of the qualifications were done without the information/data on the destination of the graduates.
- Lack of quantitative information.
- Not all the stakeholders involved were interviewed in data collection.

### 3.2. Data Analysis and Results

The learner completion information which emanated from the PSETA Management Information System (MIS) <sup>6</sup> showed that;

- The total number of completions for 2016 and 2017 is 142<sup>7</sup>, the analysis of this paper is based on this cohort.
- The qualification during the chosen period (2016 and 2017) was provided solely by three providers which are accredited to offer the qualification namely; KMS College with 85 learners, Saint Colonel Graduate Institute with 1 learner, Salitig Training college with 56 learners.
- There were 39 Males and 103 Females learners that were deemed competent and were certified.
- The uptake of training providers is generally low for the qualification. The key informant interviews indicated that this is due to the cost involved in the development of learning materials which are incurred by the training provider. This affects the low numbers of supply into the labour market.
- The qualification is also utilised by training providers for Recognition of prior learning (RPL) of learners who have been in the Public Service system without qualifications.
- The key informants also mentioned that PSETA is moving away from the unit standard system towards module system proposed by QCTO which will strengthen the quality of the qualification.

Based on the document analysis, which was further refined with information elaborated upon by key informants with whom interviews were held, the researchers re-created a logical framework which assisted the study to link the components of the qualification to the intended outputs and outcomes as displayed in table two which follows.

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<sup>6</sup> The information entered on the PSETA MIS system commonly known as indicium system only indicates the learners that were certified and deemed competent by the training provider.

<sup>7</sup> This number indicates only the learners who have completed the qualification as entered by the training provider.

Table 2: Logical Framework of the Qualification

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resources</b></p> <p><i>In order for the qualification to accomplish the set of activities it needed the following resources:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activities</b></p> <p><i>In order to address its goals, the qualification had to accomplish the following activities:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outputs</b></p> <p><i>We expect that once accomplished these activities will produce the following outputs:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Short &amp; Long-term outcomes</b></p> <p><i>We expect that if accomplished these activities will lead to the following changes:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Impact</b></p> <p><i>We expect that if accomplished these activities will lead to the following changes in 7-10 years:</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning materials</li> <li>• Assessment materials</li> <li>• Subject matter specialists</li> <li>• Development Quality Partner</li> <li>• Human/capital Resources</li> <li>• Monitoring tools</li> <li>• Online system (PSETA Indicum)</li> <li>• Learning and assessment centre</li> <li>• External and internal Quality Assurance Body</li> <li>• Training provider (private and /or public).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of learners who meet the minimum requirements for the qualification.</li> <li>• Registration of learners upon entry.</li> <li>• Induction of learners</li> <li>• Delivery of unit standards</li> <li>• Assessment of learners</li> <li>• Loading of completed learners on the PSETA system by the training provider.</li> <li>• Verification of learners and materials by PSETA.</li> <li>• Certification by ETQA unit if all the requirements are met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified learners who have met the qualification requirements.</li> <li>• Database of learners who have completed the qualification.</li> <li>• Database of training providers who are certified to roll out the qualification.</li> <li>• Learning materials developed by training providers.</li> <li>• Certificates of competency to the learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the employed learners, the completion of the qualification should lead to career growth.</li> <li>• For the employed learners, the completion of the qualification should lead into up-skilled workforce.</li> <li>• For the unemployed learners, the completion of the qualification should enhance chances of entering into the labour market.</li> </ul>	

### **3.3. Shortfalls and key challenges identified**

- The qualification goals and objectives were not clearly defined, thus the accompanying indicators of progress for the qualification are not clearly stated. Therefore conducting evaluation when there are no clear success indicators becomes challenging and problematic.
- Not all activities on the logical framework have sufficient and appropriate resources.
- The data indicating the number of entries of learners registered for the qualification is not showing and not part of the PSETA MIS, which does not allow PSETA to analyse the completion rate of the learners.
- The pieces of available data are fragmented among three key stakeholders which are PSETA, the employer (in a case where the learners are employed), and the training provider. A large quantity of data remains with the training provider. This presents challenges in the collection of data for evaluations by PSETA researchers.
- The data on the PSETA MIS is missing critical variables pertinent to the evaluation of the qualification. In addition to the lack of information on the learner entries, the data does not indicate learner demographic information, and neither does it indicate the learner contact details.
- Training providers are expected by PSETA to conduct evaluation of their programme in line with the impact assessment policy, key informant interviews indicated that not all training providers adhere to this requirement.
- Verification by PSETA is mainly done when the learners have completed and exited the qualification, this verification mainly verifies the learner portfolio of evidence (PoE) and Assessment Report. These verification reports can form part of data sources when conducting evaluations of the qualification.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of this paper was to inform evaluation decisions of the PSETA National Diploma: Public Administration qualification at NQF level 6, not *per se* to determine whether this qualification is effective. This approach was adopted to establish and assist in whether it will be worthy to invest in a follow-up full-scale assessment of the qualification or to establish if further development work on the qualification implementation and design should be completed before resources are committed to a full-scale evaluation. The study design and data sources consulted was to establish the likelihood of measurable impact for the qualification.

Based on the study design and findings, this study notes the following recommendations:

- The current qualification cycle and time frame is unsuitable, the duration is too short for the impact to have happened, the impact assessment is therefore not worthwhile in the case of this qualification. There is little realistic expectation of impact, particularly for the unemployed learners. The impact ideally should be measured after two or three years after the intervention.
- There is a need for the qualification to clearly define measurable progress indicators that can be used to determine whether impact has been achieved. This is to recommend that a logical framework for the qualification is developed upfront before the implementation of the qualification.
- Linked to the clear definition of progress indicators above, there is a need to clarify intervention goals and how they are expected to be achieved. This needs to be clarified for both the employed and unemployed learners. This will assist when conducting evaluations.
- Sources of information for measuring the indicators must be identified.
- Monitoring tools from PSETA needs to indicate variables that will assist in the evaluation of the qualification.
- Information loaded into the PSETA MIS by the training providers needs to be aligned to the Quarterly Monitoring reporting (QMR) systems of the SETA and further more information needs to be verified to ensure its accuracy and credibility.

- Information loaded into the PSETA MIS by the training providers needs to indicate variables such as demographics information and contact details of the learners, this will ease the data collection process for evaluations. This will require PSETA to design the system that integrates all required variables and meets their demands and requirements.

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