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Government skills development in South Africa: Achievements and challenges

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1. Introduction

Post-1994 South African society has placed high levels of importance on the development of the country's human resources (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997c: Ch. 13), irrespective of employment status or of whether such employment is in the informal, the private or the public sector. Further, the current government strategy has nine substantive priorities, one of which refers specifically to the '[r]eformation of public service administration, based on respect for citizens' rights; effective, efficient and courteous service delivery; honest and accountable governance structures and the modernization of procedures and systems to support sustained change' (Department of Labour, 2003: 13).

Training constitutes an important medium for improving the skills, competencies and confidence of individual government employees and for improving the efficiency and quality of government service. Skill development strengthens the 'most important vehicle available to the state to achieve its goals for changing the entire South African society. Skill development has to be aimed at making people better at the roles that they play in the developmental state. In addition, skill development becomes an important vehicle through which we can transform the less tangible aspects of the public servants – their attitudes, their commitment and the manner in which they engage with our people' (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2002c: 2).

This report attempts to describe and understand the main features of government training as well as the achievements and challenges for this sector in the post-1994 period. It seeks to do so as follows: First, it highlights international public sector reform trends as an influence upon public sector training. Second, it provides an overview of government training based on available data, largely from secondary sources. Third, it attempts to enrich the foregoing analysis with reference to data from workplace skills plan submissions by government departments for 2003/04. Finally, it attempts to capture the main features of training behaviour in government departments through a series of interviews with training personnel in five national government departments.

2. International public sector reform as a driver of public sector training

In this section, the key theoretical and ideological drivers of public sector reform will be identified and their origins discussed.

Public sector reform has been driven by epochal regional political and economic transitions such as the decline of socialist governments in eastern and central Europe, the demise of autocratic regimes across Africa and the dissolution of apartheid in South Africa. But these events have occurred against a backdrop of significant pressure worldwide towards thinner and more agile forms of government. Clearly, public sector reform is not simply a technical or bureaucratic problem. Toonen and Raadschelders (1997: 1) argue that it is important not to view the public sector reform movement as 'managerial reform' in isolation but to take into account institutional and policy reforms such as: 'regionalism, decentralization, restructuring intergovernmental relations, modernizing third sector networks, transforming neo-corporatist structures and redefining welfare state reforms'.

The broad movement of reform of government has occurred in countries at different stages of economic and social development and with different electoral systems. These reforms, which have come to be referred to respectively as 'reinventing government', 'building state capacity', 'modernisation of the state' and 'new public management' (Kamarck, 2003: 3), do however converge on a number of key themes of public sector change.

The origins of late twentieth century public sector reform in developed countries are associated with changes initiated in Great Britain, New Zealand and Canada in the early 1980s and taken up in the United States in the early 1990s. Margaret Thatcher, Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan all ran political campaigns for office that were strongly critical of the bureaucracy. Thatcher attacked what she called the 'greedy and parasitic public sector'. This proved a severe shock to civil servants who hitherto had perceived themselves as neutral administrators within the framework of the law. More generally this moment heralded the emergence of 'government administration' as an issue in national politics. In other contexts, such as in the Netherlands and Sweden, public sector reform was less politicised and more pragmatic, leading to more incremental change. By contrast, in developing countries, government reform was driven at speed by severe economic crisis or was imposed by international lending agencies (Kamarck, 2003: 4).

With some exceptions, global shifts in public sector reform occurred in two phases. The privatisation of state-owned and state-run industries and assets occurred primarily in the 1980s in North America and Europe – exceptions include the Asian Tigers, the former Soviet Union, China and Latin-American countries that are currently engaged in such moves (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004: 347). The 1990s was characterised more by the administrative reform of core state functions and the building of state capacity. In the latter period, emphasis was placed on downsizing state bureaucracies while at the same time increasing efficiency and responsiveness, and reducing corruption (Kamarck, 2003: 5). Modernisation in the form of exploiting information technologies was introduced as an aim of government particularly from the mid-1990s when the internet became viable on a large scale.

Various other influences on public sector reform have been cited for the period under review. First, public dissatisfaction with government has been expressed in the United States and elsewhere. Second, public sector spending has been restricted as a result of European Union membership, which requires that member states 'avoid excessive governmental deficits' (Article 104c). Third, there is a rising disregard for institutional authority – such as government – that has been associated with post-modern values (Kamarck, 2003: 8 – 9). Fourth, the evolution of democratic political processes in a number of countries has directly influenced public sector reform.

The set of 'realities' facing government over the last three decades and gave rise to New Public Management (NPM) are summarised by Hope and Chikulo (2000: 27) as follows:

(1) too large and expensive public sectors
(2) the need to use information technology to increase efficiency
(3) the demand by the public for quality service
(4) the general collapse of centrally planned economic systems which underscored the poor performance of government services worldwide, and
(5) the quest for personal growth and job satisfaction by public sector employees.

NPM has been characterised as a 'movement' associated with particular theoretical and ideological assumptions about government. It is based on the 'presumption that a distinct activity – management – can be applied to both the public and the private sectors', and that it is possible to use 'the economic market as a model for political and administrative relationships' (Hope & Chikulo, 2000: 26 – 27). A government's retention of dominance over public management and policy is no longer readily accepted, and government now has to shoulder the burden of proof of its competence to retain its responsibilities. As a result, 'public managers must deal not only with the challenge of providing a cost effective and friendly service but with the need to defend the involvement of government in the delivery of such a service' (Halachmi & Bouckaert, 1995, cited in: Hope & Chikulo, 2000: 26). Mhone (2003: 13) refers to a 'dogmatic approach to asserting the need for market oriented organisations' that permeates public administration debates in Africa.

Decentralisation, one of the central policy strands of NPM, is supported from within the 'public choice perspective', which posits that decentralisation can be understood as an environment in 'which public goods and services are provided primarily through the revealed preferences of individuals and by market mechanisms' (Hope & Chikulo, 2000: 27 – 28). Decentralisation is also viewed as a means of overcoming the perceived indifference of centralised government bureaucrats and of improving the responsiveness and quality of public services.

However, a number of critiques of NPM must be taken into account. NPM can be understood as based on 'explicit normative theories of government failure', although Wallis and Dollery (2002: 197 – 200) question the efficacy of NPM reform strategies as a sort of 'universal panacea' for meeting the problem of 'government failure' in all instances. Other opposing views hold that NPM is flawed because its philosophy is based on the assumption that private sector management is superior to public management. These critics recognise the need for improving public sector service delivery, but they argue that 'the solution does not lie in NPM but in a proper understanding and use of the administrative and management paradigm in the context of the political institutions and public law through which the public sector functions' (Hope & Chikulo, 2000: 27 – 28).

Fraser-Moleketi takes the critique further, in pointing out that NPM does not consist of a neutral set of technocratic policy levers. She refers to the role that NPM can play in 'creating and exacerbating diversity problems', especially where decentralisation makes the state powerless in protecting the disadvantaged (Fraser-Moleketi, 2001). The supposed 'neutrality' of NPM is understood to make NPM easy to adopt across any national context. The European Union has advocated that countries seeking EU membership adopt NPM. Based on their analysis of NPM in Turkey, Sozen and Shaw (2002, 475 – 486) question the supposed universal applicability of that approach, citing cultural factors that are embedded in the form of public administration of each country. They argue that on account of such cultural features, management models cannot simply be imposed without adapting them to suit local conditions.

It should be clear that a range of interacting events, initiatives, policies and theoretical positions inform public sector reform and these have implications for public sector training. At the same time, public sector training is seen as an important tool in achieving reforms through changing and improving the competence of civil servants and transforming the civil service working environment.

The following examples are presented to show how public sector reforms frequently have training implications:

- The reduced size of the public service requires public servants to 'work smarter' and be more efficient – this will require personal management skills.
- Decentralisation of government to lower levels will reduce opportunity for specialisation and increase the need for flexibility and multi-tasking.
- Decentralisation of government to local levels implies greater levels of interaction with citizens (from bureaucratic to service work), requiring higher levels of customer service skills.
- Strong financial controls and an effective budget process to reduce spending within decentralised structures require higher levels of skills.
- Increased application of information technologies will require skilling targeted by occupation.
- Restructuring the bureaucracy will take place alongside job redesign, which will call for new combinations of competencies, which in turn will require training.
- Reconceptualising the work of line managers involves a shift 'away from input controls, rule and procedures toward output measurement and performance

targets' (Hope & Chikulo, 2000: 26), or quintessentially from a bureaucratic form of control to a performance-based evaluation of managers. This requires a shift in mindset as much as technical training in the application of new techniques of accountability.

More broadly, as 'the tasks of government get more and more complex, government employees will need better education and training in order to govern effectively' (Kamarck, 2003: 43).

The implications of international influences such as NPM for government training in South Africa will be discussed in the concluding section.

3. Dimensions of national, provincial and local government employment

The aim of this section is to briefly sketch the main features of government employment so as to place government skills development initiatives in context.

3.1 Total public sector employment

The public sector employed 1 582 319 people in 2001, which accounted for about 18 per cent of all people employed in South Africa (Table 1) (Hlekiso, 2004: 3). By 31 December 2003, national and provincial departments employed 310 907 and 726 748 people respectively, which represented a decline of 12 245 national and 75 839 provincial employees (Public Service Commission, 2004: 12). This means that employment at national and provincial levels declined by 7,8 per cent between 2001 and 2003. However, in the analysis below, reference will be made to 2001 data, since these are available across all tiers of government on a disaggregated basis.

Table 1: Public sector employment, 2001

	Personnel	%
National departments	323 152	20,4
Provincial departments	802 587	50,7
Local government	220 759	14,0
Other government	88 449	5,6
Public business enterprises	147 372	9,3
TOTAL	1 582 319	100

Source: South African Reserve Bank, cited in SAIRR (2003: 150)

Overall, provincial government had by far the largest share, with just over half of public sector employees, followed by national government with 20,4 per cent and local government with 14 per cent. The balance consisted of employment in other government departments and public business enterprises (5,6 per cent and 9,3 per cent respectively).

It is important to establish which are the biggest departments across provinces. By far the two biggest sectors are the education and the health and social services departments, which comprise 56,7 per cent and 28,7 per cent respectively of employment across all provinces. The preponderance of service delivery in provincial departments will produce a different occupational structure to national departments and therefore different training requirements.

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3.2 Occupation

The most salient characteristic of the distribution of public sector employees by rank is how small the proportion of senior managers is in relation to the total employment in the national and provincial departments (Table 2). Assuming that the personnel not hired on specific salary notches are senior employees, the senior management cadre cannot exceed 1 per cent based on the 2000 figures in Table 2. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2002b: 15) was concerned that '[t]he management cadre of the Public Service remains alarmingly small (0,4% of the entire Public Service) compared with the very broad base of production-level, skilled workers. To aggravate this even further, the distribution of senior managers is skewed between the national and provincial departments.' Skills development strategies must be informed by the distribution of employment across skills bands and occupational categories.

Table 2: Employment figures per code of remuneration (CORES): National and provincial government, 2000

Rank	Category	No. by rank	No. by category	%
01	Lower skilled (Levels 1-2)	13 484	188 044	19,2
02		174 560		
03	Skilled (Levels 3-5)	61 974	186 915	19,0
04		56 503		
05		68 438		
06	Highly skilled production (Levels 6-8)	216 122	526 551	53,6
07		211 660		
08		98 769		
09	Highly skilled supervision (Levels 9-12)	39 898	70 365	7,2
10		16 081		
11		9 088		
12		5 298		
13	Senior management (Levels 13-16)	516	1 072	0,1
14		427		
15		86		
16		43		
Exceptions (on personal salary notches)		9 003	9 003	0,9
Total		981 950	981 950	100

Source: PSETA (2001: 18)

3.3 Race

It is clear that the large majority of employees are located at levels 6 – 8 where the bulk of the training activity must take place (Table 2). If these categories are disaggregated according to race (Table 3), we see that from the management level down towards the 'lower skilled' ranks, the share of Africans in each of these bands increases. It is noteworthy that the proportions of white employees show the reverse of this trend. Clearly equity targets are being more successfully met at the senior management level than at the management level or lower grades. This too has implications for skills development strategies that are intended to support equity.

Table 3: Racial breakdown per skills level, 1999/2000					
	African	Asian	Coloured	White	% of public service
Lower skilled	88	2	9	2	19
Skilled	74	4	9	13	22
Highly skilled production	66	4	9	21	55
Highly skilled supervisory	42	6	6	47	3
Management	28	5	6	61	0
Senior management	47	7	9	37	0

Source: DPSA (2000)

3.4 Age

One important outcome of rapid transformation of public service employment, especially at the national government level, is that although the national departments constitute 29 per cent of all public sector employment, the share of employees under 30 years of age in national government is much larger at 49 per cent. In contrast, the Eastern Cape has a much larger share of public service employees over 50 years of age in relation to its share of total employment (Table 4) (Kroukamp, 2002: 457). This means that, aside from other factors, investment in training especially in the younger cohorts of public servants at the national government level may prove a sound long-term investment. By the same token, the higher concentration of older civil servants in the Eastern Cape could be addressed by a combination of skills development strategies to deal with training of older workers, and induction training for new appointees.

Table 4: Public service according to age category				
	% of total public service in province	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	10	8	10	13
[illegible]	6	4	6	6
[illegible]	5	4	6	6
[illegible]	12	8	12	18
Northern Province	11	5	11	13
KwaZulu-Natal	14	13	14	14
Northern Cape	1	1	1	2
North West	6	4	6	7
Mpumalanga	5	3	5	5
National dept	29	49	27	16
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: PERSAL, December 1999, in DPSA (2000, Ch. 3, Table 3.7)

3.5 Equity

Article 9 of the Constitution of South Africa provides for various measures to be undertaken to protect or advance persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination. Furthermore, the constitution requires that the composition of the public service should be broadly representative of the South African society as a whole. The following key minimum targets (Table 5) were set out in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997a) and updated to 2000 (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2000: 14).

Table 5: Targets for equity in the public service

Indicator	Target [illegible] in the White [illegible]	Level [illegible] 1997	Level [illegible] 2000
Percentage of black people at management level	50% by 1999	38	50% achieved but Whites over-represented by 6% and Africans under-represented by 8%
Percentage of women recruited from outside the public service to middle and senior management level	30% by 1999 (interim step to 51% demographic level)	11	50%
Percentage of people with disabilities	2% by 2005	0,02	1,98%

Source: Department of Public Service and Administration, 2000: 14; Public Service Commission, 2000: 13

Education and training are identified in the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service as an important set of human resource development practices to support the goals of affirmative action for the three target groups (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1998b).

4. Data on training in the public service

4.1 Evidence

A major problem to report from this review of available evidence on government training is that there are serious data constraints facing attempts to understand the phenomenon. A dearth of information is evident at three levels:

- There are few commissioned research reports in the public domain.
- There is no easily accessible standard government reporting at the macro level that brings together the different forms of budget and expenditure information on training (e.g. budget, intergovernmental fiscal review, national estimates of expenditure).
- Evidence from the Public Service Commission cited earlier suggests that reporting on training within sub-units of government departments is inconsistent. As a result, many of the following empirically based observations about government training must be taken as suggestive rather than definitive.

In the sections that follow, the features of public service training will be described using available secondary data. The sources utilised at each level (national, provincial and local) will be appraised briefly, before the analysis is undertaken.

4.2 Macro indicators

There are no easily accessible basic macro indicators on public service training such as: training rates, total training expenditure, training expenditure as a proportion of payroll, and training expenditure per capita.

A sense of the scale of current and prospective expenditure can be obtained from Table 6, which provides an overview of government expenditure on programmatic skills development interventions and also of budgeted training expenditure for its own personnel. The data suggest that training expenditure at provincial level has increased faster than that at national level. This would have shifted the government training expenditure share in 2000/01 from 59 per cent to 41 per cent in favour of national departments, to 55 per cent to 45 per cent in favour of provincial departments in 2003/04.

In addition, the medium-term estimated budget foresaw government training expenditure increasing by 76 per cent between 2000/01 and 2003/04, from R775 million to R1 365 million. It is not clear how these envisaged increases in allocation were related to the 1 per cent parameter set out in the Skills Levy Act, which is linked to payroll appropriations.

Table 6: Expenditure on skills development, 2000/01 – 2003/04				
R million	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
	Budget	Medium-term estimates		
Department of Labour				
Human resource development programme[1]	212	121	117	117
Skills development levy programme				
SETAs' funds	1 040	2 240	2 400	2 560
National Skills Fund	260	560	600	640
Government training expenditure				
National departments[2]	456	553	580	609
Provincial Departments[3]	319	677	718	756
Total	**2 287**	**4 151**	**4 415**	**4 682**

1. Including the National Skills Authority and employment counselling and placement services
2. Departmental estimates of budgeted training expenditure
3. Expenditure of 0,5 per cent of personnel spending in 2000/01 and 1,0 per cent thereafter

Source: Department of Finance (2001, Ch. 3: 51)

It is difficult to obtain data on key training indicators for the different government tiers. However, one measure of training activity, namely average expenditure per employee, was calculated for national government departments between 1999/2000 and 2002/03 (Table 7). This table is based on data from departments made available to National Treasury.

Table 7: Indicative training expenditure in national government departments between 1999/2000 and 2002/03 (ZAR)		
	1999/2000	2002/03
Personnel numbers in national government departments for which data were made available	75 045	170 421
Training expenditure: Adjusted appropriation	R90 957 000	R269 654 757
Average expenditure per employee	**R1 212**	**R1 528**

Source: Calculation by the author, based on Treasury data

The data suggest that the average expenditure per employee in departments for which there were data, increased from R1 212 in 1999/2000 to R1 528 in 2002/03. It appears from this indicative data that the biggest departments in terms of employment had the lowest per capita expenditure in 2002, for example Defence, Correctional Services, Justice and Constitutional Development, and Home Affairs. This may reflect that larger departments are able to secure cost savings on training, or that the occupational structure of these departments has some influence on training costs, or it may be that larger departments experience particular challenges in the roll-out of training, leading to under-expenditure on training budgets. The reasons for this lower per capita expenditure may be worth investigating.

4.3 Training at national government level

The 2000 survey of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) shows that in the national departments, senior and middle managerial categories comprised in the region of 10 to 15 per cent personnel (Table 8). As observed earlier, the proportion of managers in national departments is higher than in provincial departments. This higher proportion of managers will present a particular pattern of training needs and courseware requirements.

These data suggest that management-level personnel received a disproportionately large share of training. Table 8 presents the training percentage or training rate by rank, which confirms that between 20 and 30 per cent of higher-ranking managers received training in the years in question, whereas in 1998/99 only 5 per cent of personnel in lower ranks received training.

Furthermore, the average training rates overall were low – between 9,5 and 16,5 per cent for the years in question.

Table 8: Total number of people who received training according to rank in national departments, 1998/99

	Senior managers			Middle managers			Junior managers			Lower ranks			Total		
	N	T	%	N	T	%	N	T	%	N	T	%	N	T	%
Total 1998/99	106	30	28,3	597	135	22,6	2 120	343	16,2	5 374	269	5	8 197	777	9,5
Total 1999/2000	124	36	29	487	94	19,3	1 348	180	13,4	2 019	327	16,2	3 978	637	16,5

N = Total employment
T = Number of people trained
% = Number of people trained as percentage of total employment in the particular category
Source: Du Toit, Van Zyl & Erasmus (2000: 25 – 26)

The distribution of training types described below shows that most training was either of a formal type such as offered by higher education institutions, or was management training (Table 9). This corroborates the finding above that managers had greater access to training than other ranks.

This table also shows that opportunities for policy-specific and office-based forms of training were offered least frequently. This finding may serve as a warning that training of employees in knowledge of their own functions in relation to government policy is relatively neglected. This interpretation must be tempered by some lack of precision around how each category was described. For example, it is not clear how 'line function' and 'neutral competency and life skills' would fit into this framework.

Table 9: Distribution of training opportunities according to types of training in national government, 1998/99

	Formal		Management		Computer		Office-based		Policy-specific		Departmental		Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total 1998/99	1 617	7,8	5 351	25,7	3 411	16,4	3 107	14,9	2 823	13,6	2 022	9,7	2 461	11,8	1 128	100
Total 1999/2000	31 336	34,7	38 443	42,6	3 605	4	2 658	2,9	3 231	3,6	8 346	9,2	2 695	3	1 307	100

Source: Du Toit, Van Zyl & Erasmus (2000: 21 – 22)

4.4 Training at provincial government level

According to the data in Table 10, training at the provincial level ranged between 17,1 and 24,3 per cent overall in 1998/99 and 1999/2000 respectively. This comfortably exceeds the training rate measured at the national level in the same period. However, these results should be seen only as indicative because of low response rates. Also, there are large divergences in some rates that need explanation.

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Table 10: Training rates per province, 1998/99 and 1999/2000 (%)								
	Training rate						[illegible]	
Province	Employment [illegible] (N)		Trained (T)		[illegible]		[illegible]	
	1998/99	1999/00	1998/99	1999/00	1998/99	1999/00	[illegible]	[illegible]
Eastern Cape	-	837	-	-	-	-	12	3
Free State	6 705	6 254	1 053	1 168	15,7	18,7	11	11
Gauteng	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	3
KwaZulu-Natal	2 181	2 193	370	480	17	21,9	12	4
Limpopo	1 753	2 240	100	715	5,7	31,9	9	5
Mpumalanga	7 408	11 313	1 308	2 254	17,7	19,9	13	12
North West	564	2 570	564	307	100	11,9	11	5
Northern Cape	4 773	5 292	593	796	12,4	15,0	12	9
Western Cape	-	37 940	-	10 959	-	28,8	8	8
TOTAL	23 384	68 639	3 988	16 679	17,1	24,3	100	60

N = Total employment
T = Number of people trained
% = Number of people trained as percentage of total employment in the particular category
'Total employment' = Only to those departments that did respond to the survey commissioned by DPSA and funded by DFID
Source: Adapted from Du Toit, Van Zyl & Erasmus (2000)

The main training focus in the provinces in 1998/99 appeared to be computer related (Table 11). However, this was on account of a very strong focus on computer training in Gauteng. The data in this table are useful more for comparison with the distribution of types of training at the national level. The provincial data show that only 20,5 per cent of training was of the 'formal' and 'management' type, whereas at the national level, these two categories accounted for between 33 and 77 per cent of training across the two years. This may indicate that provincial government had fewer managerial ranks, but also that national government managers had greater access to training than did their provincial counterparts.

Table 11: Type of training per province, 1998/99 (%)								
Province	[illegible] type of training							
	Formal	Management	Computer	Office-based	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Eastern Cape	5,4	19,3	12,2	15,5	18,4	4,5	24,7	100
Free State	23,4	11,7	9,7	17,0	9,8	25,5	2,9	100
Gauteng	2,4	12,2	56,8	0,3	27,8	0,5	0,0	100
KwaZulu-Natal	9,6	10,4	14,2	28,5	4,7	27,1	5,5	100
Limpopo	8,8	21,1	23,6	24,9	3,4	12,7	5,5	100
Mpumalanga	14,2	6,4	8,0	13,5	27,4	3,1	27,5	100
North West	3,3	7,4	43,0	6,9	11,1	0,0	28,2	100
Northern Cape	3,6	8,5	9,2	55,9	4,8	10,3	7,8	100
Western Province	2,5	14,6	43,0	0,3	1,2	38,5	0,0	100
Average	8,1	12,4	24,4	18,1	12,1	13,6	11,3	100

Source: Adapted from Du Toit, Van Zyl & Erasmus (2000)

4.5 Training at local government level

In the third year of operation of the Local Government and Water Sector Education and Training Authority (LGWSETA), the emphasis was on service delivery and to this end the following sub-sectors were given as skills development priorities: finance and public administration; water, environment and waste management; public safety; primary health; community services; local economic development and integrated development planning; councillor development; and urban planning (LGWSETA, 2003b: 10).

The data demonstrate that in the local government domain, as in provincial and national government, managers and senior officials are one of the scarce resources (Table 12). At the

local government level, greater scarcities were felt in the 'professional' and 'technician' occupational codes. This may be attributed to the overall need for greater proportions of technicians and engineers in local government than in other levels of government.

Table 12: Scarce human resources ranked by standard occupational classification (SOC) code, based on the consolidated responses of CEO, HR and CFA managers to problems of turnover, vacancies and skills shortages

SOC	Scarce skills ranking
Senior officials & managers (SOC 100)	3
Professionals (SOC 200)	1
Technicians & associated professionals (SOC 300)	2
Clerks (SOC 400)	4
Service workers (SOC 500)	5
Craft & related workers (SOC 600)	5
Plant & machine operators (SOC 700)	-
Elementary occupations (SOC 800)	-

Source: LGWSETA (2003: 40)

In Table 13, the generic skills priorities reported by managers and workers are ranked alongside each other. Within the rankings there are similarities and slight differences in rankings between managers and workers. Differences of perception of skills priorities between managers and workers may be usefully explored further in other tiers of government.

Table 13: Generic skills priorities reported by municipal managers and workers (%)

Generic skills needs	Managers %	Workers %
ICT skills	20	20 (1)
Report-writing skills	18	12 (2)
Communication skills	16	11 (3)
Team work	13	8 (6)
Problem-solving skills	11	10 (4)
Analytical skills	9	10 (4)

Note: Figures in brackets represent rankings.
Source: LGWSETA (2003: 45)

These data suggest that there was considerable disparity in the levels of training for staff of local government agencies by province, which levels ranged from 12 to 38 per cent (Table 14). Surprisingly, it appears that local government in Gauteng provided the lowest level of training opportunity in 2001/02 while a dominantly rural province such as Limpopo achieved a much higher level.

Table 14: Staff trained as a % of total staff by province, 2001/02	
Province	% of total provincial staff trained
Limpopo	38
Western Cape	35
Northern Cape	32
North West	30
Eastern Cape	28
KwaZulu-Natal	22
Free State	22
Mpumalanga	20
Gauteng	12

Source: LGWSETA (2003: 57)

Table 15 presents an apparent contradiction in the data, because Gauteng, which had a low training percentage by province, also had mainly category A and B local government types of enterprise – especially the three metros. All the category A and B enterprises had high training ratios, yet Gauteng had a very low rate (Table 14). This needs some explanation.

Table 15: Percentage of staff trained by enterprise type (%)	
Enterprise type	% of total trained
Category A	28
Category B	31
Category C	26
Water boards	8
Unknown	7

Source: LGWSETA (2003: 57)

The distribution of training by occupation and enterprise type elicits two important observations (Table 16). First, at the level of elementary occupations the proportion of personnel receiving training was very high, though the nature of such training is not known. In contrast, at management and leadership levels the proportion of training was low. Second, clerical workers were better served by access to training. This is a surprising finding, given the observed skills shortages and turnover rates at managerial and professional levels.

Table 16: Percentage of municipal staff trained by enterprise type and SOC code in 2001/02 (%)

	Category of local government enterprise			Water boards
	A	B	C	
Leadership and governance	<1	5	7	<1
Senior officials & managers (SOC 100)	2	4	7	4
Professionals (SOC 200)	2	8	3	9
Technicians & associated professionals (SOC 300)	10	6	11	13
Clerks (SOC 400)	19	15	15	10
Service workers (SOC 500)	10	7	5	8
Craft & related workers (SOC 600)	9	5	3	10
Plant & machine operators (SOC 700)	22	7	11	11
Elementary occupations (SOC 800)	24	43	38	35

Source: LGWSETA (2003: 58)

Table 17 highlights that tight finances also affected training budgeting in some cases, irrespective of the 1 per cent ruling. It is also quite clear that respondents were concerned about the quality of training provided.

Table 17: Constraints on access to and effectiveness of training	
Training-delivery constraints	**CEO respondents %**
Insufficient funds (costs of training)	31
Failure of learners to apply learning in workplace	19
Poor quality training (poor quality trainers, curriculum, materials, etc)	11
Lack of access to quality training providers	11
Loss of staff once they have received training	9
Problems to release staff for training	9
Training is too theoretical - not enough job application	8
Learner motivation is low	3

Source: LGWSETA (2003: 60)

Overall, the data suggest that there were wide divergences in patterns of skills development and training opportunities between and within the different tiers of government.

4.6 Bursaries

The public service bursary scheme is one of the instruments at the disposal of government to raise skills development among government employees. The public service has developed policies that inform the provision of bursaries to current employees, as well as to potential employees in specific occupations and sectors, but policies are interpreted differently in different departments (e.g. some only award bursaries for persons who are currently employed and do not use the bursary scheme as a means of attracting new employees).

The efficient use of bursaries implies the ability to assess current and to predict future skills shortages in the public service, and from this to identify the training needs and then to target the bursaries offered to appropriate sets of individuals – either currently employed or with the potential to be employed. It is acknowledged that bursaries can assist the fast tracking of programmes for occupations that are strategic to service delivery (Roodt & Erasmus, 2002: 15).

Currently employed personnel are most frequently enrolled for courses in public management, or human resource management/development. Other fields of study include law, medicine, engineering and information technology, but with much lower enrollment. Respondents to the public service bursary survey criticised the frequency with which bursaries were offered to personnel who enrolled in public management courses (Roodt & Erasmus, 2002: 19), and their being too generic and not assisting in ameliorating scarce skills needs. According to Roodt and Erasmus (2002: 18), agricultural and environmental departments at the national or provincial levels were awarding the greatest numbers of bursaries for potential employees who were enrolled in engineering studies.

Although most bursaries were offered at the degree level, the proportion of opportunities offered at the diploma and certificate level suggests that bursaries were nevertheless utilised to provide opportunities for persons to increase their skills at the diploma or certificate levels (Table 18).

Table 18: Study levels of bursary holders, 2001/02	
Level	**%**
Senior secondary/ABET	1
Matric	5
Undergraduate diploma or certificate	33
Undergraduate degree	41
Postgraduate	20

Source: Roodt & Erasmus (2002: 29)

In Table 19, the distribution of bursaries shows a preponderance of awards in the lower salary grades, which suggests positive efforts towards skills upgrading and opening career paths for workers from these grades. However, there is a need to link the application of bursaries more carefully to career planning: 'Respondents to the bursary survey confirmed that inadequate management of career programmes is apparent. It was indicated that management is not involved enough with the development of staff. As a result of the poor management of career development, there is an ad hoc allocation of bursaries and staff' (Roodt & Erasmus, 2002: 27).

Table 19: Bursary holders by rank, 2001/02		
Salary levels	**Occupational levels**	**%**
13-15	**Senior managers**	3
9-12	**Assistant managers and managers**	6
7-8	**Practitioners and senior practitioners**	10
2-6	**Skilled**	49
1	**Lower skilled**	32

Source: Roodt & Erasmus (2002: 28-29)

The allocation of bursaries according to race shows that African holders of bursaries slightly exceeded the total proportion of Africans in the public service (Table 20).

Table 20: Public service employees and bursary holders by race, 2001/02 (%)					
	Race				
	African	**Indian**	**Coloured**	**White**	**Total**
Proportion of public service employees	68	3	9	20	100
Proportion of persons holding bursaries	71	5	9	15	100

Source: Roodt & Erasmus (2002: 23, Fig. 2)

In addition to government funding, bursaries were also available from donor, private sector and other monies. International assistance was often offered for training and development programmes (e.g. mentorships, work placement and other forms of programme). However, data on these activities do not seem to be accessible on an aggregated basis.

5. Dimensions of skills development in the public sector, based mainly on data from workplace skills plans submitted in 2003/04

This section discusses the actual WSP as a vehicle for providing management information related to skills development planning, as well as the data that were provided in the set of WSPs for 2003/04.

5.1 Submission of workplace skills plans by government departments

The submission rates of WSPs by government departments are an important starting point in an assessment of the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in government (Table 21). First, the rates of submission reflected compliance with one of the key outputs of the skills development planning process. The pattern of improvement in submission rates was extremely positive, rising from less than half of all government departments for 2001/02 to 70 per cent for 2003/04.

Interestingly, submission rates of provincial government departments were better than those of national government departments, though the gap closed somewhat over the two years. National government departments might have been expected to perform better, since they were closer to the centre of political power and should set standards by example. Among the provinces, the submission rates generally improved, with the best provincial record achieved by Mpumalanga. However, the Northern Cape did not improve its submission rate over the two years, and the Western Cape failed to sustain an increase in successive years as most of the provinces did.

Table 21: Submission of WSPs by government departments, 2003/04

National departments and provinces	Reports submitted (2001/02)	Response rate (2001/02) %	Reports submitted (2002/03)	Response rate (2002/03) %	Reports submitted (2003/04)	Response rate (2003/04) %	Expected reports
Eastern Cape	3	21	6	43	10	71	14
Free State	3	25	6	50	8	67	12
Gauteng	4	33	6	50	10	83	12
KwaZulu-Natal	4	31	5	39	9	69	13
Limpopo	4	36	5	45	8	73	11
Mpumalanga	10	83	12	100	11	92	12
Northern Cape	6	46	4	31	6	46	13
North West	4	33	6	50	10	83	12
Western Cape	4	31	9	69	8	62	13
Total provincial depts	55	49	59	53	80	71	112
Total national depts	13	36	16	44	23	64	36
Total all departments	68	46	75	51	103	70	148

Source: PSETA (2003: 7), based on a physical count of 2003/04 submissions

At the local government level, the LGWSETA reported having received WSPs from 5 (out of 6) metropolitan municipalities, 16 (out of 50) district municipalities and 102 (out of 228) category B municipalities in the period ending 31 March 2003 (LGWSETA, 2003a: 6 – 12). This means that 123 out of 284 or 43 per cent of local government bodies submitted WSPs. In purely numerical terms, this statistic is a matter of concern since it means that less than half of local government authorities did, for whatever reason, not submit a WSP. Informal communication suggests that submissions for 2004/05 have substantially improved in this sector, but will have to be monitored.

5.2 Data reliability of the workplace skills plans of 2003/04

The submission of WSPs is not the only matter of importance. The quality of the data in the WSPs can serve as evidence of how well the planning leading to the production of WSPs has been done.

Furthermore, the quality of the data is in itself of critical importance because the WSPs are supposed to serve as a source of data for Public Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) to obtain insight into how the NSDS is applied in government departments. The rate

of submission and the quality of data in the WSPs received will in combination contribute to the general level of data quality. Consideration of the level of data quality will make it possible to broadly form an impression of the validity and reliability of the data.

For the 2003/04 WSPs the submission rate of 104 out of 148 departments (70 per cent) was certainly an improvement in compliance. However, the level of compliance cannot be used as a measure of sufficient data quantity. Just because 70 per cent of all government departments that could or should be submitting WSPs did so, does not mean that 70 per cent of all public servants were exposed to WSPs. This is because departments differed radically in size. If enough of the large departments did not submit, the data would not approximate the 'real' picture of skills development planning in government. The total number of personnel reflected in the WSP returns for 2003/04 was 428 961, whereas the total number of personnel in provincial and national government departments was given by the Public Service Commission as 1 037 655 as of 31 December 2003 (PSC, 2004: 12). In other words, the training data reported reflected less than half of all employees at provincial and national government levels.

Furthermore, notions of sampling did not apply to this set of government data. This is because most of the departments were one of a kind, each addressing a specific line function, which strictly speaking cannot be 'sampled'. The only departments that could – in theory – be 'sampled' were those with more than one example of a particular type of department (e.g. there were several departments of education in the different provinces). Put differently, if the data of Defence or Correctional Services were missing from the dataset, then confidence in the analysis reflecting the 'state' of skills development across government would be compromised.

5.3 Human resources in support of the National Skills Development Strategy

The Skills Development Act and associated regulations mobilise human resources such as skills development facilitators (SDFs) and workplace skills development committees (WSDCs), who support and facilitate skills development at the departmental level. It is important to have information about how effective these officers and structures are in furthering the aims of the NSDS.

5.3.1 Skills development facilitators

SDFs have an important role to play in furthering the culture of lifelong learning in their departments. In the course of their work, they will have to interact with colleagues of superior rank. The official designation of SDF is not linked to any particular rank level in the public service. In this sense, the actual rank of the person who is appointed as SDF becomes important, since this rank may influence co-operation from senior management. The distribution of rank among SDFs is also important, because this may give an indication of the level of importance that is accorded skills development. However, it may also be affected by the size of the home department in question.

The most common rank levels of SDFs are assistant director followed by deputy director, neither of whom may necessarily be involved in training activities by virtue of their line-function task (Table 22). On the other hand, the line function of chief training officers coincides with their role as SDFs. In only one instance at the provincial level (Limpopo) did most SDFs occupy ranks other than deputy director, assistant director and chief training officer. Differences in the rank, expertise and specialisation of SDFs suggest that the SDF role was interpreted differently by departments. Some departments regarded the SDF role as aligned to strategic planning, whereas others regarded it as being linked more to line function and implementation activities.

Table 22: Rank of the SDF					
	Deputy director	Assistant director	Chief training officer	Other	Total
Eastern Cape	3	2	2	3	10
Free State	0	1	2	4	7
Gauteng	3	1	1	5	10
KwaZulu-Natal	1	6	0	2	9
Limpopo	0	0	1	7	8
Mpumalanga	3	3	1	4	11
Northern Cape	1	4	0	1	6
North West	4	5	0	1	10
Western Cape	3	1	1	3	8
Subtotal	18	23	8	30	79
National	7	5	2	8	22
Total	25	28	10	38	101
Percentage	24,8	27,7	9,9	37,6	100,0

Response rate = 98%. Two departments did not indicate the SDF's position.

The success of the NSDS is dependent on the extent to which SDFs are aware of and have internalised the strategy as well as its underpinning policy and regulations. This will be influenced by how many of the SDFs have received training in their function. Given that the primary line function of some SDFs is not necessarily in the field of training, it is important that they receive training in their SDF role.

The WSP responses (Table 23) reveal that at least 95 per cent (71/75) of SDFs had received SDF training, whereas at least 31 per cent (23/75) had been trained in 'assessment' and at least 4 per cent (3/75) had received training in 'moderation'. It should be noted that the WSP document does not distinguish between a non-response and 'no training', so the actual figures for training received may have been slightly higher, though unrecorded. Nevertheless, it is a positive sign that most SDFs had at least received training in skills development facilitation, and that some may have received training in more than one area.

Table 23: Training received by SDFs					
	Type of courses attended				
	Skills development facilitation	Assessment	Moderation	Non-response, don't know or no training	Total
Eastern Cape	5	1	-	5	11
Free State	4	2	1	4	11
Gauteng	7	5	-	3	15
KwaZulu-Natal	8	3	-	1	12
Limpopo	6	1	-	2	9
Mpumalanga	9	3	-	1	13
Northern Cape	4	1	-	2	7
North West	7	4	1	1	13
Western Cape	3	1	1	4	9
Subtotal	53	21	3	23	100
National	18	2	-	5	25
Total	71	23	3	28	125

Response rate = 72,8 % (75 responded to this question). More than one course could be selected.

5.3.2 Workplace skills development committees

The WSP document requested information about the WSDCs. Eighty of the 104 WSP documents included information on the membership of the WSDCs, which suggests that in roughly 20 per cent of the cases either there was no such committee, or respondents did not provide data. Since respondents were requested to provide details of membership, it was possible to obtain a picture of the size of the committees. Membership size ranged from 1 to 31 persons, averaging 11,4 persons. Some of the committees were very large; 17 WSDCs had more that 16 members.

The variations in size may suggest that the WSDCs performed different functions across departments. Some committees may primarily have served as a forum for representation of various stakeholders, in which case the committees may have become quite large. In contrast, other committees may have contributed actively to the management and skills development planning process, in which case smaller committees may have been constituted. Another aspect to consider is whether departments gave the WSDCs additional functions to perform, for example to review performance appraisals, since the performance appraisal process is inherently linked to skills development. The data presented here highlights the importance of considering what the optimal size of the committees should be so that they can effectively support skills development planning. The larger committees would have been unwieldy to manage and time consuming to organise for certain tasks. The data could not test functionality of these committees, but the extent to which they actually added value to skills development planning can be investigated.

5.4 Skills needs

To do skills planning, managers need access to information that describes the size of the current establishment and its existing skills levels in relation to skills gaps (missing competencies in current employees) and skills shortages (positions that have not been filled by incumbents with the required competencies). For planning purposes, skills gaps and shortages as measured in the present must be understood and viewed in relation to planned increases in, or changes in, the direction of line department functions that have implications

for human resources. Data provided in the WSPs should ideally reflect these planning conditions, which is not necessarily the case currently.

WSP data were captured from responses to a request to respondents to describe their critical training needs in two ways: (1) a simple description of the categories of skills need, and (2) a count of the number of personnel requiring training against a skills need identified in (1).

Categories of skills need

A count was done of the number of times each training need was identified in the departmental WSP submissions. The top 15 training needs identified by departments are given in Table 24. For example, 'financial management' was indicated as a need by 56,3 per cent of all departments, which suggests that financial management was accorded a high level of importance in government departments.

The categories of training need in the table are based on the terminology used by the respondents. Potential overlaps are visible in this list of needs and should be defined where possible so that respondents share the same understanding of basic categories of skills need in the future.

Table 24: 'Most critical training needs' (question C.6) in descending order

	Training need	Number of departments indicating this need	Number indicating a need as % of all departments
1	Financial management	58	56,3
2	Project management	50	48,1
3	Computer skills	33	32,0
4	Human resource management	29	28,6
5	Customer care	27	26,2
6	Communication skills	26	25,2
7	Change management	23	22,3
8	Policy development	22	21,4
9	Leadership	18	17,7
10	Negotiation and conflict resolution	17	16,5
11	Supervisor skills	17	16,5
12	Office administration	17	16,5
13	ABET	15	14,6
14	IT and information management	14	13,6
15	Report-writing skills	14	13,6

Counts of personnel numbers in training need categories

Indicative numerical totals of the actual number of persons needing training (Table 25) were aggregated from counts of training needs from each department.

Respondents used their own definitions of skills needs. This meant that the numerical data for training needs as presented by a department were linked to unique descriptors of training need. This made the collation of data difficult and imprecise. While some terms (e.g. ABET) were used uniformly to describe a training category, in other instances nuances in the naming of categories used across the WSP submissions were laboriously sorted and matched before the numerical data could be captured manually.

The outcome of this exercise is given in Table 25. The numbers given in the columns in the table are only indicative of the volumes of training needs, because of the effects of incomplete WSP submission and incomplete data reporting in the relevant questions. Therefore, although zero counts for training needs in respect of dealing with the challenge of HIV/Aids are visible in five provinces, this may be an effect of low compliance in WSP submission.

Table 25: Top ten training needs in the public service, 2003/04, by category of need

	Priority training needs identified	National departments	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape	Total
1	Computer skills	7 774	5 628	1 428	360	6 386	922	234	586	850	3 496	28 570
2	Financial management	3 907	5 379	356	260	1 293	835	1 134	152	475	562	15 138
3	ABET	1 723	0	516	2 205	2 394	1 010	83	172	2 313	875	12 297
4	Human resource management	3 450	395	58	51	1 136	568	1 910	0	0	993	9 125
5	Customer care	3 903	321	990	472	331	430	1 130	0	0	186	8 191
6	Project management	1 618	532	292	478	1 139	465	962	132	285	601	6 947
7	Communication skills	3 945	94	330	186	278	155	699	0	0	356	6 182
8	Labour relations	1 424	474	890	127	369	112	740	115	472	742	5 523
9	HIV/Aids	1 723	2 000	1 392	0	0	0	0	198	0	201	5 514
10	Diversity management	2 454	0	605	0	0	384	100	0	82	311	4 308

Source: PSETA (2003: 8)

A simple ranking of the top skills needs reflected in the two tables above confirms in a broad sense that the most evident training need is financial management followed by computer skills and project management (Table 26).

Table 26: Ranking of skills needs

Skills need	Rank by number of departments indicating the training need (Table 24)	Rank by number of employees needing training (Table 25)
Financial management	1	2
Computer skills	3	1
Project management	2	6
Human resource management	4	4
Customer care	5	5
Communication skills	6	7
ABET	13	3

Transversal skills

The data on skills needs point to an important theme for data gathering, namely the ability to assess the balance of needs between transversal and specific skills in each department. One department actually created two sets of tables of critical skills needs by separating 'transversal needs' from what they termed 'technical needs'. This may not be appropriate

terminology, since there will be examples of 'transversal needs' that are in fact 'technical', and also of specific (non-transversal) skills that are non-technical.

In order to explore the relative importance of transversal in relation to specific skills, the number of times generic and specific skills were mentioned in the WSPs was counted. The total number of times any transversal skill was mentioned in the WSPs was 643, whereas specific skills were noted only 68 times, a ratio of roughly 1 specific to 10 transversal skills. This suggests strongly that transversal skills were seen as important to all departments. To take another example, the Department of Home Affairs identified training needs together with the number of employees requiring such training (Table 27). This also produced a ratio of roughly 1:10.

Table 27: Training needs identified in the Department of Home Affairs in 2003

Skills types	Category	Number
Computer training	Generic	5 257
Management skills	Generic	876
Leadership skills	Generic	102
Budget/finance control measures	Line specific	226
Immigration training	Line specific	1 540
ABET	Generic	404
HIV/Aids awareness	Generic	5 257
Total	-	13 662

Source: Department of Home Affairs (2003) training statistics for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003

PSETA is considered to be primarily responsible for transversal training across the public service, while specific sectoral education and training needs would be met by line-function SETAs. The information discussed here reinforces the critical importance of the PSETA in terms of transversal training.

At this point it must be noted that the relative importance of generic/transversal and line-specific skills may be influenced by the methods of collecting training needs data by some departments. Where employees self-report their training needs, they may tend to emphasise generic self-improvement skills that they can take with them. This could lead to the impression that generic/transversal skills are more needed than is really the case.

In addition, it is likely that line managers and supervisors are better judges of the technical and line-specific training needs among their personnel. Data on skills needs from these groups may produce different results from those recorded above.

5.5 Training planned and provided

WSPs are records of intentions rather than records of training completed. This section discusses some data on actual training that took place as reported by PSETA and also plans for providing lower grades of government employee with training.

5.5.1 Short course attendance across salary ranks, 2002/03

The WSPs for 2003/04 did not present data on training completed. To provide some perspective on the possible shape of training across all the salary scales of the public service, short course attendance in 2002/03 is presented in Table 28. The data should be taken as indicative, and as a means of identifying trends rather than as reflective of actual numbers of employees completing courses.

First, the 'miscellaneous' courseware category was the biggest in all but one of the salary bands. (There is however no opportunity to 'look inside' this category.) Where the

'miscellaneous' category is much larger than the specified categories, certain unknown other categories of training were probably undertaken by large numbers of employees.

The WSPs for 2003/04 show that financial management skills were a major critical skills need. This raises the question as to why the 2002/03 short course data show so few senior and middle managers completing financial management courses. This is a matter worthy of further attention.

On the other hand, information technology courses were the biggest single type of course provided to middle managers and administrative officers. This seems consonant with the needs expressed in the 2003/04 WSPs. What is troubling is that relatively few senior managers undertook information technology courses. The need to raise levels of information technology training at the management stratum was recognised in the HRD Strategic Plan of the DPSA as follows: 'There has been a concerted drive to train public service managers to use computers and handle large amounts of data. This is happening slowly and the skills that are being imparted are basic skills only. Most senior managers in the Public Service need line managers who are fully computer literate and familiar with software that creates and maintains efficient systems. Many members of the Public Service are not able to utilize the technology that is now available. This in itself will hold back service delivery in the short to medium term' (DPSA, 2002c: 15).

Table 28: Participation in short courses by personnel in national and provincial departments, 2002/03

Types of course	Elementary workers		Admin officers etc		Middle managers etc.		Senior managers		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Secretarial	108	2,0	346	2,1	252	3,5	12	1,3	718	2,4
Manager/supervisor dev	252	4,7	2 992	18,4	1 076	15,0	138	15,3	4 458	15,0
Labour relations	367	6,9	314	1,9	838	11,7	25	2,8	1 544	5,2
Provisional admin	120	2,2	224	1,4	169	2,4	32	3,5	545	1,8
Project management	11	0,2	148	0,9	300	4,2	24	2,7	483	1,6
Information technology	202	3,8	4 915	30,3	2 165	30,1	58	6,4	7 340	24,7
Financial management	47	0,9	130	0,8	291	4,0	132	14,6	600	2,0
Miscellaneous	4 243	79,4	7 172	44,2	2 097	29,2	481	53,3	13 993	47,1
Subtotal	5 347	100,0	16 241	100,0	7 188	100,0	902	100,0	29 678	100,0

Source: PSETA (2003: 10)

Analysing the short course data further is difficult. This is because of the need for different training opportunities to be adequately defined on a standard basis across all government departments. For example, the definition of 'short course' itself needs to be made explicit.

To illustrate the general argument for improved definitions of training, some comments regarding the importance of developing some simple conventions for capturing data are made with reference to the field of ICT training. In the first instance, in the WSP data on training, the need for ICT training is represented as a single category (e.g. 'computer skills' or 'computer training' or 'information technology'). Describing training provided or training needs in this way is limited analytically, because the domain of ICT training is extremely varied in terms of skills, functions and applications. The main point here is that aggregated statements about 'computer training' received or needed cannot be the basis of planning and budgeting at the department level. Nor can it be of assistance in obtaining an overview of ICT training nationally in the public service. It is important to begin to unpack these issues in a way that enables data collection on key skills areas that can directly assist planning.

5.5.2 Training planned for employees at salary grades 1 – 4

Data on training undertaken were not recorded in the WSPs. Therefore data on planned training for employees at salary grades 1 – 4 were compared with total employment at the same levels. These data are important because they provide some insight into the intended levels of training access among lower-skilled workers and part of the skilled worker category.

Public service salary level categories	
Levels 1-2	Lower skilled
Levels 3-5	Skilled
Levels 6-8	Highly skilled production
Levels 9-12	Highly skilled supervision
Levels 13-16	Senior management

The data on training to be provided for these workers were categorised in the WSPs as 'ABET training' and 'other training', and were analysed separately. The ABET data suggest that there was considerable variation between provinces in terms of planned employee access to training, but mention must again be made of the fact that only 79 departments of the 104 that submitted WSPs completed all the data fields (Table 29). The unevenness of the data could be the result of incompleteness, or differences in the roll-out of ABET per province. Nevertheless, overall, the planning data suggest that 19,1 per cent or nearly one in every five employees at salary levels 1 – 4 would receive ABET training. In addition, 25 per cent of the same group of employees would receive another form of training.

Table 29: Employees on ABET salary levels 1 – 4 compared to employees to benefit from training planned, 2002/03

	Number of departments	C Employees at level 1 – 4	A Beneficiaries ABET training	A/C %	B Beneficiaries other training	B/C %
Eastern Cape	6	11 632	1 148	9,9	101	0,9
Free State	4	979	95	9,7	156	15,9
Gauteng	9	3 473	763	22,0	1 517	43,7
KwaZulu-Natal	9	9 680	3 518	36,3	6 424	66,4
Limpopo	7	9 571	377	3,9	2 533	26,5
Mpumalanga	10	5 206	225	4,3	604	11,6
Northern Cape	6	3 879	564	14,5	375	9,7
North West	8	5 788	3 216	55,6	532	9,2
Western Cape	6	905	416	46,0	1 005	111,0
Subtotal	65	51 113	10 322	20,2	13 247	25,9
National	14	3 955	204	5,2	520	13,1
Total	79	55 068	10 526	19,1	13 767	25,0

NOTES:
1. In the case of the Western Cape the >100% given in the last column means that there were more opportunities to benefit from training than there were members of staff. In this instance some staff members will have received two or more training opportunities.
2. Response rate = 76,7% (79 departments responded to all questions)

The 55 068 employees recorded at salary levels 1 – 4 could expect to share 24 293 opportunities to attend ABET or other training opportunities. This means that, cumulatively, on the basis of one training opportunity per employee, 44,1 per cent of this group would receive some form of training. This is a good ratio, especially at the lower salary levels.

It is likely that the two different training opportunities were exclusive and that in reality an unspecified number of employees would attend more than one course. The data did not allow this level of investigation.

Lastly, if 24 293 learning opportunities were produced through a total of 315 programmes (129 ABET and 186 'other'), the average number of learners per programme would be 77,1. This raises the question as to whether a programme needs to have a certain minimum number of learners in order to be more cost efficient.

The existence of these data provides an important opportunity to examine to what extent the training plans were fulfilled and how and why the planned training goals were achieved, exceeded or not reached.

6. Analysis of training activities in selected national government departments

In order to supplement the empirical data obtained for this report, a number of interviews were held with personnel and managers in a set of government departments. The aim of these interviews was to understand the nature of skills development activities under way in government departments.

This section therefore deals with the following key themes:

- The establishment of training needs and linking these needs to strategic objectives
- The role of the WSP in information gathering in departments
- The allocation of, and reporting on, training expenditure
- The procedures for quality assurance and monitoring of training impact
- The contribution of key role-players such as the SDFs
- The influence of line managers on skills development
- Evidence of good practice in skills development
- The co-ordination of training strategies between national and provincial departments

6.1 Participating departments

Five national government departments (Table 30) were interviewed to get a picture of their line functions, size, clusters they were dealing with, links to provincial structures, and proportions of personnel at high grades.

Table 30: Summary of key characteristics of five national government departments					
	Department of Social Development (2003)[1]	Department of Home Affairs (2002)	Department of Health (2002)	South African Police Service (2003)	National Treasury (2003)
Characteristics	Service delivery	Centralised bureaucracy	Service delivery	Centralised	High level & professional skills
Size	Small	Large	Medium	Large	Small
Tier of government	National Frontline delivery in provincial departments	National and provincial	National Frontline delivery in provincial departments	National and provincial	National Provincial treasuries
Cluster	Social	Security	Social	Security	Governance and Administration
Employment size, in permanent filled posts	320	5 892	1 344	131 560	487
% of personnel in grades 9-12	34,6%	0,28%	24,7%	3,78%	34,5%
% of personnel in grades 13-16	9,06	0,05%	0,52%	0,42%	24,0%
Approximate number of designated HRD/ skills development personnel	5	89	5	1 399	4
Number of SDFs	1	1	1 (1 more planned)	40	1

Note:
1. The above data were obtained from various sources. The dates indicate the year for which information was provided.

It became clear during the interviews that each department's training activities were influenced by its core mission, its size in personnel numbers, the spread of its operations and other unique characteristics relating to organisational development. Each is briefly characterised below as an introduction to the discussion.

- Department of Health

A medium-sized national department with a relatively low proportion of senior managers. Frontline delivery takes place in provinces. Skills development is influenced by an active Performance Management Committee in addition to the Workplace Skills Development Committee.

- Department of Home Affairs

A large national department with offices and functions located in all provinces, and a very small proportion of senior managers. It has instituted a new campaign to improve service delivery 'turnaround'. It adopts a centralised approach to driving skills development, which is seen as critical to driving change.

- Department of Social Development

A small national department with a relatively high proportion of senior managers. Frontline delivery takes place in provinces. It has devolved skills development to line managers in the national department with some success.

- National Treasury

A small national department with a very high proportion of personnel in professional occupations. Skills development is to a large extent individualised and is seen as an important condition of service.

- South African Police Service

A very large national department offering a service in all provinces down to the local level, with a low proportion of senior managers. Changes in skills requirements affect large numbers of employees in the ranks. It has constituted a large number of SDF posts (40), which creates challenges for co-ordinating training. Allocation of funds for skills development is highly centralised. It also has a large internal training infrastructure.

6.2 Planning process

This section gives an overview of the establishment of training needs and their link to strategic objectives, the development and submission of the WSP, database management problems and information management resources, and then compares training plans with what is actually achieved.

6.2.1 Establishment of training needs and their link to strategic objectives

Fundamental to the implementation of a skills development plan is the process of obtaining accurate information on training needs, and then using this information for planning purposes.

Analysing training needs

Obtaining data to inform the skills development cycle appears to present difficulties. The WSP document for submission to PSETA requires the SDF to provide data that are based on a training needs analysis/skills audit that uses 'scientifically acceptable methods or software packages'. This suggests that there is some latitude for SDFs in the methodology they may use to obtain skills needs data, but also that the method used should be reliable.

One respondent argued strongly that 'departments don't know what a skills audit is', whereas another observed more gently: '[We] should be doing a comprehensive skills audit, but what is this? Do people understand it in the same way?' The crux of the situation was that there was apparently no shared understanding of what a skills audit entails, and how this is different to a needs analysis.

One department indicated that it conducted a '360 degree needs analysis based on the key elements of technical and behavioural competencies [and] these [were] based on job evaluations'. This approach is different to the 'Equate' government job evaluation methodology and software, which are considered to be restrictive. Hence the particular department's activity is a positive sign of willingness to proactively institute its own procedures even if they do not conform to standard processes. The initiative may point the direction to simpler and easier methods of dealing with skills needs analysis.

The Department of Home Affairs instituted a process involving visits to frontline offices and interviews with clients. Clearly it was considered important to obtain an outside or a client's view of the service competence of the Department. Such an approach could highlight additional competency and skills requirements that did not appear on existing job profiles. This level of investigation is not cited here as a necessary element in a skills needs analysis, but as an example of the rigour with which the skills needs analysis could be undertaken under particular circumstances.

Based on their work plans, line managers develop a grid that indicates their deliverables and then identify the competencies required against their deliverables. On this grid, the manager

will then select the best fit of training opportunities and personnel capacities to meet departmental objectives. On this basis each employee will then sign an agreement with their manager in respect of their personal development plan and their skills development within that plan. However, matching skills development needs with training packages is far more uncertain than this clean 'technical' explanation reveals. There are two main reasons for this: First, the analytic task of understanding skills needs down to the individual level is complex, and, second, personnel characteristics and motivation play a crucial role in the selection of candidates for training.

The evaluation of all posts is a necessary anchor in establishing the gap between skills requirements and the skills of job incumbents. Job evaluation is, however, a time-consuming process and can only be undertaken on a cycle of several years. Even so, not all departments seem to have complete job evaluation data. One of the respondents argued that it was not necessary to do a detailed job profile on each position in a department; a generic job profile for a particular job type was sufficient for a skills needs analysis. This may to an extent be true of some bigger departments with large numbers of personnel who have very similar duties, but would not hold for departments where persons of similar rank and function have quite different duties.

It is worrisome that some departments employed approaches to identifying their training needs that may not necessarily have produced information that was sufficiently useful to them from a planning perspective. A number of departments interpreted the method of establishing 'training needs' in a very particular way. If undertaken, this was frequently done in the form of a paper-based survey in which each employee reported what he/she perceived as his/her own competencies and training needs. Such a method is useful and valid in gathering data on what skills development opportunities employees would like to be exposed to, since their development should be based on a negotiated understanding between them and their supervisors. The method is also relatively quick and easy to implement.

However, this self-report method presents some questions regarding data validity. Individual employees are not necessarily in a position to judge their own competencies or relate their own job requirements to the mission of their line function department. Furthermore, in responding to such a survey on an individual basis, employees will not take into account cross-cutting strategic imperatives such as equity. These aspects need to be assessed by the responsible manager in a systematic way.

Organising data on training needs

The departments organised their data on training in a range of ways, and some produced information that was not sufficiently useful from a planning perspective. They frequently reported that they organised their data by race and gender, but far less frequently by salary rank or occupational group. Expenditure data were almost never mentioned.

Furthermore, the departments did not appear to be linking training needs to their strategic objectives in a systematic way. Where they reported that they did a training needs analysis, they seldom linked particular skills needs with specific posts within their post structure. In some instances they only knew skills needs on an aggregate basis by occupational category. This means that they could not establish in which directorates or in what specific posts the most urgent training needs were, which may not seem to be a serious problem if one assumes that the employees get their training. However, if training needs are only summarised by category and not linked to a post structure, a manager cannot accurately allocate training resources in relation to envisaged line-function activity as per strategic plan, which is a serious problem.

This seems to suggest that the departments did not see the importance of closely linking skills development opportunities to the employees who had to carry out the mission of the

department. It is also a sign that departments were not adequately equipped to gather and analyse training data to the desired level of specificity.

6.2.2 Development and submission of the workplace skills plan

In terms of the legislative framework supporting the NSDS and its impact on government training, the WSP is a primary lever that engages departments in a variety of planning activities that should lead to skills development. The WSP is primarily supposed to act as a source of evidence that departments have in fact undertaken skills needs analyses and skills development planning in relation to their strategic plans. However, apart from serving as a planning tool, it can also serve as a key vehicle for recording information on the training needs of a department, and the existence and functioning of structures such as the workplace skills committee. The actual recording of training activity takes place via the annual training report or the training implementation report.

The respondents appreciated the importance of developing a WSP that is aligned to the strategic plan of their department. As managers of skills development, their association with the principles underlying the production of a WSP was not in question. However, they suggested that the developmental value of the WSP as a critical output of the annual department planning process was reduced by deficiencies in the design of the WSP process and deficiencies of the WSP as a document.

As a result, the responsible officers in the departments viewed the submission of the WSP as a matter of compliance that was to some extent at odds with their mission or at the expense of service delivery, as expressed in the following rhetorical question: 'Do you deliver on a plan, or do you deliver what is needed (in the community)?'

Process

A deficiency in the design of the WSP *process* was claimed to lie in the PSETA-scheduled date of submission – the month of May, when some departments have not completed their annual strategic planning process. In Treasury, for example, managers submitted completed performance agreements and self-development programmes by 30 June. Therefore, if the WSP was submitted in May, it could not take into account these processes. Nor could it take into account Treasury's strategic planning process that takes place in August.

In practice, the planning of human resources should be based on and informed by the strategic plan of the department, which must necessarily be developed first. The back-to-front scheduling of the WSP submission reduces strategic planning to an exercise to meet requirements without reference to strategic operational needs for the next year. Whether this is the experience of departments other than Treasury remains to be confirmed. A solution would be to submit the WSP at a later point in the annual planning cycle so that strategic planning feeds into skills development planning.

Design

A second deficiency lies in the *design* of the WSP document itself. The respondents did not consider the document to have been designed as part of an 'enabling system' for data delivery; in certain sections it was even seen as deficient in its logic for data capturing. For example, one section requires data on establishment (e.g. ten senior managers) and another on training. If the ten managers between them cumulatively attended more courses than their own number (e.g. 20 courses), the system could not capture this detail.

Another difficulty relates to who captures what data. The decision as to how to categorise courses is left to the capturer. For example, if a course about a new financial management system included software, was the course offering software training or financial management training? Because no business rules informed data capture, the cumulative effect of decisions on where to capture data could skew results and analyses.

The importance of feedback on WSP submissions will be touched on again in this report, but it is necessary to observe here that the departments claimed to have received no feedback on their submissions. One respondent observed: 'We submit and that is all that matters ... all they say is that the department complied ... nobody tells you whether your WSP is of good quality ...' Such perceptions will probably lower the motivation of SDFs, because where feedback, reward or sanction is missing, the WSP is likely to be seen as a matter of compliance.

6.2.3 Database management problems

There is an urgent need to generate better links between different data holdings of government. The respondents observed that the data fields required in the WSP document had different characteristics to data capture and data presentation formats that were applied in other standard government databases such as PERSAL which is the government's national personnel database. Thus data had to be converted into the required format and transferred manually from one database to the other (e.g. from PERSAL to the WSP). This takes time and increases the possibility of introducing unwanted errors into the chain of data.

In addition, the respondents indicated that they had to meet multiple internal and external requirements for statistical returns (e.g. on employment equity, human resource management, Section 21 companies and in-service training), all of which have different formats. In November 2003, at a Public Service Commission briefing on its evaluation of the pilot study on performance of selected government departments (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2003:2), reference was made to the national minimum information requirements (NMIRs) 'to address unreliable human resource information in the public sector'. There were eight NMIR categories (biographics, occupation, gender, career, disciplinary matters, organisational matters, geographics and post information). NMIRs were meant to assist in structuring information on employee profiles and posts.

Qualifications data for each employee are requested in the WSP. However, the respondents reported that when new civil service members were inducted and their personal details were captured, REVQ13 (qualifications data) was only an optional field. This throwback to the years when the civil service promotion system was driven by rank and length of service is in stark contrast to the philosophy behind the South African Qualifications Authority, the National Qualifications Framework and lifelong learning, which philosophy makes the capturing of qualifications data essential. The implication is that the data needs in one part of the civil service system (PERSAL) are not adequately synchronised with the data needs in another part of the system (WSPs).

As most of the problems identified above by the respondents refer to technical planning and implementation deficiencies, they can and should be removed as expeditiously as possible.

6.2.4 Information management resources

Over and above the mechanisms for capturing data, it is important to make the transfer and manipulation of the data as easy as possible.

It has been observed that at the provincial and national department level the levels of compliance with the requirements of WSP submission require substantial improvement. This sub-section takes a look only at the possible causes of non-submission of WSPs, namely the apparent lack of technical infrastructure and skills to efficiently collect, distribute and interpret training data.

The SAPS respondents observed that within their department, different institutional units had 'not been well resourced to cope with the demands of implementation', that is, they did not have computers and software and the skills to maximise the usefulness of the technology to

capture, create and transmit data. This was reflected in the fact that at some levels in the organisation, training data reports were still drawn up by hand or captured in basic word-processing documents. Other SAPS units did have computer software on which to capture and store their data, but this was not standardised, with the result that data were managed by means of MSWord, QuattroPro, Excel or Access respectively and there was no easy way to integrate them. This lack of standardisation on the format of training statistics made the integration of information at higher levels in the organisation onerous and expensive.

It was observed earlier that once data were gathered in the WSPs, they were sorted for reporting by category on an aggregate basis and were not linked to individual records within a database. If training information was linked to individual records in a database, it would be possible to extract data through relatively straightforward queries. However, the evidence suggests that few of the departments had a functional database on training. This would continue to present a major hurdle to analysis and planning.

As part of their baseline survey of training in the public sector, Du Toit, Erasmus and Van Zyl (2000: 44) observed from their analysis of the returns that departments struggled to provide the information requested in this audit. In order to establish why this was the case, data were collected on information management systems, and on the systems of data and information processing available in the departments. This uncovered the startling reality that one in every four departments (22,6 per cent) had no information system in place, 6,5 per cent had a manual filing system and 9,7 per cent were planning a system at that stage. In other words, four out of ten departments did not have any electronic means of capturing and storing data and information. Among the departments that did have some electronic form of information system, some were decentralised (i.e. located in the sub-units of the departments) and, as a consequence, data collection was a hugely time-consuming process. Du Toit, Erasmus and Van Zyl warned that '[t]he state of information systems greatly impacted on this audit and it can be expected that similar exercises in future may prove to be equally unsatisfactory unless this problem is addressed' (2000: 44).

There is no recent data on the state of information systems geared at managing training information in government departments. No doubt, there have been improvements since 2000. However, circumstantial evidence suggests that much should still be done about improving the capacity of human resource management directorates to manage training data. This, in turn, should impact positively on the reliability and usefulness of training data contained in WSPs and reduce the effort of obtaining data and conducting analyses.

6.2.5 Comparing training plans with what is achieved

There are inevitable divergences between what training is planned for a particular period – as stated in the WSP – and what is achieved. This is because of changes in the internal and external environment that bring new priorities to the attention of line managers.

Internally, departmental restructuring affects skills development. Even without job losses, restructuring can significantly affect business unit activities, personnel responsibility, job profiles and the reallocation of personnel between different line managers. This in turn can greatly disrupt the management of skills development.

The respondents observed that externally driven changes in the mandate of their department could also lead to variances between the stated intentions for training given in the WSP and what was achieved. Discontinuity in training needs was created when public servants were expected to undertake new functions or to change the way they carry out their functions. For example, government may promulgate a new law on firearms, and because the SAPS must deal with private and public gun ownership, employees would have to be trained to understand the implications of the new law in time for its implementation. As a result, training

plans are often disrupted, as a respondent commented: 'You can plan ... but if the need arises, they must go for the training ... immediately.'

If departments' training plans tend not to be realised, then it is important to compare plans against records of what is actually achieved, such as annual training reports or training implementation reports. However, the WSP document and the actual training records are not brought together for analytic purposes.

Skills development legislation emphasises planning as a foundation for training activity. This is an important and logical starting point for encouraging public and private organisations to pursue skills development and develop a training culture. Now that the NSDS is beginning to mature, it is important to pay attention to monitoring and assessing progress in training endeavours in government departments.

Complementary to the activity of planning is that of monitoring implementation. Monitoring could be given some prominence by completing the feedback loop between the WSP and its implementation report for the same period. This would enable practitioners such as SDFs and line managers to hone their capability to judge how feasible their plans were.

6.3 Allocation of training and reporting of training expenditure

The focus of attention of this section is training allocation processes, reporting of training expenditure, and the calculation of the budgetary value of skills development activities.

6.3.1 Training allocation processes

Line managers are accorded greater control and responsibility for the utilisation of resources at their disposal – including human resources – on the basis of their performance agreements. They are responsible for the implementation of the performance framework and for training budgeting. According to one respondent, it was an inherent job requirement for every manager to submit his/her training plan, based on his/her workplan, to the human resource management directorate. This was necessary to 'move away the responsibility for training from the training unit towards the managers themselves'.

This decision-making process if driven through line management can produce a particular distribution of opportunities for training and training investment. Monitoring training investment is an important means of control for line managers and their supervisors. We must therefore ask to what extent managers have access to financial data on training and to what extent they base their decisions on cost considerations.

Links between training budgets and training allocation decisions

The budget and allocation processes for training investment differ considerably between departments. In the Department of Social Development and National Treasury '[t]he budget for training is decentralised'. In other words, it is bundled within the overall budget for each sub-directorate. With some differences of detail, the chief director in each sub-directorate has a budget and, as the budget holder, can approve and allocate funding for employees to attend courses. This means that in some departments there is a direct link between the relevant manager and the employee who is selected for training. As a result, accountability for deploying and applying training finances in the workplace can be built through performance management.

In contrast, the SAPS National Training Committee sits and adjudicates on all submissions for training expenditure down to the area levels. The SAPS uses a document that requires details on each course that is requested and the affected employees. This 'business plan' for each course must be submitted and adjudicated. Course applications must be completed at

the divisional training level and call for detail on personnel, motivation, administration, functional value implementation, duty activity, geographics and course costs. This format is useful in that it encourages candidates to motivate their training choice. This centralised approach seems motivated by concerns to sustain high levels of standardisation of courseware for maximising shared understanding among SAPS members at all levels, and also to prevent unnecessary expenditure.

However, a national committee may not be able to adjudicate appropriately on allocations to training at local levels. The committee members cannot know the subtleties of how allocations can affect the actual people on the job. This arrangement can reduce managers' sense of responsibility for skills development. Thus a strategy that succeeds in controlling and regulating training allocations may have unwanted consequences elsewhere. In this case, line managers are not able to allocate training opportunities and are therefore not empowered to take full control and responsibility for how skills development feeds into personal development and the personal development plans of their staff.

The Department of Home Affairs has also adopted a centralised approach to budgeting for skills development. The core budget for skills development is located with the head of the training directorate, who has financial resources at her disposal for training purposes, which amount to roughly 4 per cent of payroll. Line managers only have discretionary access to money for minor ad hoc training. This singular commitment of a large part of the budget of Home Affairs and the centralised control over that budget must be understood within the context of the 'turnaround strategy' that the department has adopted to quickly raise service levels. It is clear that senior management have decided to drive the transformation of service delivery in the Department through providing training opportunities to personnel. A centralised approach to focusing training against the objectives of the turnaround strategy makes sense. This may well be a time-bound approach to training allocation, and once the desired service levels have been achieved, training decision-making may be devolved to line managers.

While line managers are obliged to allocate 1 per cent of their budget to skills development, how these monies should be allocated is not specified. The pressure of their own performance contracts may induce them to expend their training budgets instrumentally. Although this approach is defensible in terms of meeting strategic objectives, it may not necessarily support equity or development objectives. Some employees may have fewer training opportunities because their role is not considered mission critical. It is therefore necessary to obtain financial data in order to monitor aspects such as the spread of financial resources between units and between employees.

Feedback on training expenditure

Only the process of distributing finances has been described above and not the way in which training funds are monitored and managed. In practice the budgeting of training in sub-directorates does not seem to be adequately integrated into decision-making at that level. Without feedback to managers on how their resources are being expended, it is not possible for them to make appropriate decisions on allocations for strategic training.

It seems that few managers actually had sufficient access to information to enable them to track their training expenditure adequately. None of the respondents indicated that they had access to data that showed whether a particular line manager had overspent or underspent on the statutory 1 per cent. One respondent observed: 'I don't have a sense that that is being done ... At times we receive [verbal] reports that the amount exceeds the required 1 per cent, but it is better to have documentary proof ... If it were true, then I would not hear people complaining that they need to be given a chance to get opportunities for training.' From this statement it is clear that the training personnel themselves did not understand how line managers were allocating training funds. This is corroborated by another respondent who

said that line managers 'are not necessarily analysing the information, because we do not request such data from our Finance Unit. If [line] managers cannot see it and if we cannot provide the information to them, it is invisible.'

6.3.2 Reporting of training expenditure

The interviews contained no evidence that a structured system for reporting training expenditure at the line management level was in place. One respondent attributed this lack of a reporting structure to the internal finance section's not being keen to be a partner in developing the WSP.

The absence of financial reporting on a periodical basis was recognised by one respondent as a disadvantage to training personnel. She considered financial information to be an important resource in dealing with – and persuading – senior management in negotiations around training policy: 'Given the structures/positions/hierarchy in government it is important to have information available for this purpose.'

6.3.3 Calculation of the budgetary value of skills development activities

A problem for the provision of management reports on expenditure on training was how to specify budget expenditure categories. It was uncertain whether the departments interviewed actually had a common set of protocols or categories for describing training expenditure.

Although 1 per cent of payroll must be allocated to training, this value is relative to what expenditures are designated as training related and how these data are collected. If different departments calculate training expenditure differently, this information will not be strictly comparable. For example, respondents differed in their views on whether and how certain costs should be reflected in records of training expenditure (e.g. direct and indirect costs; opportunity costs of employees (lost time); training development costs; allowances to those attending training; and catering and venue costs).

Furthermore, one respondent drew attention to how government employees were exposed to international leadership and technical development programmes, sponsorships or scholarships that were worth large amounts of money. If such skills development activities were not recorded, the total value of training put in by government through different sources of funding could be underestimated.

6.4 Assuring quality and monitoring training impact

The departments paid relatively little attention to the quality assurance of training. Most attention was focused on quality assurance upfront.

The respondents indicated that their training directorate 'approved' training courses by scrutinising structure, curriculum and duration of courses in relation to cost. In addition, it was checked whether the training provider was accredited by a SETA. It was noted that some SETAs kept databases of registered enterprises, but if these databases were not updated, the data would be unreliable as a management tool for selecting between training opportunities.

Where courses were not on the approved list, training directorates had to approve courses that managers had selected for employees. This involved basic checks on the reliability and respectability of the provider. In addition, training managers looked at basic cost-benefit issues 'inside of' the course by asking whether it 'looked feasible' against outcomes claimed for the course. It was noted that training providers 'are masters in formulating the material and outcomes but when course participants arrive, they are asked what their needs are'. This means that it is more difficult to judge what is worthwhile in the more unstructured courses.

One respondent expressed concern about outsourced training, particularly for personnel in the management and professional categories. She drew attention to the high proportion of conferences, workshops and even one-day seminars that employees were attending. These events may have been part of mandated personal development plans, but they were not necessarily of good quality. They were not regulated via the SAQA system or by SETAs, and although some of the institutions that offered the events may have been registered, their events were not registered. The events were, however, valued as an opportunity for professionals to keep abreast of new developments in their field and for broadening and enriching their knowledge base.

Beyond advance screening, very little was done to determine the quality of the courseware itself in terms of the quality of the training experience (not that this is always easy to achieve). One respondent commented that as far as post-training monitoring was concerned, there was 'no monitoring of training provided by external providers ... nobody has ever done [this]'. This means that it was unknown whether the performance of employees who received training improved or even whether managers provided the opportunity for employees to practise the skills they had learned. Data from the Public Service Commission reports confirm that departments hardly ever conduct any impact assessment.

There was a lack of evidence that managers monitored their personnel for changes in their behaviour after they had attended courses. However, one of the participating departments planned to put in place a follow-up procedure three months after training had taken place. The follow-up would involve requesting trainees to report briefly on whether they perceived the course to be of value and whether they were applying their learning. This approach recognises that responses to training can be very individualistic and that trainees should be sensitised to use their training experiences and newly acquired skills.

In some instances, the respondents referred to measuring the impact of training through: monitoring the incidence of client complaints, using customer care hotlines, measuring the turnaround time for particular services delivered, and scrutinising feedback requested from clients. However, in none of the participating departments have these ideas been put into effect.

According to one respondent, a more technically demanding return on investment analysis was 'largely off the radar for managers'.

6.5 Role of the skills development facilitator

SDFs are important role players in skills development in departments. There are, however, certain circumstances that can militate against their playing their role as effectively as they might wish.

First, as has been observed earlier, the SDF position is not designated as a substantive post in the rank structure of the civil service. In some instances, SDFs are appointed in full-time posts, but in other instances their work is seen as a part-time responsibility.

One respondent observed that '[w]e don't have the authority ... the SDF is not taken seriously ... which is strange because the DPSA evaluated the SDF and set its job function at level 12'. As a result, SDFs can find themselves in management environments where they cannot fulfill their duties adequately. In the SAPS, for example, most SDFs were at the rank of captain or superintendent, which are effectively middle-rank posts. Analogous situations occurred in the other departments.

In the SAPS and elsewhere, SDF duties '[are] done over and above their normal work'. It was clearly not common practice for SDFs to singularly focus on the demands of their SDF role. As part-timers they had to keep up with the demands of their formal appointment in the

line department and their additional responsibilities as SDFs. They might also be removed from their SDF position because they were promoted or transferred in terms of their formal position, or because they withdrew, which would result in discontinuity. Because of the additional tasks associated with the SDF role, more senior managers were seldom appointed in this role.

Moreover, SDFs were appointed through delegation by senior line managers rather than by appointment based on competition. This was because the SDF role had no formal status (in rank terms) or permanency (in appointment terms) in the public service. For these reasons, it was difficult to see how the SDF responsibility could bring advantages or rewards to the incumbent.

The respondents suggested that the SDF post should be elevated and given appropriate authority, and that there should be an appropriate career path for the SDF in human resource development, or training and development directorates. One respondent argued strongly that SDFs had to have an Education Training and Development Practices background and that '... we should not just take anybody'.

The skills development legislation refers to the role of the SDF in the singular, as though there is only one incumbent per enterprise. This will be the case in the overwhelming majority of private sector enterprises, most of which have under 150 employees. However, in the public service, where most government departments are not only very large in employment size, but also dispersed in location, this is not the case. Thus, it is important to ask how best to manage the role envisaged for the SDF in government departments, some of which constitute massive challenges – both numerically and spatially. The problem is best illustrated by examining the function of the SDF in the SAPS. The SAPS has in total about 145 000 employees, distributed between one national head office, nine provinces, twelve divisions and five components. In addition, the SAPS has ten of its own internal training colleges dedicated to policing training. The overall size and structure of the SAPS have caused it to appoint 40 SDFs within its sub-structures. The number of SDFs is so large that the group itself requires organisation and co-ordination from within the SAPS national office, an outflow of national centralisation of all service control of all SAPS levels. The chain of communication on training information extends from the station level, to the area, to the provincial training manager (PTM) and then to the national department.

6.6 Influence of line managers on skills development

The discussion below is divided into a section on the influences on line managers' propensity to conduct appropriate skills development activities, one on line managers' understanding of skills development and one on how line managers are perceived to be responding to the NSDS.

6.6.1 Influences on line managers' propensity to conduct appropriate skills development activities

The way in which policies and regulations associated with the NSDS are taken up in government will be affected by other policies and regulations that are intended to govern the behaviour of civil servants. These sets of rules will not necessarily generate uniformity in the way in which all government departments work, because they will be interpreted differently and their enactment will be affected by the scale and complexity of the organisational structure within which they are applied. Nevertheless, the intention of public service regulations that are applicable to all government departments and all civil servants serves as the basis for understanding the institutional environment within which skills are to be developed in government departments.

Line managers in government departments are critically important role players in the skills development process. Their role is reinforced by two structural elements. First, in terms of the bureaucratic structure of public service departments, the line manager of a particular unit or units is placed in a position of responsibility that primarily requires the effective fulfilment of line function objectives. Second, in terms of the Public Service Act (103 of 1994) and the Public Service Amendment Act (86 of 1998), 'a head of department shall be responsible for the efficient management and administration of his or her department including the effective utilization and training of staff' (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2002: 6). Responsibility for skills development is devolved through the different management tiers to reach each individual employee, who is expected to be engaged in 'planning and managing with his/her supervisor, learning and career development, in a way that is consistent with the needs of the department and the public service at large' (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2002: 6). Accountability for these functions is enforced through the system of performance agreements from higher management echelons down to the personal development plans of all other staff.

It is important to recognise that skills development activities in government departments are profoundly influenced by this combination of structure and obligation, the source of which is not the Departments of Labour and Education, but the domain of public service regulations. What this means in practical terms is that progress in skills development in the public sector is dependent on how line managers function in relation to their overall and day-to-day responsibility towards their subordinates, and on how line managers apply themselves to matters of personal development as required by the performance management system.

A number of observations can be made about this general human resource management context within which skills development is located.

First, the devolution of these responsibilities to line managers must be seen in the context of changes in the role and conception of line management in the public service generally, and specifically the higher profile of human resource management requirements in the job profiles of line managers. The Public Service Commission report observed recently that '[d]epartments are generally finding it difficult to comply with the broad range of human resource management requirements imposed on them. For example, managing performance is now the responsibility of individual managers. Decentralisation and the delegation of authority relating to human resource management to lower levels have in many instances overloaded managers. Where performance suggests it is necessary, consideration should be given to revoking these delegations until capacity to manage them properly has been built' (PSC, 2004: 34 – 35).

This concern is mirrored by a respondent of one of the larger national departments. She stated with reference to the performance management process that 'managers have got no time to sit with you ...' The situation is probably more complex than this, and there could be more than one reason contributing to managers having less time than they should to work through performance management with their personnel. For example, line managers can be too busy because they are under-staffed, or they themselves need to improve their own personal time management skills, or they may not have bought into the imperatives of skills development yet and are inclined to allocate their time to other tasks that are perceived to be more important. Further analysis will enable this situation to be understood.

Second, the formal legislation of processes may not necessarily produce the lived enactment of the intentions of such legislation. A lot depends on how managers interpret these requirements. In 2002, the DPSA observed the following with respect to performance management in the public service: 'Many managers do not appreciate the link between human resource development and systems of performance appraisal and review that actually lead to performance improvement, accountability and increased productivity' (2002: 15). The

interviews with the five respondents cited above either corroborated of contradicted this assertion.

Third, the effective implementation of systems is dependent on how easy they are to implement. The Public Service Commission recently argued that '[e]ffective performance management needs simple, functional systems that support managers in assessing staff and reviewing their performance' (PSC, 2004: 34). This aspect is merely noted here. Further research is required to assess the user-friendliness of the processes specified in the systems.

The principles of skills development are not the only policy imperatives that line managers must seek to address in their planning and implementation tasks. In some sense, the observations that follow are inevitably informed by an understanding that skills development is affected by the quality of time, insight, understanding and effort that managers in the public service are able to allocate to that set of activities. In the words of one of the respondents, training is a tool and is in the end 'only as good as the enabling environment'. Managers have the power and responsibility to maximise the receptiveness of the work environment so that training undertaken can produce maximum benefits for individuals and for their particular directorates.

6.6.2 Line managers' understanding of skills development

The respondents expressed the view that line managers in their departments varied quite widely in the level of sophistication with which they understood 'skills development' as a concept and as a practice. One respondent observed that managers were having 'difficulty in starting to work in this new mode ... Much as we have moved in our understanding of skills development and training, there is still a need to change.'

Another respondent observed that some of the line managers in her department 'think it [skills development] is easy' and 'equate it [skills development] to teaching'. The implication here is that certain line managers hold a 'thin' conception of skills development, as largely consisting of actual teaching-learning practices, rather than as an approach to learning that could permeate almost any working activity.

Of greater concern was a respondent's observation that some line managers revealed ignorance of core skills development concepts. She stated that 'they don't understand what is a "skill" and what is a "competence"'. She related how one of the line managers referred people who approached the department to do volunteer work to her, in the mistaken view that volunteers were equivalent to interns. She took this to imply that the manager did not know what the internship programme involved. However, there were positive signs. For example, another respondent related that she was requested to make a presentation on skills development to senior managers in her department. This was a sign that awareness of the importance of skills development was increasing within departments, and that managers were willing to tap into the knowledge of skills development professionals in their ranks.

The need to 'sensitise line managers' was a phrase frequently used in the course of more than one interview, which suggests that skills development managers attributed considerable importance to achieving a shift in mind-set among line managers. In addition, one of the respondents said: 'We need their co-operation', meaning that he understood that increasing line managers' buy-in to skills development was something that could not be commanded via the training directorate. The influence of managers in training directorates is partly dependent on their seniority, but probably more dependent on how much support and credence their function are given by directors-general and deputy directors-general.

Line managers also tended to view training as an activity that was distinct from day-to-day operations and responsibilities. It appears that line managers did not identify themselves as

skills development practitioners and had relatively set ideas about where their responsibility and competency regarding training ended. According to one respondent, 'training is seen [by managers] as a support function ... it does not add to core functions'.

In contrast, the respondents also emphasised their concern that line managers could fall into the trap of 'understanding any problem to be a training problem'. This was attributed to the failure of some line managers to properly diagnose the full environment within which an operational problem existed. As a result, they did not appreciate 'that the root of the problem could lie in a program, in a system, in a management style or in any other factor in the environment' other than training. Therefore, these line managers could not easily 'crystallise the real training needs' from the whole scenario that confronted them. In an extreme sense, the propensity to throw training at the problem reflected a reification of training as a solution and absolved management from seeking complementary solutions to the problem. Furthermore, if a manager saw training as the sole solution to an operational difficulty, it could mean that that manager was unconsciously displacing blame or responsibility away from him-/herself.

6.6.3 How line managers are perceived to be responding to the National Skills Development Strategy

The aim of the interviews was in the first instance to obtain insight into training practices as they took place in departments. For this reason, the concern was to identify to what extent training practice supported the precepts of the NSDS but did so without necessarily referring specifically to the policy texts themselves. This approach was necessary so as not to straight-jacket the analysis with narrow reference to the policy texts.

Some respondents asserted that they were 'doing it anyway'. By this they meant that in their view they understood the concepts and legislative framework of the NSDS and were practising these, but without necessarily referring to the NSDS 'language' for the same ideas and practices. This is an important finding, because it suggests that in most training directorates in national government departments there was a sophisticated understanding of the NSDS and its legislative underpinnings as a framework for training action.

It was also of importance for this research to assess understanding of the direct influence of the NSDS on training, since the various policies are relatively new. Understanding the influence of the NSDS could sustain appropriate training practices in the long term.

The training personnel interviewed observed that the NSDS called for a culture change and that this was a long-term process: 'It took us years to understand what the legislation aimed to accomplish' and the important thing was 'to have our line function understand and take on their responsibility'. The respondents pointed out that the NSDS was 'very broad and very generic' in its intentions and that there was a 'need to unpack and customise [it] to departmental needs', meaning that they understood the policy as a framework that each department had to interpret to best bring it into practice. However, this was seen to be a relatively slow process in some line function areas as managers there, according to the respondents, were 'aware of it [legislation] but will not bother to [make themselves aware of] it'. In addition, certain managers were inclined to disclaim personal responsibility for skills development activities, and would say to their training personnel '[W]e need you to take us through the process [so we are] not worried, because [you] are here.'

Clearly the responsibilities for skills development were being negotiated between the human resource management (HRM) and skills development directorates on one side, and line managers on the other side. Employees in the former were obviously there to assist line managers, but they were not necessarily there to take on fundamental work within each line manager's own domain.

There is evidence that in some of the departments, the HRM and the human resource development (HRD) function did not interact as much as might be desired. One respondent stated: 'They [HRM] think: "We are recruiting and you [HRD] are training." And that is where it ends.' This compartmentalisation created a situation where synergies were not captured and the value of a co-ordinated approach was forfeited. This danger was reflected in the low level of information sharing between the two functions. For example, training directorates were uncertain whether HRM directorates would make relevant information available after the personal development plans had been submitted to them.

6.7 Good practice

The respondents were asked to talk about what they would view as good training courses, programmes or training-related innovations that they had implemented. More than one respondent asserted that 'there is nothing like "best practice" ... what might be best for [department X] might not be best for [department Y]'.

6.7.1 Good practice embodied in training programmes

Some of the respondents spoke with pride about particular training programmes they had initiated. For example, the respondent of the Department of Social Development was proud of the skills the Department had developed in the field of social security (specifically pension distribution and servicing). They had built up a programme from scratch, whereas previously their personnel only received generic training in customer care and had had little training regarding their specific roles in pension administration, which was a massive operation. As the programme matured, learning programmes were developed that dealt with the reasons why such a service was being offered, which could give meaning to their work and help build standards and norms for service in that specialised sphere.

The respondent of the Department of Home Affairs saw the development of a three-month induction programme to cover both line and transversal skills as a critically important innovation. The value of this programme was clear from the fact that the department used to let personnel work for periods of up to a year without giving them any form of induction or training. This programme was also seen to be important because, whereas in the past personnel 'did not see the value of what they were doing', they were now provided with an understanding of their role and its relevance to the line functions of their department. This instilled a greater sense of purpose in their working lives.

It transpired that information technology training was a challenge for the Department of Home Affairs. This was because Home Affairs had several large database-driven systems (e.g. HANIS, the Home Affairs National Identification System) that were developed to meet the specific needs of the Department. Generic training resources available in the market would therefore be inadequate. Furthermore, the context of application of the computer systems in Home Affairs required that training courses take into account that unique operational environment. As a result, it was decided that the Department would create its own in-house computer training capability. This move appears to have met the needs of the Department, but would not necessarily be the right solution for another department that uses commercially available off-the-shelf software. In the latter case, outsourced computer training may be the best route.

One successful programme in the view of the SAPS respondents was a learnership developed and registered by the ETDP SETA, and implemented by the SAPS. It is called the 'Occupationally Directed Education, Training and Development Learnership'. This is a 'train-the-trainers' learnership for current employees (18.1 learnership). The ETDP was also working on the same programme with other departments such as Correctional Services and Justice, which are big departments that need to train large numbers of employees. For large government departments, training of the whole department might take weeks to months. The scale of SAPS training projects was very large, and sometimes it was necessary to train the

entire force in a particular aspect of law enforcement within a short space of time. In these circumstances, the SAPS might resort to a cascade training model, which was not necessarily ideal. An example of this kind of training was the 'Criminal Administration System' (CAS). The point to be made here is that for the SAPS with its massive establishment and need to implement certain training modules quickly and cost efficiently, a train-the-trainers solution is innovative and valuable.

As can be seen, the notion of good practice differed, depending on the needs of and pressures on each department and the type of goals it had to achieve. Further research that first identifies successful programmes or good practices and then investigates each example further to isolate principles that are generic and transferable could prove useful.

6.7.2 Good practice embodied in supporting a culture of skills development

The discussion will now turn to what appear to be forms of good practice other than in actual training programme design and development. These good practices refer to activities that support a culture of training in the department.

The Department of Health established a Performance Management Committee that proactively engaged with performance management issues that had direct skills development implications. The key role of the Committee was to ensure that personal development plans for the relevant staff members were appropriately developed and followed through by both supervisor and staff member. The Committee elected to introduce the performance management system and to conduct training in this system to all employees all offices from salary grade 12 and below. The approach served to sensitise employees to their own responsibilities and rights to personal development and through this showed the potential to raise awareness of training as a means to develop the individual. It is interesting that management and supervisors initially saw more grievances, because employees became more aware of the process of personal development plans, which was to include the planning of goals, setting of targets and review of progress.

The conclusion of the process of planning the allocation of training opportunities lies in the signing of an agreement between the line manager and each of his/her employees. This is supposed to be a negotiated agreement, but as one respondent indicated, 'people want to enrich themselves but not look at the [departmental] strategy'. That is, employees might seek to engage in courses that were of oblique relevance to their actual job function. This may be partly because the job function had not been adequately defined. In the words of the respondent, choice of training opportunities 'should not be a shopping list' for the employees, and the allocation of opportunities had to be 'to the benefit of government' rather than to the benefit of the employee. However, good practice should provide an appropriate balance, depending on the line department and the occupational category of the employee.

There is obviously a potential contradiction between training options that could be to the greater developmental benefit of the individual and those that could be to the benefit of the department concerned. The balance of power in decision-making over what training is undertaken, differs. Some departments fully drive this process, such as the Department of Defence where there is a preponderance of structured courses that are compulsory and strongly directed. In other instances, employees in particular occupational categories, such as high-level professionals, can initiate their own training programmes and have a say in the direction of their own continuous professional development. Thus the extent to which training is elective or commanded will differ in respect of the occupational category of employees and the skills structure of the department.

Another approach to skills development is visible in Treasury. In that department, the motivation for providing employee skills development was not only driven by the demands of operational requirements and skills needs. It was also informed by the aim to make Treasury

the 'employer of choice', the central idea being to attract people to the organisation, based on creating attractive conditions for employees. This points to competition for employee talent in the labour market. There are several possible reasons for this strategy. By making itself attractive as an employer, Treasury was also raising the likelihood of keeping the employees it had attracted, given the difficulty to retain employees at the managerial and professional level in the public sector.

In Treasury, training decision-making was augmented and complemented by an in-house system that involved publishing notices of training opportunities on the intranet. This served to raise awareness of training among employees, emphasised that employees had a choice regarding their own development, and also demonstrated that the department was concerned with learning. The Treasury respondent indicated that 'Treasury considers itself a learning organisation'. As a sign of its commitment to personnel development, Treasury linked training activity to personal development plans and performance agreements. In terms of this, non-SMS and SMS performance assessments explicitly focused a portion of the assessment on what skills development personnel had undertaken.

The evidence suggests that examples of good practice are appearing in specific courseware in particular knowledge fields and also in practices that encourage the evolution of a stronger culture of training in government.

6.8 Managing training strategy between the national and provincial departments

Although this series of interviews focused on training in national government departments, there was inevitably reference to the way departments such as Health viewed training issues in provincial departments with the same line function. For example, the Department of Health, which had one SDF for its national departmental needs, was considering a second SDF for overseeing health training activities in the provincial health departments. The SAPS was a clear exception with its centralised control of all training.

The articulation of responsibility for skills development between national and provincial departments was complex for a number of reasons. First, provincial departments are constitutionally autonomous and have autonomous training capabilities, but they are subject to the oversight of the national government department. Second, provincial departments have to customise training in accordance with the unique policies and also unique circumstances of public service provision in the regions. Third, provincial governments have elected to incorporate different line functions into unique combinations at the provincial department level. For example, one SDF would attend to the skills development needs of a combination of line functions in the Department of Social Services, Welfare and Arts in the North West Province. Fourth, some provincial governments approach the furthering of skills development differently. For example, Gauteng has established its Shared Services Centre (SSC), which functions as a central node through which sourcing of training services and co-ordination of training courses and activities are undertaken. The primary – though not the only – motivation for Gauteng's SSC seems to be to structure processes around procurement. The Western Cape has adopted a different strategy by establishing its Academy through which it seeks to institutionalise certain training provision and related activities. The Free State has elected to drive provincial public service training through the Premier's Office, which takes responsibility for an Institute for Public Service Training.

These different approaches and structures will affect the complementarity of training between national and provincial levels.

7. Conclusion

This overview has highlighted a number of characteristics of government skills development. In the first section below, the key features will be discussed with reference to available data. In the second section, the discussion turns to practices and processes. The last section briefly considers the implications of international public sector reform for government training in South Africa.

Data on government training

- **Expenditure:** In the 2002/03 year, government departments budgeted for expenditure of about R1 528 per employee on training, which represented an increase of 26 per cent over the average value of R1 212 spent in 1999/2000.
- **Training rates:** Available 1999/2000 and 2001/02 data suggested that training rates for government were 16,5 per cent in national departments and 24,3 per cent in provincial departments and ranged from 12 to 28 per cent at local government level. The data showed that training rates varied significantly between departments and across time. While such variances prevented definitive comment, the general impression was that training rates could still be improved in the public sector.
- **Training and rank:** At national level, managers in government seemed to receive a higher share of training than lower-level employees. At the provincial and local government levels, the picture was more complex. In local government there was evidence of relatively high levels of training among elementary and clerical workers. With reference to planned training, WSP data suggested that one in five (19,1 per cent) of lower-skilled employees (levels 1 – 4) were to receive ABET training in 2003/04, and one in four (25 per cent) were to receive some other form of training, which means that cumulatively, training opportunities of some form were planned for over 40 per cent of lower-skilled workers.
- **Training type:** Just over 30 per cent of all middle managers and administrative officers received high levels of information technology training in the form of short courses in 2002/03. This is a positive sign for the conversion of departments to working environments that use information technology.
- **Bursaries:** Bursaries to government employees were mainly allocated to skilled (49 per cent) and lower-skilled (32 per cent) workers, which shows that these employees were being exposed to skills upgrading and career path development.
- **Equity:** The target of 50 per cent black managers and women in the public service was exceeded by 2000, and the 2 per cent target of people with disabilities was at 1,98 per cent in 2000.

In addition, the following aspects of skills development infrastructure were positively reflected in the data:

- **Skills development facilitators:** The majority of SDFs received training in 'skills development facilitation'.
- **Workplace skills development committees:** Eighty per cent of departments had workplace skills development committees in place.
- **Compliance with WSP requirements:** The proportion of government departments submitting WSPs increased each year since 2002 and reached 70 per cent in 2003/04. However, the 100 per cent level must be reached as quickly as possible.

The following represent key issues that deserve further attention:

- **Critical training needs:** Government departments highlighted the following critical training needs: financial management, computer skills, project management, human resource management, customer care, communication skills and ABET.
- **Scarce skills:** The SDFs interviewed identified particular hard-to-fill vacancies based on current shortages, but were less confident in predicting medium to long-term patterns of scarcity in particular skills or occupations. The formal process of compiling the WSPs was

based on broad categories of skills need from which scarce skills and hard-to-fill vacancies by occupational category or function could not be simply abstracted. Categories of skills need recorded in the WSPs were not sufficiently specified. For example, 'computer skills needs' was too broad to provide useful information on scarce skills. Therefore, the planning process associated with the WSP did not lend itself to specific scarce skills identification. In order to address this challenge, SDFs will have to develop methods to accurately define, identify and quantify scarce skills. Collaboration will be required between the HRM (recruitment) and the HRD (skills development) functions in order to develop a complementary strategy for reducing the effects of scarce skills.

- **Transversal skills:** It seems from the WSP data that, in government departments, transversal or generic skills were the most strongly needed. Further analysis based on specific line function and occupational categories is needed to test this conclusion.
- **Low exposure of senior managers to key skills:** The reasons for senior managers receiving relatively low levels of training in financial management and computer skills have to be investigated.
- **Learnerships:** Government SETAs do not seem to have progressed as quickly as they should in the registration of learnerships. PSETA has not progressed sufficiently in developing learnerships based on transversal skills.

Practices and processes of government training

The practices associated with skills development in government were explored through interviews with a sample of government departments. The findings assisted in highlighting both achievements and challenges across the strategic set of themes discussed below:

- **The planning process**

Skills development managers and practitioners are participating as best they can to gather data on existing skills and competencies among current employees and then compare the existing skills profile with the future skills needs profile of their department. There are several important opportunities to assist skills development personnel in this process:

1) Develop and communicate a shared understanding of skills needs analyses – and possibly audits. This may involve suggesting a particular methodology or alternative methodologies that feed into the WSP.
2) Schedule the submission date of the WSP so that its completion takes account of the need for prior development of the departmental strategic plan.
3) Create a set of key definitions of particular skills categories that can be shared across all departments so that data can be more comparable.
4) Investigate ways in which the format of data required for the WSP can be copied from other government data sources (e.g. PERSAL) via an electronic process.
5) Establish a set of common standards for computers and especially software that are to be procured, so that data-capturing tools can be used across all units that process data.
6) Redesign the structure and format of the WSP and have the instrument converted into a user-friendly format for ease of data capturing.

- **Allocation of training and reporting of training expenditure**

The way in which the allocation of training opportunities in departments takes place varies. Not a great deal is known about how line managers make these decisions. The capturing and use of data on training expenditure for monitoring and decision-making are hardly evident. The following actions may be considered:

1) Investigate the methods according to which different departments allocate training opportunities and how the shape of the department contributes to particular methods of training allocation.

2) Establish a process for collecting budget data related to training undertaken in all government departments, which process should be driven through a shared national system of budget categories that enable comparison.

- **Assuring quality and monitoring training impact**

Skills development personnel do their best to assure the quality of training through advising managers and candidates at the selection stage. This activity is hampered by lack of access to data about providers. Little attention is paid to quality assurance after the training has taken place. Even less attention is given formally to assess the impact of training. The following may be considered:

1) Explore ways in which quality assurance can be facilitated in the selection phase.
2) Investigate what means there are to encourage some level of feedback from employees who have undergone training on the usefulness of their training.
3) Investigate a means of alerting line managers to their own responsibility to ensure that training adds value to employee performance.

- **Role of the skills development facilitator**

Skills development facilitators expressed a sophisticated understanding of their role and of the conditions within which skills development took place in their respective departments. However, they had difficulty in bringing skills development matters to the attention of line managers. The following may be considered:

1) Examine the process according to which SDFs are appointed and the conditions within which they work so as to enable them to carry out their functions more effectively (e.g. the difference between elective and delegated appointments, allocating labour hours for the tasks, considering rank and authority issues).
2) Investigate methods that large departments with many SDFs apply to ensure that data and programmes are co-ordinated.

- **Influence of line managers on skills development**

Line managers could play a critical role in creating an environment that maximises the benefits of skills development for individuals and the department. Managers differed widely in the extent to which their approach to skills development was consonant with practices associated with lifelong learning and the integration of skills development into work practices. The following may prove useful:

Investigate further the different conceptions that line managers hold about skills development with a view to finding the most effective means of persuading line managers of the value of applying skills development in the personal development process.

- **Good practice**

A number of examples of good practice were visible from this research. Even from limited evidence in a few departments it appears that good practice was emerging through the development of courseware that involved the creation and formalisation of new knowledge to improve government delivery (e.g. high-tech pension delivery). Furthermore, there was evidence that departments were exploring ways to create and enhance a culture of skills development (e.g. training employees so that they understand the aims of personal development plans). The following may be considered:

Investigate further the ways in which skills development practitioners are engaging in 'best practice', both in terms of actual programme development and in terms of creating conditions conducive to training.

- **Training relationships between the national and provincial departments**

National departments had an interest in the nature of skills development at other tiers of government. There were important linkages in terms of training policy where different agents

were in action: national departments that built policy and had oversight, autonomous provincial departments engaged in delivery, line function SETAs and PSETA, who facilitated training across specific and transverse skills forms, and provincial government training initiatives and institutions driven by provincial cabinets.

- **Training capacity in the public service**

In its three-year plan for skills development in the public service, the DPSA (2002: 6) expressed itself as follows on the status of trainers:

> *The status of trainers and training units is often very low and it was recommended that this be addressed. In view of the concern that trainers may not be placed strategically to influence decisions at higher levels, the elevation of training into a separate directorate headed by a director was proposed. It was recommended that a professional competence framework be developed for public service trainers and that their career pathing be reconsidered.*

The ratio of training officers to the staff complement was low compared to the desired ration of 1:2000 (DPSA, 1998a: 29). This raises questions about how government departments managed to meet their training needs, given that there were clearly difficulties with contracting out large proportions of the training function.

On the other hand, the interviews did not draw much attention to the training of trainers in government departments. Perhaps this was a result of the increasing tendency for training personnel in smaller departments to outsource actual training and to concentrate on generating a culture of learning. Larger departments clearly did not adopt this approach, as could be seen from the SAPS with its about ten colleges and a number of other specialised training facilities. Thus, the question of training capacity could not be addressed satisfactorily, but remains an issue to be investigated further.

International influences of New Public Management on government training

The influence of NPM on government functions in general and on skills development in particular in South Africa is difficult to determine. This is because the impact of NPM cannot easily be separated from other influences that may produce similar effects. Restructuring, decentralisation and market-oriented skills development strategies may be wrongly associated with the NPM approach. It will be argued below that restructuring, decentralisation and training strategies in South African government departments are not necessarily attributable to the influence of the rationale of NPM.

Restructuring

NPM is internationally frequently characterised by structural changes in government formations. Restructuring will influence skills needs, though it may not necessarily affect government's conception of how skills development should take place. South Africa's public sector restructuring after 1994 was occasioned by the need to rationalise employment by reconstituting apartheid governance structures into the current configuration of government in three tiers within the nine new provinces. There were certainly efficiency concerns that informed these changes, but then efficiency is not necessarily the preoccupation only of the NPM approach. Observers' presumption that efficiency and effectiveness of government is a concern of NPM only is often based on the normative assumption that government is inherently inefficient and that it has to become more like the private sector. Such a starting point is not necessarily defensible.

Decentralisation

Another theme linked to NPM is decentralisation. The South African constitution makes provision for a federal structure in which the nine provinces have autonomy and so to some extent can be seen to be decentralised or federalised. To a degree, this opens the way for

provinces to develop their own training and skills development policies. However, government functions in South Africa are not decentralised to the same degree (compare for instance the decentralisation of training in the Department of Social Development to the centralisation of training in the SAPS).

Skills development

The internal policies of government departments show considerable differences in approaches to training, some of which seem to be associated with the NPM 'philosophy'. For example, Treasury has a skills development policy that reveals an inclination to act in a competitive mode with respect to skills development. Treasury explicitly recognises the existence of the labour market and the fact that enterprises – public and private – are to a greater or lesser extent in competition for skilled personnel. This response may not necessarily be informed by an allegiance to NPM principles, but rather by a need to secure skills in a domain of professional activity – namely high-level financial management – in which there is potent market competition. Also, Treasury is keen to raise its capability to retain personnel in the environment of mobile professionals. This may explain partly why other departments with a different occupational structure with fewer high-level professionals do not seem to have moved down this path.

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