

RESEARCH AGENDA

FUTURE PERFECT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



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VISION

“To be a credible and effective skills development partner ensuring the delivery of service excellence that will produce a highly-skilled world-class workforce through various skills development interventions.”

MISSION

“To establish a credible institutional mechanism that facilitates an efficient and effective skills development process, through a range of quality services and partnerships, to contribute to the achievement of sector competitiveness, transformation and economic growth.”

1. Introduction and Background

The Minister of Higher Education established the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M SETA) and Training on 1 April 2011 after Government took a decision to cluster sectors in order to strengthen value-chain linkages between related industries. The FP&M SETA mandate is:

- To provide skills development services to the clothing, footwear, forestry, furniture, general goods, leather, packaging, print media, printing, publishing, pulp and paper, textiles and wood products sectors;
- To implement the objectives of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS III); and
- To ensure that people obtain the critical or scarce skills that are needed to build the capacity of the sector to become economically sustainable and globally competitive.

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established to bridge the gap between education and the workplace. SETAs are funded through the Skills Development Levy grant system. Employers pay a skills development levy to SARS, 80% of the funds pool are transferred to the SETAs through South African Revenue Service (SARS) and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). A share of this funding is distributed to employers who are investing in training, the remainder supports the implementation of sector skills plans and a variety of training interventions including formal institutional, and workplace based training in order to achieve the intent of the National Skills Development Strategy.

“In terms of the white paper for post school education and training the SETAs are expected to obtain accurate data about workplace skills needs as well as support providers to deliver programmes necessary in their sectors. The SETAs focus is going to be the development of workers within enterprises and development of pipeline to such workplaces through the promotion of internships, learnerships, and apprenticeships.”

2. Skills Planning and Research Division

The Skills Planning and Research Division in FP&M is responsible for creating and implementing the SETAs research agenda. This includes provision of research services and products in relation to skills planning and the SETAs role to bridge the gaps between training to work.

3. Key research objectives of the Skills Planning and Research Division are:

- a) Formulate FP&M SETA's research strategy
- b) Enhancement of the research culture in the FP&M SETA
- c) Introduction of incentives for the promotion of research endeavors
- d) Establish accurate baseline data for trend analysis purposes.
- e) Monitoring of progress and impact of research programmes
- f) Formation of working relations in research project switches research institutions, research council, Higher Education and Training (HET), Technical Education and Vocational Training (TVET) and skills planning practitioners.
- g) Harmonisation, capturing and analysis of skills planning data from internal divisions in a centralized repository
- h) Coordination of all processes that lead up to the development, creation and update of the Sector Skills Plan (SSP)
- i) React to external research request from the Department of Higher Education and Training
- j) Contribution of skills planning direction and information to contribute to the formation of a 'credible mechanism for skills planning'
- k) Participation in the skills planning community through research seminars, colloquiums, workshops, and roundtables.
- l) Contribution to the skills planning research resources through publication and dissemination of skills planning informative research.

4. Context of Research Agenda

The importance of research in policy and strategy development cannot be overstated. The NSDS III and other national discussion and guiding documents highlight the need for the SETAs to use its close contact with industry to establish mechanisms to document and communicate recent and emerging trends, as well as to develop solid baseline indicators and contribute the creation of an institutional mechanism for skills planning.

Research is a planning tool that allows for a better understanding of unknown and unforeseen features, necessary in government strategies, projects, and policies. It is in these times of scarce resources and uncertain global economic conditions that policies and strategies need to be backed by accurate evidence. Through research we can systematically collect and present information; that serves our planning purpose and allows for a better understanding of unknown and unforeseen aspects, necessary labour market strategies, projects and interventions. Research gives policymakers the proper tools to address issues in a pragmatic manner.

Application of proper research in formulation of development strategies can help ensure that communities and the targeted beneficiaries of these strategies are afforded the best possible outcomes. It is through adequate research that policies can be based on real issues that affect people and these can be better identified when holistic research is undertaken that considers both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of a policy or strategy. With all these considered, the new draft Sector Skills Planning framework from the DHET encourages SETAs to undertake evidence based research in their development of SSPs. SETAs also have a research role through which they need to utilise data, undertake research and evaluations to inform skills development strategies and interventions. FP&M SETA is working towards accurate information for the development of its Sector Skills Plan (SSP) and for the implementation of skills planning interventions in FP&M subsectors.

One of the country's biggest developmental challenges is high unemployment especially amongst young graduates, which is further aggravated by misalignment between skills demand, and skills supply. It is against this background that the FP&M SETA tightens its research priorities through an expression of its research plans and focus on issues relating to its mandate of linking education, training, and the workplace.

5. Research Agenda

The research agenda is largely based on making intensive efforts to address the country's skills development priorities from a research perspective through participation and contribution into the academic and research community. This requires that FP&M to establish strong partnerships with academic, research and development institutions that work within the skills planning and development fraternity. The SETA would provide quality research employing accurate and evidence based data for the development of their key documents, which are the Sector Skills Plan, the Scarce and Critical Skills list and overall skills planning related information.

The research agenda is grounded in a precise understanding of South Africa's skills development challenges and the necessary improvements needed for the creation of a skilled and capable workforce as articulated in the White Paper on Post School Education of (2013).

6. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the research agenda is to provide strategic direction and work towards the achievement of the FP&M SETA's research objectives and priorities. The research agenda explicitly outlines our research priorities in effort to ensure that resources are directed to research and ensure their alignment to the FP&M SETA priorities. It also provides a foundation for the development of a detailed research plan and project which will largely be implemented through the Research Chair Initiative (RCI).

This research agenda provides direction and a basis for more detailed project plans addressing each of the research objectives. However, it is to maintain flexibility, and constantly be integrated into emerging national research and development priorities. These are detailed below:

Objective 1: Development of a Research Focus

- Research contribution to skills development and labour market information relating to the FP&M SETA 13 sub-sectors.
- Publication of research reports and or working papers and disseminated to FP&M SETA subsectors.
- Primary research is produced for the purpose of identifying and confirming scarce and critical skills and related skills shortages for planning purposes.

Objective 2: Articulation, clustering and shared services through, building of systematic dialogue and collaboration

- Facilitate the establishment of partnership with international training institutions and universities that can support skills development within FP& M SETA sub-sectors.
- Support knowledge sharing from international partners.
- Create opportunities for collaboration and centers of excellence.
- Enhance engagements with our service providers.
- Collaborative research into skills bench strength of all 13 sub-sectors.
- Benchmark locally to identify model sub-sectors.
- Benchmark international to establish learning site for us.
- Develop milestones for each sub-sector.

Objective 3: Contribution to labour market intelligence and post school education research

- Research instruments and methodology for labour market and sector skills planning purposes are produced.
- A mechanism for gathering and analysis of labour market intelligence is developed for the FP&M SETA sub-sectors.
- Collaboration with industry in the development of their sectoral growth strategies/models for responsive development of the scarce and critical skills lists.

Objective 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

- Produce research instruments and methodologies for monitoring and evaluation of FP&M SETA interventions and projects.
- Produce research instruments and methodologies suited for a FP&M SETA annual industry survey are produced.
- Produce research instruments and methodologies suited for an FP&M SETA annual stakeholder perception survey.
- A sustainable learner progress tracking system for the FP&M SETA is developed.

Objective 5: Research Methodologies, data curation systems and establishment of baseline data deposits

- Produce suitable research instruments and methodologies for an impact assessment study of FP&M SETA interventions and projects.
- Research reports are published in recognised publications and disseminated amongst FP&M SETA subsectors.
- Produce a research repository and data knowledge management system for FP&M data, research, and knowledge created.
- Establish accurate baseline data for trend analysis purposes.

Objective 6: Recognition of Prior learning (RPL)

- A Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process is developed and implemented to increase the through-put rate of learners registered for an FP&M related qualification.
- Research and Skills Planning and Constituency Support Division personnel are coached and mentored to improve research practice for the FP&M SETA.

Objective 7: Capacity building and skills transfer

- Funding of 2 PhD or 2 Master's students is overseen.
- The Research Chair supervises two PhD or two Master's students conducting research relating to FP&M SETA skills planning and labour market intelligence.

7. Research Priority Areas

This section provides an overview of the selected research priorities. These research areas reflect the research that is considered essential to the FP&M SETA. These are aligned to the overall role of SETAs as reflected in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training from the Department of Higher Education and Training as approved in November of 2013, the FP&M SETA Strategic Plan of 2014 and the SETAs Annual Performance Plan (APP) of 2014.

To provide technical research support and capacity to the FP&M SETA to deliver on sector skills planning interventions across the various FP&M SETA units and sub-sectors, namely Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), curricula updates and interventions, toolkit for SMME operators, learner placements, and dialogue and collaboration between the research institutions and the skills planning community. These research focus areas are outlined below:

A. Updating Curricula

Rationale:

Changes in the economy, technological advancements, as well as global environmental changes affect the labour market environment. Skills planning should react to these changes by ensuring that the curricula taught in training institutions is aligned to labour market trends, changes and needs. This would ensure that learners that come out of the system are able to respond to industry needs and immediately contribute to the growth of the economy by providing their skills and knowledge where needed.

Priority Areas for Research

Curriculum Interventions important to achieving National Skills Accord (NSA) and FP&M SETA Sector Skills Plan (SSP) Artisan and Technical Targets. Establish the quantitative targets that may be achievable and necessary for sector business needs; identify the qualitative concerns in these specific artisan/technical areas (in particular in relation to maths and science and other critical curriculum areas):

- Identify the institutional interventions that can best address the qualitative and quantitative concerns in the relevant provider sectors, especially FETs.

B. Toolkit for Small Medium and Micro Enterprise Operators

Priority Areas for Research

- Providing a closer link to the SME operators and training institutions.
- Access to valuable practical and soft business skills.

C. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Rationale:

Recognition of Prior Learning is still one of the main platforms through which past injustices within the training and education can be tackled. This cannot be neglected and it is thus important to constantly search for ways through which RPL can be inserted into the formal education and training system. Since RPL has made slow progress across industries, FPM can contribute to in researching the most viable interventions to ensure that learners in possession of the appropriate skills and practical knowledge are credited with appropriate qualifications.

Priority Areas for Research

- Researching the most viable interventions.
- Appropriate skills and practical knowledge.

D. Contribution to Skills Development and Labour Market Intelligence Research in and post school education research

Rationale:

Small medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly being recognised as productive drivers of economic growth, development and a source of employment for African countries. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), there is a noticeable increase in the emergence of SMEs in countries like Zambia, Uganda, Ghana, and South Africa, which registered a growth below 10%. However, the sustainable growth of SMEs is still a hurdle. This is where FP&M SETA can contribute by providing a closer link to the SME operators and training institutions. This would increase access to valuable practical and soft business skills that would contribute to their success.

There is substantial evidence of a variety of mismatches between the supply and demand of provision of technical and vocational education and training in South Africa. The SETAs main objective is to link education and the workplace; however, there are currently skills shortages especially in areas of vocational training, engineering and construction fields. FP&M SETA is to make a concerted effort in undertaking primary research on skills shortages, and mismatches in FP&M specific industries.

Priority Areas for Research

- Mismatches between skills demand and skills supply in FP&M SETA sub-sectors.
- The impact of the mismatch between demand and supply on the workplace within the FP&M sector.
- In provincial growth and development priority areas.
- Labour profile of the FP&M sector to determine patterns of employment by race, disability, gender, education/qualification, class, disability, and geography.

E. New Quality Assurance Platforms and Monitoring and Evaluation Methods

Rationale

FP&M SETA needs to understand the relationship and infrastructure that is required and available and the accreditation requirements of trade test centers. FP&M SETA has developed know-how in terms of accrediting trade centers and all the work that has been done may serve as a baseline.

Priority Areas for Research

- A study on the link between NAMB, FET Colleges, Industries, Trade Test Centers and their accreditation requirements.
- provide a detailed conceptual map of the necessary roles and relationships.
- build sector-wide understanding of the strategy and plan for establishing the new quality assurance systems.
- Provide specific recommendations to FP&M SETA and other role-players on their responsibilities in the quality assurance processes.

F. Articulation, clustering and shared services through, building of systematic dialogue and collaboration

FP&M SETA intends to form effective research relationships, and partnerships, with universities, other public recognised research bodies, relevant government departments and with other SETAs along the same value chain. These should lead to long-term strategic partnership that assist in the implementation of the research agenda and facilitate capacity development for SETA research and placements of learners through articulation, clustering and shared services that cover the following priority objectives:

Priority Areas for Research

- Opportunities for collaboration and centers of excellence.
- Enhanced engagements with our service providers.
- Collaborative research into the skills bench and strength of all sub-sectors.
- Benchmark locally to identify model sub-sectors.
- Benchmark internationally to establish learning sites for us.
- Develop milestones for each sub-sectors.
- Bringing existing research capacity into a dialogue about the research and skills needs of the sector (in particular, about how these are inter-related).
- Identifying where FP&M SETA (and others, i.e. Sectors and research agencies) should be spending money on research and funding bursaries.
- Identifying what research says about the skills priorities of the FP&M sectors.
- Funding and or mentoring Masters and PHD students that can conduct research on FP&M SETA related topics.

8. Conclusion

This research agenda brings to the fore the research that will be undertaken by the FP&M SETA during the set planning period. The research priorities here will be further interacted with in specific research projects addressing those areas through project plans outlining timelines as well as envisaged outcomes. It is proposed that the process should be initiated through a dialogue between leading role-players and stakeholders, under the guidance of a strategic research partner to coach and monitor the research capacity of the SETA. This will be implemented (RCI) the Research Chairs Initiative (RCI). Initiatives and the preparatory processes could take the form of Focus groups, research roundtables will also be in the form of research colloquiums, conferences, round tables that will achieve a focused and collective conversation and with relevant stakeholder that speak to the core objectives as described above.