This Discussion Brief on the overall SETA M&E framework provides an overarching discussion on monitoring and evaluation in a SETA environment. It also makes the links to a number of more specific and detailed discussion documents as illustrated in the diagram below.
POLICY MANDATE

Section 195 of the Constitution of South Africa sets out the basic values and principles governing public administration.

These include requirements related to:
• professional ethics
• efficient, economic and effective use of resources
• a developmental orientation
• equity in provision
• public participation in policy-making
• accountability
• transparency
• effective HR management
• and representivity in employment practices.

Also within the Constitution is provision for a number of institutions with monitoring and evaluative responsibilities across government. These include the Public Services Commission, the Auditor-General and National Treasury. Closely linked to National Treasury is the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) which requires that each accounting officer of a department establish a monitoring and evaluation system for the institution for which they are responsible.

In order to address the constitutional mandates for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and in particular in an attempt to address the fragmented nature of M&E in government, Cabinet approved the development of a Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E) system in 2007. The GWM&E System requires that government institutions formally adopt an M&E strategy that includes a description of current and future (planned) M&E systems and a capacity building plan detailing how the institution will put in place the human capacity to fulfil its M&E functions. In order to support the GWM&E, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) produced the National Evaluation Policy Framework in 2011. As the monitoring and evaluation frameworks have developed, new challenges have emerged including a tendency towards routine monitoring with an emphasis on quantitative data. In many instances this monitoring is not feeding into evaluation and learning processes and is thus not effectively used for strategic planning.

“The absence of effective monitoring and evaluation has created a situation where the SETAs and DHET are unable to answer... very serious criticisms. This is partly because of the focus on numerical targets ...and partly because of the [lack of] effective monitoring and measurement” (DHET, 2015)

The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) (in line with a number of government publications on evaluation) has a results-based management approach. It also aligns with theory of change and logical frameworks, models aimed at ensuring a logical progression from programme and evaluation design to inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. This discussion brief focuses on the M&E framework related to the skills sector and includes an overview of key planning, policy and guideline documents as well as discussion on which organisations are responsible for producing and using M&E related to the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

The purpose of these Discussion Briefs is to gather feedback towards the finalisation of an Overall SETA M&E Framework.
VISION AND MISSION FOR PSET AND M&E

The National Development Plan (NDP) envisages that by 2030 South Africa should have access to education and training of the highest quality. In the section of the NDP focused specifically on skills development, SETAs are identified as the entities that are responsible for the delivery of sector-specific skills interventions that help to achieve the goals of the National Skills Development Strategy and develop the skills needed by employers.

SETAs are singled out as having a crucial role to play in building relationships between education institutions and employers.

The White Paper on Post School Education and Training provides specific guidance on the role of SETAs and notes that M&E must make it possible to understand the levels of efficacy that are being achieved, and to identify where any blockages in the system may be emerging. The DHET Strategic Plans for 2015/2016-2019/2020 make a commitment to improve the effectiveness of the skills development system and to enhance the performance monitoring and evaluation system for SETAs. Key to this process, the plans note, is the refocussing of the National Skills Authority to support monitoring and evaluation in a SETA environment.
ROLE OF SETAS

The White Paper on Post School Education and Training (WP-PSET)(2013) indicates that the roles of the SETAs will be “simplified and clarified, and their capacity built in line with their core functions”. For the SETAs, these functions are summarised as:

- Developing the skills of those in existing enterprises and the development of a skills pipeline to such workplaces;
- Engaging with stakeholders in the workplace, establishing their needs and ensuring that providers have the capacity to deliver against these.

The White Paper also comments specifically on the Mandatory and Discretionary Grants noting that there is a need for much-improved data, not only to inform planning but to enable accurate measurement of and reporting on outcomes and the impact of funds deployed.

The National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) has been developed to respond to the policy goals of the White Paper on Post School Education and Training. The mission of the NSDP is:

To improve access to occupations in high demand and priority skills aligned to supporting economic growth, employment creation and social development while also seeking to address systemic considerations.

According to the NSDP, the role of the SETAs is to effectively contribute towards the realisation of the NSDP outcomes.

These ‘outcomes’ are:
- Identify and increase production of occupations in high demand
- Link education and the workplace
- Improve the level of skills in the South African workforce
- Increase access to occupationally directed programmes
- Support the growth of the public college institutional type as a key provider of skills required for socio-economic development
- Skills development support for entrepreneurship and cooperative development
- Encourage and support worker-initiated training
- Support career development services.

A number of ‘principles’ have also been articulated to guide the outcomes. These are:
- Locating the NSDP within an integrated PSET system
- Contributing to the country’s socio-economic development objectives
- Advancing an equitable and integrated system
- Promoting greater inclusivity and collaboration
- Focusing on support systems for learners and employers
- Strong emphasis on accountability
- Understanding skills demand
- Steering supply through qualifications and provision and through funding mechanisms.

It is in this context that the National Skills Development Plan has defined the role of SETAs as intermediaries linking the world of work and education.

Does the National Skills Development Plan adequately reflect the insights, goals and policy direction provided by the White Paper on Post School Education and Training?

Do the ‘outcomes’ and ‘principles’ above need to be reframed as outcomes to inform a clear theory of change and thus M&E framework for the SETAs? It is in this context that the National Skills Development Plan has defined the role of SETAs as intermediaries linking the world of work and education.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The areas to be included in the monitoring and evaluation framework need to be clarified and streamlined through the Theory of Change. At present the various documents suggest a diverse and expansive set of activities, outcomes and impacts to be monitored and evaluated. It will also be important to ensure greater alignment between the monitoring and evaluation requirements of diverse stakeholders.

THEORY OF CHANGE

[see Discussion Brief 2]

Neither the NSDS III nor the current National Skills Development Plan have an explicit and well-articulated theory of change. It is proposed that DHET and the SETAs work together to develop a Theory of Change for the SETAs. This needs to be based on the WP-PSET, the NSDS III evaluation, the NSDP and the National Plan for PSET and will require attention to be given to the micro, meso, and macro levels of change.

INDICATORS

[see Discussion Brief 3]

In the context of limited resources for monitoring, there is likely to be an inverse correlation between the number of goals and indicators that are set on the one hand, and the number of goals/indicators that are achieved. In addition, while it is possible to generate many indicators, it is likely that there are a few indicators that would contribute a substantial amount towards tracking, understanding and improving performance. If these indicators can be identified through the Theory of Change, then it would make more sense to focus on these.

DATA

[see Discussion Brief 4]

A careful and honest assessment of SETMIS and other data management facilities needs to be made and based on this assessment, realistic requirements can be developed with regard to monitoring and indicators. This can be expanded as capacity, reliability and integrity of the data develops. What is the current capacity, reliability and integrity of the data management system?

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND MONITORING

[see Discussion Brief 5]

DPME is currently updating the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) that will provide a standardised and thus comparative assessment of performance for government departments in South Africa. It is proposed that this tool be used to monitor HR management, financial management, good governance, strategic management and data/knowledge management performance within and across the SETAs. However, in addition it is proposed that specific attention be given to the relationship between management performance and institutional (service) performance based on a reduced and refined scope of objectives.
MAKING EVALUATION WORK  
[see Discussion Brief 6]

For evaluations in the skills system to 'work' PSET role players must use them. Failure to use evaluation findings constitute a waste of time and money. In this Brief we note some of the reasons why evaluations findings are not always used, and discuss how to address the challenges.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PLATFORMS  
[see Discussion Brief 7]

This Discussion Brief will include a consideration of the alignment and timing of a number of planning processes including the Sector Skills Plan, the Strategic Plan, the Annual Performance Plan, the Budget, and the Service Level Agreement between the SETAs and DHET.

M&E OF THE DISCRETIONARY GRANT  
[see Discussion Brief 8]

The broad scope of initiatives that can be funded, the diversity of beneficiaries, the significant resources invested and the importance of the Grant for achieving the objectives of the SETAs requires that a broad approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the Grant will be required. The notion of a Skills Value Chain in particular seems appropriate to this grant with different kinds of evaluation (e.g. diagnostic, design, implementation, economic and synthesis) all being used at different times and for different purposes within the Skills Value Chain. A draft M&E framework that consolidates the expansive learning cycle with the forms of evaluation is suggested as an appropriate tool to support a coherent and logical skills value chain running from the Sector Skills Plan, the Discretionary Grant Policy and into the Annual Report.

M&E OF THE MANDATORY GRANT  
[see Discussion Brief 9]

The Mandatory Grant is positioned at the interface between employers (demand) and skills providers (supply) and is core to the work and function of the SETAs. Given this critical role of the Mandatory Grant, it is proposed that in-depth evaluative work based on interacting activity systems and the understanding of underlying mechanisms be developed and undertaken. From these depth evaluations, key leverage points would need to be identified and built into a Theory of Change, associated indicators and evaluative focus areas as the basis for expansive learning and change processes among the relevant role players.
PROTOCOL FOR TRACER STUDIES
[see Discussion Brief 10]

Nearly half of the SETAs have demonstrated the capacity to utilise a centralised template for tracing the completers of workplace-based learning programmes. Lessons for institutionalising centralised tracer studies have been documented and, inter alia, include: the need to standardise administrative data, the value of including tracer studies as part of regular monitoring and evaluation processes, and the importance of centralising the collection of administrative data on WBL programmes.

EVALUATING COSTS AND BENEFITS OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT [see Discussion Brief 11]

Is South Africa spending too much on skills, or not enough? This tool asks SETAs to input all direct costs associated with learning programmes, but also the indirect costs such as programme management. This makes skills development look more expensive, but it also indicates where efficiencies could be achieved. It is offset by an indication of the enormous benefits of skills development on multiple levels. SETAs wanting to evaluate costs vs benefits must have the necessary data to enter into the tool. How available and comprehensive is learning programme data?

A PROCESS FOR CAPACITY AND SYSTEM BUILDING
[see Discussion Brief 12]

The introduction of a new M&E framework in a multi-partner context such as the Post School Education and Training sector the SETA environment more specifically will require capacity development at individual, institutional and systemic levels. In addition it is acknowledged that in a changing context such as the skill landscape it will be necessary to build both knowledge and adaptive capacity. It is therefore proposed that a longer term capacity development programme, linked to existing forums and platforms, be implemented to support collective reflection and learning a new practice.

RESPONSIBILITIES, FUNCTIONS AND RESOURCING M&E
[see Discussion Brief 13]

In order to reduce the M&E burden on the SETAs and to ensure that the M&E processes focus on the most important aspects of the SETAs work, it is proposed that the M&E reporting be streamlined around a common core. The responsibility, capacity and resourcing of the NSA needs to be clarified and then aligned to the other institutions responsible for monitoring and evaluating in the SETA environment.
IMPLICATIONS FOR AN OVERALL M&E FRAMEWORK

1. Is there alignment between the various policy and planning documents guiding post-school education and training? In particular, is there alignment between the WP-PSET and the National Skills Development Plan to provide a clear set of objectives and a plan for achieving these objectives?

2. Has a clear and streamlined Theory of Change for the SETAs been developed based on the policy and strategy documents (including the WP-PSET and the NSDP) and the many reviews and reports on SETA performance?

3. Do the current monitoring and evaluation frameworks provide the information needed to monitor management and performance and for adaptive learning and improvement with regard to the underlying assumptions and the achievement of appropriate impacts?

4. Can a clearly articulated theory of change provide the basis for developing a limited number but strategically focused set of key indicators?

5. What will be required to ensure that the data collection system and the data required to monitor key indicators are aligned?

6. Would it be feasible and useful to use the new MPAT as the basis for performance assessment of the SETAs?

7. How can the existing evaluation tools, developed by the DPME, be integrated to support an expansive learning cycle?

8. Is it viable to use heuristics such as interacting activity systems and realist evaluation approaches to identify and understand underlying mechanisms as the basis for in-depth evaluations?

9. How can long-term data required for tracer studies be standardised and centrally collected to enable tracking across PSET systems?

10. How can specialist M&E tools and processes such as Cost Benefit Analysis be integrated into existing and ongoing M&E in the SETA environment?

11. What would be required to streamline the monitoring and evaluation reporting requirements of diverse stakeholders?

12. What existing fora could be used to support collaborative learning and ongoing capacity development at the individual, institutional and systemic levels to support better M&E processes in relation to SETA performance?

13. What processes are in place to clarify the responsibility, capacity and resourcing of the NSA and other entities involved in M&E in the PSET and SETA environments?

FURTHER READING

All SETA M&E Project Reports and other deliverables are available at www.ru.ac.za/elrc/projects/meinasetaenvironment/publicationsusefullinks/deliverables

All DPME M&E Guidelines are available at www.dpme.gov.za/keyfocusareas/evaluationsSite/Pages/Guidelines.aspx