
Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA)

LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH REPORT

**PUBLIC SECTOR POLICY DIRECTIONS & PRIORITIES
ASSOCIATED WITH THE UN'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS: IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS DEMAND IN THE
PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR**

NOVEMBER 2021



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NOVEMBER 2021

**Prepared for the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority
(PSETA)**

by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS	
ANC	African National Congress
ASD	Agenda for Sustainable Development
DHET	Department of Higher Education & Training
DPSA	Department of Public Service & Administration
ETDP SETA	Education, Training & Development SETA
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
HWSETA	Health & Welfare SETA
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NP	National Party
NPM	New Public Management
PSETA	Public Services Education and Training Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SETA	Sector Education & Training Authority
TVET	Technical & Vocational Education & Training
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

This document constitutes the literature review for the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) research project entitled: ‘The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Impact on Employment and Skills Demand in the Public Service Sector.’

This project will aim to examine, inter alia, the impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on employment and skills demand for a selection, between 10 and 15, priority occupations (and their associated knowledge, skills and competencies) in the South African Public service sector.

South Africa is a committed member state of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by member states in 2015. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (commonly referred to as the SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (United Nations, 2020).

This project will be aligned with and contribute to strategic focus area 4.2 of The Public Service Human Resource Development Strategic Framework. The objective of the focus area is:

“To ensure that HRD initiatives support South Africa in meeting its commitments in terms of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and other related international commitments.”

Work in this research strand will seek to build an understanding of the drivers and challenges impacting and informing the occupations and skills demand in the public sector in relation to new policy directions and priorities initiated by and/or associated with the public sector (with a focus on national and provincial government) in delivering and achieving a selection of SDGs. The purpose will be to identify the occupation, skills, knowledge and capacity gaps and challenges that need to be overcome or are required to achieve the SDGs.

This literature review will examine academic, and other literature, from South African and international sources in order to provide a rigorous framing, and related analysis and insights, which will assist with the formulation of robust, as well as meaningful, impactful and useful, empirical questions which can be posed to potential research participants from the public service sector. These questions will enable the research team to generate insights which can assist the South African public sector with understanding the related knowledge, skills and competencies (linked to a selection of priority occupations) associated with the SDGs in question.

1.1. An Overview of the PSETA Scope of Coverage

There are three autonomous spheres of government – national government, provincial government and local government. The national and provincial departments (which fall within the PSETA scope) cover all employees employed in terms of the Public Service Act of 1994 (which excludes medical practitioners, nurses, teachers, police and the military). Many departments, such as education and health, have ‘dual reporting’, i.e. reporting to PSETA and a line-function SETA, such as the Health and Welfare SETA (HWSETA) in the case of health and medical practitioners. National departments are responsible for implementing laws and policies decided on by Parliament or Cabinet. There are nine provincial governments. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) sets the policies and framework for the Public Service at national and provincial levels. There are currently 41 national departments and 109 provincial departments registered with PSETA (PSETA, 2020).

PSETA’s scope of coverage within the Legislative sub-sector is limited to the administrative component, with the members of Parliament function falling within the scope of the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETA (PSETA, 2020).

Public entities, which are the smallest sub-sector within the PSETA scope, have different mandates, but the common skills cutting across these entities are transversal skills. A total of 18 public entities are registered with PSETA (PSETA, 2020).

1.2. A Brief History of the South African Public Service Sector

Before we can proceed to more particular dynamics or concerns within the South African public sector, such as the knowledge, skills and competencies required to achieve the SDGs, it is important to briefly examine the history of the public sector. If skills, knowledge and competencies related to the realisation of the SDGs are to be identified the nature of the *business* of the state, specifically at provincial and national level but also more broadly, needs to be engaged with; albeit briefly. Part of understanding the nature of the public service in South Africa is understanding its political, social and especially historical origins and the impact thereof, direct and indirect, on its current realities and future trajectories.

The past matters and especially so when it comes to the South African public sector. Three historical factors, and their significance to this day, stand out in the history of the South African public sector in the 20th century. The first is that of apartheid. A survey of senior public servants in 1992 indicated that 80% of them were Afrikaans-speaking and 77% supported the National Party (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). At the time there were only two black managers (at the lowest pay grade) in the entire Department of Finance (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Even the Department of Development Planning, which was partially responsible for the delivery of public goods to the black population, only had six senior black managers (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Although there is no necessary connection between a public servant's race and their ability to serve the public it would be difficult to argue that during apartheid, and in the period leading up to the transition to democracy, that race did not play a central role in state capacity, or lack thereof. Especially in that senior public servants often, or even predominantly, actively supported, and implemented policy, for a regime which was only interested in serving the needs of a racial minority.

The second factor is that of the legacy of former homeland officials. Although the leadership of the ANC was generally highly trained and educated, the situation in the former homelands was, to put it mildly, far from ideal: especially in that the former homelands would form an integral component of provincial government in the democratic dispensation. As South Africa transitioned to democracy there were approximately 650 000 homeland officials who had worked in a dysfunctional system and who often had little or rudimentary education. These officials functioned in

systems working according to principles of patronage and personal rule (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Furthermore, the vast majority of the population, in the new democratic South Africa, urgently required the continued but also expanded delivery of a wide range of public goods. As a result the vast majority of homeland officials were incorporated into the new government (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012).

The third factor is that of new public management (NPM). In the 1980s, the traditional bureaucratic public administration model was challenged in countries such as England, Australia and New Zealand. A new model of public sector management emerged in these countries which was called NPM. NPM is not a coherent theory but rather a discrete set of ideas that can be broadly divided into two categories. First, there is the use of private management ideas, such as greater autonomy and flexibility for managers, contract appointments, performance management and new financial techniques. Second, there is the use of market mechanisms such as privatisation and public– private partnerships. NPM was seen as a way of cutting through the red tape and rigidity associated with old style public administration and was seen as a way of providing more efficient service delivery (Cameron, 2010).

The at times uncritical, and far from wholesale, adoption of new public management models and ideas, it could be argued, in certain instances, exacerbated the challenges faced by the South African public sector (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). NPM is no longer very new and has been heavily criticised for over 15 years. Many public administration scholars have argued that due to the deficiencies of NPM approaches, not least of which being that it over-emphasises output and efficiency with an attendant neglect (or insufficient focus on) of matters, some would argue, which are crucial dimensions of the work the public sector is engaged in: namely due consideration of and rigorous incorporation of democratic values and a pronounced focus on matters related to equity (Reiter & Klenk, 2019). Out of these critiques has arisen, a yet to be clearly defined and at present still contested, set of positions known collectively as 'post-new public management' (Reiter & Klenk, 2019) but with certain emergent underlying commonalities: such as arguments for improved coordination and the development of central politico-administrative steering capacity in complex, dynamic and changing environments and contexts . Where the South African public sector is located on the continuum of new public management and post-new public management falls beyond the scope of this particular research project. These wider

systemic dynamics and developments nonetheless inform a research project such as the one being undertaken here. It could be argued that considerations of equity and the realisation of democratic values are central to the realisation of various SDGs.

If the above is indeed the case, then it raises critical questions for the post school education and training system and specifically for PSETA. Such as: what would the knowledge, skills and competencies be of public servants who are not only technically capacitated to deliver on specific SDGs but also committed to equity and democratic values? Which post school education and training institutions, and even specific study programmes, would be best suited to such an undertaking? Is such an undertaking even feasible or desirable?

Irrespective of the insights and recommendations which might arise from initial and exploratory attempts at providing coherent answers to such questions it is essential that any understanding of the South African public sector be historically, socially and politically informed.

2. Sustainable Development Goals: Focusing on Specific Targets

There are a total of seventeen (17) SDGs with 169 associated targets (United Nations, 2015). It will therefore not be feasible, or advisable, to focus on the SDGs in their entirety. The SDGs are focused on achieving a wide range of goals associated with social, environmental, economic, and political progress and development in diverse international, regional, national, and local contexts.

For this project it was decided that the following SDGs (and very specific targets linked to the SDGs) would be focused on to ensure that an in-depth understanding of the knowledge, skills and competencies associated with them could be developed. These SDGs and targets also closely align with strategic objectives and targets of PSETA, DHET and the broader post school education and training sector. Said objectives and targets are also closely linked to, and align with, the goals of the National Development Plan (hereafter NDP).

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Many of the targets linked to the above SDG are focused on basic education. It was therefore decided that only the targets directly concerned with post school education and training would be explored in this project. The SDG targets applicable to the post school education and training sector (with a focus on the South African public sector) are:

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university (United Nations, 2015).

Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (United Nations, 2015).

Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations (United Nations, 2015).

Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy (United Nations, 2015).

It is probable that examining all of the above targets linked to SDG 4, which are only a selection of targets, will result in too broad of a scope of coverage for this project. Meaning if all of the above targets were to be examined it would result in an increase in *breadth* of coverage but potentially result in a lack of *depth* of examination and analysis. It is therefore advisable to only examine certain of the above targets and/or to identify commonalities between targets and then examine the occupations, and associated knowledge, skills and competency requirements, which are critical to the realisation of the target in question.

At present the following areas have been identified as meriting further examination and exploration during the empirical phase of the project:

- Ensuring affordable and quality education tertiary education: TVET, other tertiary institutions and universities (Target 4.3)
- Increasing the number of adult and youths who have relevant skills (Target 4.4). Here the focus will be on examining the skills, knowledge and capabilities of the occupations responsible for occupations and skills related labour market intelligence in the public service sector and/or the broader post school education and training sector.
- Building post school education systems which are more inclusive (in broad terms) and supportive of disadvantaged groups (however defined) (Target 4.5)

The above targets will be the primary focus of this project. Target 4.6, which is focused on adult numeracy and literacy, potentially falls beyond the scope of this project. It will remain for now on the list of targets and considered for inclusion or exclusion in the scope of research at a later stage.

The above targets are all essential and require further examination and analysis in order to develop an in-depth understanding of: firstly, the occupations within the public service sector which are critical to the actualisation of these targets, and, secondly, the skills, knowledge and competencies which civil servants who work in the identified occupations require in order for them to be empowered to reach these targets.

One of the objectives of this particular project will be to examine the extent to which the above targets are aligned with other SDGs such as SDG 16 and SDG 17. After briefly outlining SDG 16 and SDG 17 a brief argument will be presented which hypothesises (to be explored in further depth during the data collection and analysis phase of the project) that there are important interlinkages and co-dependencies between SDG 4, SDG 16 and SDG 17.

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (United Nations, 2015).

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (United Nations, 2015).

SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Target 17.14: Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Target 17.17: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships data, monitoring and accountability (United Nations, 2015).

What are the potential, and actual, interlinkages between targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 and the above listed targets? A preliminary argument can be provided here but this question can only be answered with some measure of accuracy and certainty after stakeholders in the public service sector have been consulted.

Target 16.6 is potentially essential and critical to the realisation of targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5. An example of this would be the potential interlinkages which exist between target 16.6 and target 4.3. If the target is to ensure affordable and quality tertiary education for all adults and youth it could be argued that effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels of the post school education and training sector will be one of the prerequisites to ensure successful realisation of the goal and associated target.

Target 17.14 (which focuses on policy coherence) also clearly illustrates the potential interlinkages between SDG 4, SDG 16 and SDG 17. It could be argued that inter-departmental coordination (Kraak, 2011), in terms of policy and implementing systems and structures, would be an essential prerequisite for the actualisation of targets which are as broad, sweeping and transformative as increasing the quality and affordability of tertiary education for all (target 4.3) or building post school education and training systems which are more inclusive (target 4.5).

Target 17.17 focuses specifically on partnerships at various levels(as well as monitoring and evaluation) which it has been argued is essential not only for the realisation of the SDGs in particular but for sustainable development more broadly defined (Bäckstrand, 2006; Van Huijstee et al., 2007). The realisation of target 17.17

is therefore potentially inextricably interwoven with SDG 4 in its entirety but in particular targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5.

During the course of the literature review, and especially during the empirical phase of this project, it is envisaged that analysis and insights of value, to the South African public service, and a broader audience in the post school education and training sector, will be produced. Said analysis and insights can then be utilised as the foundation of the co-creation, in collaboration with public sector stakeholders, of policy recommendations which will assist PSETA and its stakeholders with the realisation of not only SDG but also other closely related strategic national objectives.

The central hypothesis of the arguments presented and developed here being the following: That the realisation of the SDGs, from a public sector perspective, cannot be viewed in isolation. Meaning the realisation of one set of SDGs (such as SDG 4) is connected, in myriad ways, with the realisation of other SDGs such as the development of state capacity: in this instance specifically capacity related to post school education and training. The exact form, content and level of involvement of the state in these processes is a matter which would require further analysis and, to an extent at least, be determined on a case by case basis. In certain instances, the state will need to capacitate itself in order to play a central and leading role in terms of the determination and provision of post school education and training. In other instances, it could play the role of a mediator and or catalyst. Irrespective of the degree or extent of involvement it is difficult to imagine the state playing no role in the realisation of the SDGS; or alternatively attempting to play a role in the realisation of the SDGs with minimal or weak capacity.

After careful consideration, and consultation with PSETA, it was decided that the primary focus of this research project will be SDG target 4.3 with other targets, especially targets associated with SDG 16 and 17 and which speak to the need to create a strong, capable and democratically accountable state, being addressed indirectly. This is required as it would potentially be problematic, and limiting, to focus exclusively focus on target 4.3 without duly considering the capability of the state institutions responsible for managing and overseeing TVET in South Africa. SDG 4.3 also speaks to the need for quality and affordable university education. This will not be a primary focus of this particular research project but it could emerge during the

empirical phase of this project that in certain instances universities could be best suited to supply (if not fully then at least partially) the knowledge, skills and competencies required by certain segments of the South African public sector workforce.

3. The Sustainable Development Goals: A Review of International Literature

In terms of the actual content and substance of the SDGs the above provides a relatively clear and succinct summary of what they entail; especially as regards the SDGs and associated targets which will be focused on in this specific project. Various debates, discussion and recommendations have however arisen regarding the myriad aspects surrounding the SDGs. Some of these debates, discussions and recommendations will be covered here. This is not meant to be in any way as a comprehensive overview but will be presented in such a way that a more holistic and critical understanding of the SDGs can be developed which will assist with later phases of the project.

4. Making the case for why the SDGs matter

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 after 3 years of multi-stakeholder engagement and inter-governmental negotiations (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals and merged the agendas of development and environment. A central concern, or focus area, of the SDGs is the matter of responsibility. Who exactly is responsible for realising, and keeping track of progress, of the realisation of the sustainable development goals? (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017).

Making the case for why the sustainable development goals matter is not necessarily difficult or overly problematic; especially in a context such as South Africa with high levels of poverty, inequality (Chatterjee, 2019), struggling post school education and training institutions (Tewari & Ilesanmi, 2020) and substantive environmental challenges and concerns (Omisore, 2018). These are just some of the intersecting challenges South Africa faces. Potentially all 17 SDGS, and associated targets, are relevant to the South African context in some manner and to some extent.

What is however problematic, and which requires further in-depth investigation and exploration, especially for instance as regards say target 4.3 which speaks to the need for affordable and quality TVET and university education for all men and women, is the matter of *responsibility*. For this particular research project, the main focus will be to determine the skills, knowledge and competencies required for a selection of critical occupations in the PSET system which are responsible for the realisation of SDG 4.3; amongst others. The issue is however that before occupations can be identified, followed by knowledge, skills and qualifications, what needs to take place is an identification of responsible departments, divisions and individuals; especially as regards achievement of SDG target 4.3 and specifically the role of the state in the realisation of the goals and objectives associated with this target.

In essence then the argument presented here would be that the SDGs, and their realisation, are desirable and much needed objectives, particularly so in the South African context. Two problems need to be engaged with. The first being that the SDGs, and associated targets, are too diverse and numerous to allow for any meaningful and substantive engagement: at the level of policy and implementation. Hence a more focused and precise approach is required. The second being that underlying potentially any engagement with the SDGs is the matter of responsibility for their realisation.

5. Critiques of the SDGs: Working Generatively with Tensions and Contradictions

There are a wide range of critiques of the Sustainable Development Goals from a multitude of diverse perspectives. These critiques do not necessarily entail a complete abandonment of the SDGs but should be given the due consideration and ideally be incorporated and constructively engaged with and overcome. A substantive, and hence critical engagement, with the SDGs has the potential to strengthen, as opposed to weakening, engagement with the SDGs at the level of policy and implementation.

Sultana (2018) offers a potentially devastating critique of the SDGs:

However, the 17 goals and dozens of targets are fuzzy, ambitious, often unimplementable and contradictory, and perhaps even hubristic. While the SDGs

are supposed to be aspirational, they are open to interpretation, capture, and subject to abuse by those with power. Also, the SDGs are supposed to be transformative, but exactly how that may be is still unknown. Indeed, the SDGs can be considered to be post-political, that is, a polite consensus and celebration without any real change. While supporters can point to the progressive possibilities in the vision of the SDGs, we will not know until they are implemented and the outcomes, both intended and unintended, are evident.(Sultana, 2018, p. 187)

How does one begin to work constructively with such a potentially debilitating critique? Viewed from a different perspective a comprehensive critique such as the one above offers a highly generative point of entry into the SDGs. What follows is an attempt at a productive and constructive engagement with critiques such as the one offered above.

Take for instance the claim that the SDGs are in many instances not implementable. There is probably a lot more truth in this claim than some in positions of power and influence would be comfortable to admit. Take target 4.3. What would the implications be of providing affordable and quality TVET, and university education to all men and women in South Africa? From a purely financial perspective the cost would be immense as South Africa already spends a substantive portion of its GDP on education (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). Furthermore it is questionable whether free, or even just highly affordable higher education, would result in substantive decreases in inequality(Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). There are many reasons for this one of which being that 50% of learners who enter the education system do not finish matric (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). Of those who complete matric many do not meet the academic requirements for admission to higher education and even for those who gain access many never complete their higher education studies (Shay, 2017).

The above may seem as if SDG 4.3 is futile to pursue. Or it can make one question it and reformulate it: although this questioning and reformulating may lead to substantive changes in perspective. It could be argued that for those who want, and can access, higher education that TVET (the primary focus of this research undertaking) should indeed be affordable and of a high quality. The implications of such an approach have

wide ranging systemic considerations. One of these could be that TVET would need to be more focused. Focused in the sense that it meets the genuine needs of industry and that those who participate in the system are driven, motivated, capable and empowered to succeed in their studies with the knowledge that a meaningful, secure and stable occupational destination(s) await at the end of their studies. This could potentially lead to a much smaller and more capable TVET system in South Africa. Such a scenario would however only be feasible if the cost of failure or non-participation is substantively reduced. Meaning non-participation in higher education (assuming it is a choice on the part of the individual) will not result in severe and potentially lifelong costs: such as precarious employment, increased likelihood of unemployment and poverty. Such a state of affairs would in return substantive changes in other domains to ensure that non-participation or failure in higher education (for whatever reason) does not result in potentially harsh and severe consequences: such a universal basic income (Banerjee et al., 2019) or increases in the national minimum wage or measures to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth (Francis & Webster, 2019).

It could be argued that the above has very little to nothing to do with TVET in South Africa. Although indirect it very much has a bearing on TVET education. Assuming our national financial resources are limited, and far from infinite, it follows that we need to have realistic, and achievable or 'implementable', goals for our TVET system; SGD related or otherwise.

A brief examination, and presentation of counter arguments, to a powerful second critique of the SDGs, which also applies to target 4.3, needs to be undertaken. This is the claim that the SDGs run the risk of being post-political. If this is indeed the case how do we politicise the SDGs? This will depend on how one defines the political. A simplistic, but useful in this particular instance, way of politicising the SDGs would be the active consideration of, and engagement with, power dynamics. What would this entail in the context of target 4.3? Clearly the needs of industry, and in the case of PSETA national and provincial government departments, need to be met in terms of producing capable TVET graduates who can contribute to the organisations which they eventually join and form an integral part of. A strong case can however also be made that TVET graduates need to be empowered and enabled, during the course of their studies, to contribute actively to the common good and that education (TVET or

otherwise) cannot be viewed purely instrumentally and that education also has intrinsic value (Walker, 2018). Meaning whatever the ultimate or specific form and content of TVET it would potentially be problematic to advocate for, or implement, a TVET system which only or primarily serves the interests of the powerful: in industry or the state. Or it could for instance be found, as some recent research indicates, that TVET in a context such as South Africa, best serves the needs to students and employers if it is industry led and closely integrated with the industry or sector in question (Allais et al., 2021).

The implications of such a position might be daunting but ultimately, if the SDGs are to be realised, need to be engaged with actively and rigorously: at the level of research, policy formulation and eventual implementation.

6. The SDGs and the National Development Plan

Calling for global solutions to global challenges, while requiring implementation regarding national priorities, does of course make sense. However, it presents national governments with the challenge of retaining the integrity of national planning processes, while aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda's SDGs (Fourie, 2018).

To what extent do the SDGs generally, and specifically target 4.3, align with the National Development Plan? Why is it important to align the SDGs with the NDP? What needs to be in place to ensure that the two are aligned? What would the skills development requirements be, especially as regards public sector employees, to ensure that they are capacitated to conceptualise and implement initiatives and structures which ensure alignment and ultimately realisation of these goals? This last question will be more fully answered during the empirical phase of this project.

The NDP has nine focal points, namely (i) creating employment, (ii) expanding infrastructure, (iii) transitioning to a low-carbon economy, (iv) transforming urban and rural communities, (v) improving education and training, (vi) ensuring quality healthcare, (vii) building a capable state, (viii) fighting corruption and improving accountability, and (ix) consolidating social cohesion (National Planning Commission, 2011b, pp. 10–27). It seeks to realise these aims by 2030 (Fourie, 2018).

The NDP focal point which directly speaks to target 4.3 is that of improving education and training. Two other points are however indirectly related to SDG target 4.3 are that of creating employment (as TVET is closely linked, in terms of its official stated purpose at least, with the goal of equipping individuals with the skills required for either gainful employment or self-employment) and building a capable state. The link between TVET and the creation of employment is, albeit contested, more self-apparent. The link between TVET and a capable state less so. Firstly, in order to improve the quality and affordability of TVET a capable state is required. Not a capable state in general but specifically the state department(s) responsible for public TVET colleges and for quality control, regulation and oversight of private TVET colleges. Secondly TVET colleges could produce, in certain instances for certain occupations, the skilled individuals required by the state to realise the SDG as well as the NDP objectives.

Alignment between the NDP and the 2030 Agenda is clearly possible, but not without complications and difficulties. A key element in aligning these development plans is the creation of policy coherence (Fourie, 2018). Earlier in this literature review the importance of *responsibility*, specifically who is the primary agent or body responsible for leading and co-ordinating policy formulation and eventual implementation of said policy, in terms of realising the SDGs. A second key focus would then be that of *policy coherence*. The argument in essence then being that *responsibility* and *policy coherence* are two key requirements for the realisation of the SDGs and specifically target 4.3.

What are the key requirements for ensuring policy coherence in the South African context? In terms of SDG target 4.3 and potentially other targets.

It has been argued that the following guidelines could assist the South African public sector with improving on its policy coherence:

- (i) prioritizing political buy-in, (ii) safeguarding country ownership of development priorities, (iii) using and improving existing institutional structures and processes, (iv) stimulating cooperation across government departments by using an issue-based approach and (v) including a long-term and transnational perspective when considering policy impacts (Fourie, 2018).

The above seems to be sound and logical recommendations. It does however raise a few pressing questions. To what extent is the South African public sector currently and historically able to adhere to or follow the above guidelines? What is inhibiting, and what would enable, the South African public sector to actively engage with, internalise and adopt the above guidelines? What would the skills, and in turn education and training, requirements be for public sector employees, especially for those occupations in the public sector responsible for policy formulation and implementation (including monitoring and evaluation), to actively and productively contribute to the above processes? Assuming the required skills are identified and effectively developed, what would the inter institutional, intra institutional and systemic enabling or constraining factors be which would inhibit or enable civil servants to engage with, develop and implement the above guidelines in order to ensure policy coherence; said policy coherence being potentially essential for the realisation of the SDGs and NDP (Kraak, 2011).

7. The Role of Transversal Skills in the Realisation of the SDGs and NDP

It has been argued that an issue-based approach to policy coherence should be adopted (Fourie, 2018). Most developmental challenges are cross-cutting and focusing on these issues will require cross-sectoral integration. Identifying, establishing, developing, expanding and revising systems and structures for policy coherence can be immensely complicated and will most likely require the development of transversal skills.

What exactly are transversal skills and where and how are they developed? This is one of the key questions this research will aim to shed some light on: specifically, in terms of the transversal skills required by a selection of critical occupations in the public sector organisations responsible for TVET in South Africa. Insights gained during this investigation will also potentially be applicable to other domains of the public sector: barring what could be substantive contextual differences depending on the domain of application of said transversal skills. Transversal skills also raise the issue of domain specific specialised knowledge. Are transversal skills developed, in some yet to be determined way, independently of specialised disciplinary knowledge and/or a specific occupation? Are transversal skills in some way context independent?

Or are they determined and developed not only through formal education and training (at a higher education institution in the form of full-time studies, part time studies or short courses) but also at and through work? Especially in this instance within, and through, the work done at public sector institutions. Before investigating these questions in a bit more detail it is worth briefly outlining what transversal skills might entail.

Table 1
A framework of transversal skills

General Domains	Examples of Skills
Critical and innovative thinking	Creativity, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, application skills, reflective thinking, reasoned decision-making
Interpersonal skills	Communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, collaboration, sociability, collegiality, empathy, compassion
Intrapersonal skills	Self-discipline, ability to learn independently, flexibility and adaptability, self-awareness, perseverance, self-motivation, compassion, integrity, risk-taking, self-respect
Global citizenship	Awareness, tolerance, openness, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, ability to resolve conflicts, civic/political participation, conflict resolution, respect for the environment
Media and information literacy ICT,	Ability to obtain and analyse information through express ideas through media and ICT, ethical use of ICT

(Valūnaitė-Oleškevičienė et al., 2019)

Many, even possibly all of the above, transversal skills could be applicable to the realisation of SDG target 4.3, and associated NDP focus areas, as well as other SDGs. The above skills become even more critical if one accepts the argument that the realisation of SDG and NDP goals are by their very nature complex and multi-faceted. If for instance there is a need to improve existing institutional processes and structures responsible for TVET provision in South Africa, in order to improve the quality and affordability of TVET, then skills such as reflective thinking and reasoned decision-making would be essential. It is difficult to imagine a substantively improved public sector responsible for TVET which is not to some extent capable of reflective thinking and reasoned decision-making.

8. Where and How Are Transversal Skills Developed?

Are transversal skills developed independently of context? Or are they developed within a particular disciplinary (whether via a degree at university or other course of study at a TVET college), then occupational and then company, industry or sector specific context? This does not imply a simplistic linearity as the process of learning can, and is, multi-faceted, complex and far from linear. For instance, someone can unlearn reflective thinking and reasoned decision making, for instance if these skills were acquired during studies: TVET or otherwise. Circumstances could then change resulting in the need to re-acquire and develop these skills; or a whole range of possible scenarios which will differ on an often case by case basis.

There are questions which also arise which apply specifically to the public sector and the South African public service sector. For instance: to what extent, if at all, are the transversal skills required in the public sector unique? Is creativity and reasoned decision-making different, substantially so, depending on the occupation and industry/sector context?

It could be argued that it indeed is as the public sector, in South Africa and elsewhere, is unique. An industry to industry or sector to sector, even occupation to occupation, comparison would be very difficult to undertake, and subtle differences would potentially emerge. There is however a strong case to be made for the public sector being fundamentally different from the private sector. In that the public sector, or similar contexts such as NGOs, produces professions which are substantively different in that serving in the public sector requires a commitment to the public interest, effecting, understanding societal change, formulating and implementing policy that contributes to the common good and a commitment to democratic values and inclusivity (Lyons et al., 2006). This position however goes against views held by certain proponents of new public management which would argue that 'management is management'(Saint-Martin, 2001).

Although the above are valid points these questions can only be answered empirically. It could for instance be found that, at least for the occupations identified and examined for this research project, that the management of TVET from a public sector perspective is indeed very similar to management broadly speaking. Or alternately it could be found that the knowledge, skills and competencies required for managing

and overseeing TVET systems which are affordable and of adequate quality is indeed unique requiring a more nuanced, in-depth and context specific understanding of transversal skills requirements.

Two further points require brief discussion before concluding this section. The first being that there is a subtle but potentially important distinction to be made between two claims. When it comes to the knowledge, skills and competencies required by the public sector in terms of the provision of TVET is it that technical domain specific skills (specifically related to TVET) is necessary but not sufficient or is it that technical domain specific skills are sufficient but not necessary?(Berman, 2015). Meaning can a public servant excel at TVET system management without being a TVET specialist with the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through formal study, short courses and work experience over an extended period of time? Or put differently: are transversal skills so essential that technical domain specific expertise is not required?

Secondly it is important to take note of a recent comprehensive study on 21st century skills, which are very similar to or often used interchangeably with transversal skills, where over 140 000 job descriptions were reviewed and analysed(Rios et al., 2020). It was found that, contrary to claims that there a wide range of transversal skills in demand, that only four so-called '21st century' skills were emphasized by employers in job advertisements: oral communication, written communication, collaboration and problem solving(Rios et al., 2020).

It has also been argued, and these arguments will be explored and expanded on during the empirical phase of the project, that transversal skills is a problematic concept and that 'transversal abilities' be used instead (Winch & Addis, 2020). The argument being that transversal skills, or rather 'abilities', are not generic skills but, to varying degrees and extents, context and individually specific(Winch & Addis, 2020). The use of the term ' skills' implies that these attributes can be acquired and then near universally applied: irrespective of context(Winch & Addis, 2020). Which has worrying echoes of the 'management is management' arguments presented earlier: transversal skills are transversal skills. The points the authors make regarding specifically problem solving are potentially highly relevant to not only broader debates regarding

transversal and/or 21st century skills but also the skills or 'abilities' required by public servants to problem solve as it were in the TVET space.

One of the most important, and arguably under-rated groups of these abilities are those associated with problem solving. We argue that there is no such thing as a generic and transferable problem solving ability, let alone skill since this kind of ability is domain specific, depending as it does on knowledge both local and theoretical, as well as relevant experience of the domain(Winch & Addis, 2020, p. 7).

The above then raises the question of whether problem solving, and other transversal abilities such as communication skills, associated with TVET in the public sector are indeed domain specific, dependant on theoretical and local knowledge and requiring relevant experience of the domain in question. It would also potentially be important to determine the weighting, and relationships between, these various aspects. Could for instance local and theoretical knowledge of the domain, in the absence of for instance relevant experience of the domain (say in the case of a senior public servant who themselves do not have relevant experience of the domain as they have not served as a principal of a TVET college), be adequate to perform at an adequate level of proficiency as a public servant responsible for TVET in a South African context at national or provincial level? These are some of the areas this research will attempt to shed some light on.

9. TVET and the Public Sector in South Africa

The TVET system in South Africa has been described, at the level of governance, as one where there are *fragmented input controls* (Wedekind, 2010). A system where responsibility and rule-making regarding TVET is dispersed across the politico-administrative systems and structures of government (Wedekind, 2010). The extent to which this is still the case in the South African TVET system will be determined, partially at least, by engagement with PSETA stakeholders in the public sector responsible for the governance of TVET systems and institutions. If it is indeed the case that this state of affairs still pertains today, and assuming that calls (SDG target 4.3 or otherwise) to substantively increase the quality and affordability of TVET

provision are taken seriously, it follows that there is some legitimacy to arguments examined earlier in this literature review advocating for higher levels of policy coherence.

Wedekind, in insights arising from interviews with TVET college principals in rural and urban contexts, also point out that:

This lack of experience in the vocational sector meant that many of the principals were not in a position to play a strong leadership role in the college, and they focused instead on managing the mergers in a relatively technical fashion. Certainly there was little sense that the principals were actively managing the curriculum processes (Wedekind, 2010, p. 310).

Some of the principals also spoke at length about the challenges they faced in terms of developing not only their own understanding of VET, as some of them do not come from a VET professional background, but also having to struggle as a result of their management teams, and the members of the college councils, not always having VET experience(Wedekind, 2010). TVET principals also spoke about the short comings of funding systems operational at the time(Wedekind, 2010). In terms of the affordability of TVET (from the individual, industry, societal or state's perspectives, this could also be a crucial area for investigation and exploration.

Although Wedekind does not specifically look at national and provincial public servants responsible for TVET during his analysis, but when read in conjunction with Winch's arguments that context matters, interesting, generative and important (from a PSETA perspective) areas for research and investigation arises. To what extent do public servants responsible for TVET need to be experts? What role would, and does, transversal abilities play in their ability to assist with the development and provision of affordable and quality TVET education in South Africa?

10. Conclusion & Brief Outline of Next Phase of the Project

This section has provided an overview of literature potentially relevant to the research undertaking in question. As an iterative and expansive process will be adopted and followed, the specific focus of the project, and hence applicable literature and conceptual insights and framings, could alter based on input provided by PSETA and its stakeholders.

At this stage it is recommended that the following be undertaken, after consultation with PSETA and/or its stakeholders:

- 1) An identification of occupations, within the Public Service sector scope of coverage, which are responsible for TVET in South Africa. Occupations, broadly speaking, identified by PSETA in their SSP, such as: General Manager Public Service, Senior Government Official, Senior Government Manager, Finance Manager, Policy and Planning Manager and Programme or Project Manager could potentially be relevant. Further detail (at the level of 'specialisation' according to the OFO) and verification will be required. It could also be found that in terms of SDG target 4.3 none of these occupations are directly relevant.
- 2) The formulation of a set of clear empirical questions to be posed to research participants (after informed consent has been obtained from the individuals and their institutions) during online or in person semi-structured interviews. Although not confirmed or finalised as of yet the following questions are proposed:

- 2.1 Which public sector organisation does the individual in question work for?
- 2.2 What is their occupation?
- 2.3 What does their occupation entail in terms of tasks, duties and responsibilities?
- 2.4 What do they understand by affordable TVET?
- 2.5 What do they understand by quality TVET?
- 2.6 What role does, or could, their occupation play in the provision of affordable and quality TVET education?
- 2.7 What 'skills' or 'abilities' would be required for them to make a more substantive contribution to the above? I.e. improving the quality and affordability of TVET.
- 2.8 Which transversal abilities are most important in the fulfilment of their tasks, duties and responsibilities? Ask them to list and expand (with examples) as many as they can.
- 2.9 If the affordability and quality of TVET were to be substantively improved how would their response to the above question change? For example: Problem solving or communication skills could say become more important.
- 2.10 Do they have domain/context specific experience of TVET? If yes, how does this improve their ability to perform the functions associated with their specific role? If no, do they experience challenges as a result?
- 2.11 Are their transversal abilities domain specific? In terms of the fact that they work for the public sector and/or in terms of that they work specifically with and for TVET colleges and TVET stakeholders. If yes, how? If no, how? For example: Are communication skills and problem solving in the public sector, and when working TVET, different from communication skills and problem solving broadly defined.

As can be seen some of the above questions are somewhat cumbersome and require further refinement by the research team and research director. Consultation with PSETA and/or its stakeholders will assist greatly with refining and developing the questions.

In conclusion, the SDGs and NDP are much needed articulations of pressing socio-economic environmental needs in especially the South African context. Although this research project will focus on SDG 4.3 it is envisaged that if approved by PSETA, and undertaken with adequate analytic rigour, it could generate insights which could contribute to domains of interest and relevance to the broader public service sector: especially in terms of developing, deepening and expanding our understanding of transversal skills.

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APPROVAL OF RESEARCH REPORT BY CEO

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APPROVAL OF RESEARCH REPORT BY CEO	
Recommendation(s)	Approved/ Not Approved
Comments: SDG Project Literature Review Report approved	
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