

Draft Policy: Building an Effective and Integrated Career Development Services System for SA (June 2016)

Introduction

Every month the NSTF publishes a 'Policy Brief' online, focusing on public policy relevant to science, engineering and technology. Here follows a summary of the draft policy on [Building an Effective and Integrated Career Development Services System for SA](#), and critical comments on some of the content.

Disclaimer

The comments in this document are those of the Executive Director only, and not necessarily the views of the NSTF structures or members.

Summary

This policy has a national footprint that spans national government departments, and also directs implementation at provincial and local government levels. Its purpose is to:

- emphasise the role of government in ensuring that all citizens are assured access to comprehensive and integrated career development services to make informed career and learning decisions;
- provide a framework for the strengthening and continuity of leadership regarding career development services in South Africa;
- provide a framework for cooperation and collaboration at all levels of government, as well as with non-governmental organisations and the private sector, to ensure transparency and ease of access to career services that are geared to meet the needs of a diverse range of citizens;
- enhance implementation at all levels of Government within existing mandates and responsibilities and address weaknesses, overlaps and gaps in the current provision of career development services;
- identify processes that stimulate regular review and systemic planning of career services; and
- provide specific directives for various aspects of the provision of career development services for the country.

Five strategic policy themes are identified:

- career development services across the lifespan of an individual;
- improving access to career development services;
- a single, coherent and coordinated Career Development Services System with different roles and responsibilities;
- an enabling environment for career development services to take place; and

- coordination and leadership in career development services.

The last section of the policy document provides a high-level implementation strategy, including implementation challenges. It formulates the policy instruments and mechanisms to be used in implementation. It furthermore addresses the issues of funding; coordination and strategic leadership; as well as assessing the effectiveness of career development services over the short, medium and longer term.

Background

In February 2014 Cabinet approved the development of a National Career Development Services Policy, implementation strategy and consultation process across all spheres of government. It noted that a coordinated career development service was urgently needed to ensure that youth, students, under-employed workers and unemployed citizens had access to quality career information and career services. This would enable them to make better and more informed career choices that deliver higher levels of employment and help to increase sustainable economic growth in the country.

According to the DHET the Career Development Services policy “builds on best practice distilled from both local and international experience. It purposefully avoids “re-inventing wheels” and also ensures alignment and customisation within a South African career development environment”.

The DHET emphasises that the positions expressed in the policy are “congruent with the positions which government has articulated and delineated in its various related strategies, white papers, strategic and operational plans, legislation and regulations (for example the National Skills Development Strategy version 3 (NSDSIII), the Human Resources Development Strategy for South Africa, and the National Development Plan”.

Key challenges identified in the policy

- Providing services that develop career management skills, rather than only helping people to make immediate decisions; and
- Greatly widening citizens’ access to Career Development Services, extending access throughout the lifespan.
- Improving the ways that services are planned and coordinated: between government and non-government services; between education, labour and other portfolios within government; and between the various education sectors.

Opinion and Conclusion

The draft policy on Building an Effective and Integrated Career Development Services System for SA is a thorough policy document with ambitious goals. It is a welcome development in that:

1. **The importance of career advice:** The draft policy recognises the important role of career advice for people to find jobs. In an economy that can currently support only a relatively small workforce, it is critical to match existing skills with available positions.

Often young people (in particular) lack only the necessary access to information, contacts and advice, in order to find a suitable job and build a career.

2. **Coordination:** It seeks to coordinate existing initiatives and roles across various sectors and Government departments in the interest of greater efficiency. This is always a laudable aim and if it leads to any streamlining of processes, the policy would have been worth the effort. It proposes that the DHET initiate suitable Memoranda of Understanding and implementation protocols to facilitate collaboration across departments (in line with the provisions of Section 35 of the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act).
3. **Establishing a Forum:** To enable coordination, it is proposed that a “National Career Development Forum (NCDF)” and a “5X4 Inter-departmental Forum” (involving five specific Government departments) be established. From the NSTF’s point of view, it is useful to have forums where various stakeholders can meet and coordinate their efforts in the common interest. It brings private and public sector role players together. It is also easier for various Government departments to interact and collaborate under the umbrella of such structures. However, it is also not an easy task to establish and maintain a forum.

The NSTF has managed to exist and be productive for 21 years, (partly with the support of the Department of Science and Technology) but not without ongoing challenges, the crucial support of key stakeholders, and the commitment and hard work of the secretariat. ALL stakeholders must be involved in such a Forum, especially those most influential in the field, and a thorough process must be embarked on, where stakeholders are allowed to lead, with DHET’s facilitation. The Forum should not be a Government agency, but responsible governance structures should be established. Although it should not be a statutory body or Government agency, it should nevertheless receive financial support from DHET in order to be sustainable in the long term. It is envisaged that the establishment of a Forum will also facilitate interaction with the school system: “Promote engagement with the school sector to facilitate access of school based learners to Career Development Services which meets their needs.” (p 39 (p 81 of the Government Gazette))

4. **Coordination of information systems:** The draft policy includes the building of a “national web-based career information system”, including the National Career Advice Portal (NCAP). The fact that information and communication technologies are being used as vehicles for the achievement of policy aims is to be welcomed. It is hoped that the draft policy will lead to increased awareness among the population about existing services, and more effective communication between Government and the people. The Portal is envisaged to be a “national integrated resource for career development for the individual. It will integrate appropriate systems such as the ESSA database of the Department of Labour, the LURITS system of the Department of Basic Education, the Central Applications System and the National Learner Record Database system of the Department of Higher Education and Training and the National Identity System (NIS) of the Department of Home Affairs, to name a few, to provide seamless, integrated career development services to individuals.” (p 25 (p 67 of the Government Gazette (GG))). There are indeed many reasons to provide

Career Development Services outside of the formal school system, including the fact that parents need more information and understanding of the world of work their children will be entering. This coordinated system might also assist in addressing the lack of coordination among universities where "...many types of support programmes such as mentoring, counselling and career development, are not evenly distributed across the university system, and are often lacking in the poorer institutions where students need those most." (p 38 (p 80 of GG))

5. **Career Development Practitioners and LO teachers:** Finally there is hope that something might be done to equip Life Orientation (LO) teachers for their task with learners. LO teachers are recognised as Career Development practitioners, which accords them a special professional status. Hopefully this will empower LO teachers to do their job well, as well as putting a stop to the relegation of LO teaching to the least experienced teachers in a school.

"Significant differences occur in the quality and types of Career Development Services that are provided to citizens, both within and between countries, as the result of significant variations in the appointment, utilisation and training of Career Development practitioners. The length of initial training varies from three weeks to five years." "Government will ensure the development and implementation of a Competency Framework for Career Development Practitioners, the development of relevant qualifications, programmes and courses for Career Development Practitioners and the professionalisation of the profession. *The DHET will define the content and process of initial training for Career Development practitioners (in specific for Life Orientation Teachers)*, and align training content to the outcomes sought for public policy goals for education, training and employment."

6. **Competency Framework** by all those who provide Career Development Services: "The DHET will work with tertiary education institutions and Career Development Services practitioners to develop a strategy to implement a Competency Framework" (p 26 (p 68 of the GG))
7. **The importance of data:** The policy recognises the shortage of reliable data for decision making around career development services. No problem can be solved without being informed by quality data gathering and analysis, and the solution process cannot be monitored and evaluated in a systematic and comprehensive manner. "The evidence base for policy making for Career Development Services is very weak. There is a paucity of data to provide an overall picture of Career Development Services provision, of its effectiveness in meeting public policy objectives and to inform decision making. Few government ministries are able to state precisely how much public money is being spent on Career Development Services and how it is being spent. Collaboration among stakeholders (such as users, administrators, social partners and practitioners) at national level will help to *identify relevant and useful data types and procedures for evaluating inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes for Career Development Services provision.*" (p 28 (p 70 of the GG))

8. **Establishment of a Professional Body:** “Government will promote the establishment, development and registration of such a Professional Body.” (p 40 (p 82 of GG)). The creation of a Professional Body for Career Development Practitioners might kickstart the process of professionalisation of Career Development Practitioners. Such bodies are usually established once there are registered practitioners who recognise their common interests and seek to lobby for and promote such common interests. Professional Bodies are private sector organisations, voluntary associations, and are often registered as NPCs or NPOs. Support and assistance by Government could expedite a process that would otherwise take a long time (if it happens at all). An added advantage is that the Forum and the Professional Body can be established through the same consultation process with stakeholders. Interacting with private sector bodies such as the envisaged Forum and Professional Body, is the best way to ensure that the actions of the Department in terms of this Policy are responsible, transparent, and informed (because a constant feedback loop can be established).

In conclusion:

The Draft Policy contains a number of initiatives that would be very welcome if well implemented. A note of caution from our side: the goals of the policy are very ambitious and will take determination to realise. Not only Government, but non-government role players have to be involved and be committed to these goals. As such, active promotion of the policy, and consultation with all the stakeholders, will be required.