

What makes a successful Public employment services (PES): International comparisons

We investigated models of PES provision from the United Kingdom, Singapore, Brazil and the Philippines. The models we selected were not intended to serve as templates for South African conditions; rather, they represent the divergent experiences of the selected countries, and offer lessons that may be absorbed by the local system in seeking to improve the service. Comparisons with other countries are useful, but it is important to distinguish between learning from principles and copying models mechanistically without taking context into account.

Four key observations can be extracted from our comparative analysis:

- The introduction of online portals does not render walk-in centres redundant. Walk-in centres are still an essential vehicle for the delivery of various PES.
- PES job matching is most successful in environments where structural or long-term unemployment levels are relatively low. Deep-seated, structural labour market disequilibria call for strategies to support alternative or informal employment initiatives.
- Some countries have linked the delivery of PES to the administration of unemployment benefits in different arrangements, with different effects.
- Measuring the effectiveness of PES remains a challenge for almost all countries. In the end, perception surveys of users may be the most reliable measure of effectiveness.

In the South African context, we experience persistent high levels of structural unemployment. It is therefore significant to establish whether and how employers use the ESSA system as a favoured recruitment channel.

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Greater coordination with the DoL is also desirable. Cooperation between DoL and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) institutions would add value to ESSA services. Areas for cooperation could include a shared strategy for the ESSA system, and plans for the sharing of employment data generated through ESSA, which could help to identify appropriate target groups for skills upgrading.

Finally, ongoing research on ESSA trends would be valuable. Future research should monitor changes in the employers who use ESSA, their employment needs and their opinions on services rendered.

A focus on job placements for those who are most vulnerable is a critical role for ESSA.

Going forward

Public employment services such as ESSA should generate potentially valuable and relevant administrative information about labour market demand and supply that can be used for skills planning. The quality of service that ESSA offers depends on the integrity of the captured data. Ideally, high-quality service and data will improve rates of matching which will, in turn, attract increased employer and worker participation consequently improving national skills-planning capacities.

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The full report, Fabian Arends, Sybil Chabane, Andrew Paterson (2015) *Investigating Employer Interaction with the Employment Services of South Africa (ESSA)*, is available on www.lmip.org.za



SMOOTH, STAGGERED OR STOPPED? Educational transitions among the youth

Understanding educational transitions is vital to addressing basic skills shortages. Efforts to address these shortages have been hampered by a lack of high-quality longitudinal data. To gather this information, a new study provides the first in-depth look at how young people move through the education system and advises on how to succeed academically despite disadvantage. *Kathryn Isdale, Vijay Reddy, Lolita Winnaar and Tia Linda Zuze* report on the outcomes.

In South Africa, basic education is compulsory and all learners follow the same curriculum up to the end of grade 9. The end of grade 9 is a transition point in the education and training system. Post-grade 9, students can choose to remain in the schooling system (making different subject choices) for a secondary education, transition to a technical vocational education institution, transition to work or participate in neither education nor training.

The next major transition point is at the end of grade 12, where students who sat for the major exit matriculation examination can, depending on the quality of their pass, enter different post-school education and training institutions.

This segment of the LMIP's multi-cohort panel study focuses on pathways and transitions of a group of students who we followed for five years from grade 9. Such research provides valuable information and intelligence to skills planners on the different pathways that

students follow post-grade 9, and hence the pool of skills at different levels that subsequently enter the labour market.

Smooth, staggered or stopped?

Year-on-year, incremental progress is the gold standard of education. While progression and promotion policies are in place to address any possible anticipated interruption in overall learner journeys, smooth transition through each stage of an individual's schooling career is a core aim of education programmes the world over.

New analysis from a longitudinal study of South African youth suggests that just under half of all learners are following this smooth type of pathway through the further education and training (FET) phase of schooling, with

the rest following three other distinct progression routes.

Understanding educational transitions is vital to addressing basic skills shortages and improving the life chances of all South African learners. Efforts here have, however, been hampered by a lack of high-quality longitudinal data. In response to the lack of appropriate data to examine these issues and to obtain a better understanding of the variation in pathways taken by our youth, the HSRC administered the South African Youth Panel Study (SAYPS).

This report provides the first in-depth look at what young people are doing, how they move through the education system, and how background and school-level characteristics influence those pathways.

Understanding educational transitions is vital to addressing basic skills shortages

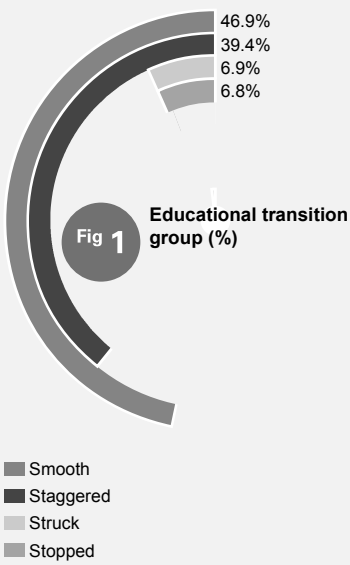


Mapping different educational pathways

To explore the educational transitions of young people, SAYPS followed grade 9 learners who participated in an international assessment of mathematics and science (Trends in International Mathematics and Science, (TIMSS)) in 2011 over four consecutive years.

The research suggests that South African learners follow one of four educational pathways: 47% follow a smooth pathway, where they progress through the FET phase of secondary school without interruption; a further 40% follow a staggered pathway, where their advancement is marked by at least one episode of grade repetition; despite

the Department for Basic Education’s progression policy, 7% of learners remain stuck in grade 9 or 10 for three or more years; and a final 7% leave school shortly after grade 9 and do not return.



Our results are broadly twofold:

The predictable story...

Educational transitions among learners show a somewhat predictable story of advantage, confirming much of what is already known with respect to school progression.

For example, achievement begets achievement; learners who follow a smooth transition tend to have higher scores in the TIMSS assessments measured at baseline, come from more highly educated households, and attend fee-paying and independent schools.

In addition, boys and those with previous episodes of grade repetition are more likely to experience interrupted pathways through school.

...vs. a new one

The report also tells a new, less formulaic story about educational progression highlighting that it is possible to beat the odds and succeed academically despite disadvantage.

Our analysis shows, for example, that while the importance of earlier academic achievement and school quality is clear, many learners from the least well-off schools are progressing through school without delay or interruption: 57% of the smooth transition group come from fee-paying and independent schools, meaning that 43% come from no-fee schools.

Learners who want a high level of education for themselves see greater value in mathematics and science and enjoy school more and are more likely to have a smooth pathway through school.

The findings also indicate that measures of achievement are not deterministic, with learners who perform poorly in assessments of both mathematics and science also being able to realise smooth progression pathways through school.

Having high educational expectations and positive attitudes about school are related to smooth transitions: learners who want a high level of education for themselves see greater value in mathematics and science and enjoy school more and are more likely to have a smooth pathway through school.

Educational expectations matter

With studies such as TIMSS suggesting that only a quarter of South Africa’s grade 9 learners are reaching the lowest international benchmark comparisons and just 1% the advanced levels, and youth unemployment estimated to be a staggering 66%, understanding the educational journeys of all learners is integral to building a school system that truly serves all its learners and developing one that can compete on a global stage.

Our study looks beyond the predictable pattern of ‘achievement begetting achievement’ story and demonstrates that educational expectations matter and that the school attended, needs not. Together the results paint a complex picture of educational transitions where advantage operates but so too does the notion of ‘beating the odds’ where the flipside of advantage need not so formulaically be poor outcomes.

The study provides an additional lens to policies focused on expanding post-school educational opportunities by showing what progress through school looks like for different types of learners.

While our predictable story supports commitments to increasing educational opportunities and ensuring that learners thrive at school, lending support to the National Development Plan’s (NDP) focus on early interventions to address opportunity gaps, it also demonstrates the systemic challenges faced by boys at school that require further attention.

The report highlights patterns of fluidity across the achievement spectrum and transition pathways that require further investigation. In particular, shifts in and out of the schooling system might be more frequent than previously thought and so it is important that the country’s schooling and post-schooling system is well integrated to allow for these movements. Equally important is clarifying what options are available for learners, in terms of technical vocational education and training and community colleges, the terrain of which is currently very complicated. Finally, evidence of persistent grade repetition suggests a need to understand how the current progression policy is applied practically across different schools.

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This article is based on Isdale, K., Reddy, V., Winnaar, L., Zuze, L. (2016) Smooth, Staggered or Stopped: Educational Transitions in the South African Panel Study, available on <http://www.lmip.org.za>.

¹ Including discouraged job seekers.