



Health and Welfare Sector
Education and Training Authority

HWSETA

ABSTRACT

Evaluating the Performance of the Learnership Programme Strategy for the Unemployed: 2011/12 to 2015/16

Daphney Mogopudi

Bulelwa Plaatjie

During the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III period, spanning from 2011/12 to 2015/16, the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) put in place a strategy to facilitate the employment of unemployed learners funded to acquire qualifications through learnerships. This strategy was actioned as a condition for participating in discretionary grant funded learnerships for the unemployed. Expressions of interest and Memorandums of Agreement (MoAs) have, through these years, actively sought for a commitment from employers that wanted to place unemployed learners in learnership positions within their organisations. All employers who participated in learnerships for the unemployed, committed (through the HWSETA MoAs) to employ all unemployed learners, placed in learnership positions within their organisations, upon successful completion of the learnership. In cases where employers could not employ these learners the agreement was that they would find employment in sister organisations. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the performance of this strategy from 2011/12 to 2015/16. The study also sought to probe the challenges that may have impeded some employers from appointing these learners as employees in their organisations. The evaluation used quantitative methodology informed by the strategic approach. Data triangulation was applied to allow for evidence-based evaluation.

The evaluation has indicated that the learnership programme outcomes are not aligned with the MoA strategy. The learnership MoA section 11¹ indicates that 100% of the learners should be employed upon successful completion of the learnership based on the evaluation the data has indicated that overall the employment rate is at 65% as opposed to the stipulated 100%. The health and welfare sector were analysed separately as they vary in relation to organisation size, number of learners and absorption rate. The employment rate of learners who completed learnerships in the health sector was three thirds, with 57% of the health sector organisations employing 100% of the learners as stipulated in the MoA learnership strategy. The employment rate in the welfare sector was one third with 20% of the employers adhering to the learnership strategy.

The challenges reported by both the health and welfare sector included delayed certification, learners dropouts and unavailability of vacant positions. In addition, large size organisations had high rates of employment (over 40% of the organisations in the health sector had a company size of more than 150+ and 60% of the organisations in the welfare sector had an organisational size of 0-49), which could be a contributing factor to

the capacity to employ. Moreover, less than a quarter of the organisations in the welfare sector indicated that they are no longer participating as an employer but as a training provider, due to the inability to secure

employment upon learner completion. This indicates that this strategy can negatively affect future participation and programme sustainability for employers in the welfare sector. There is, however, an indication of sustainability in the health sector due to high employment rates of learners upon completion.

The following lessons were derived from the evaluation: Firstly, we are operating at a 65% compliance rate as opposed to a 100% strategy compliance rate. The health sector seems to be leading in terms of compliance and capacity. Further enquiry is required on how the welfare sector can be supported. Secondly, monitoring needs to be strengthened. This suggests that the study's overall findings are critical at programme and systemic level. At a programme level, the study has shown that employers' capacity to absorb unemployed learners are shaped by the internal dynamics of their respective workplaces such as their financial position, demand opportunities and company size. The structure of the learnership programmes also require support at a systemic level. This study has shown the danger of homogenising ideas about skills development and learnerships which does not take into account the variance between sectors nor their diverse structural challenges. Allais, Marock and Ngcwangu (2017)² show that human resources development at a national level in South Africa requires a holistic approach, one which embraces all aspects of human development. This study shows that the welfare sector employers require additional support to absorb more learners and could provide critical experience to learners committed to a wider concept of human development.

- Daphney Mogopudi is the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA): daphneym@hwseta.org.za
- Ms Bulelwa Plaatjie is the Acting Executive Manager: Research Information Monitoring and Evaluation at the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA): bulelwap@hwseta.org.za