



planning, monitoring and evaluation

Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Report on the Assessment of Government Evaluations

Evaluation Title:	A Review of the Gauteng Master Skills Plan
Evaluation Number:	443
Evaluation Completion Date:	01 June 2012
Period of Evaluation:	December 2011 - June 2012
Submitted:	08 February 2015 by Meagan Jooste
Approved:	20 March 2015 by Mike Leslie

Evaluation Details

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Created:	21 November 2014 by Mike Leslie
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Period of Evaluation:	December 2011 - June 2012
Known Cost:	R 165 528.00
Known Cost Type:	Referenced
Initiated By:	Gauteng Provincial Government
Initiated By Internal:	Yes
Undertaken By:	Education Policy Unit (University of Witwatersrand)
Undertaken By Internal:	No

Assessors

Meagan Jooste	meagan@pdg.co.za
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Assessment Documents

Document Name:	Document Type:	Added By:	Added On:
Master Skills Plan_Final Eval Report_2012.docx	Evaluation report	Mike Leslie	21 November 2014
Evaluations - Final ToR - Master skills plan 081111.docx	Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation	Meagan Jooste	20 January 2015
b. Master Skills Plan EPU Proposal.docx	A letter of engagement or contractual agreement with the service provider	Meagan Jooste	20 January 2015
e. Master Skills Evaluation 1st Draft Report 03 2012.doc	Evaluation report	Meagan Jooste	20 January 2015
e. Master Skills Pan Evaluation GPC Comments on 1st Draft Report 02 04 2012.docx	Minutes or notes of meetings with stakeholders	Meagan Jooste	20 January 2015
Critique of Gauteng Master Skills Plan.docx	Any other relevant documentation pertaining to the evaluation process	Meagan Jooste	28 January 2015
Gauteng Skills Development Implementation Plan for 2012-2014 Ver 12.doc	Any other relevant documentation pertaining to the evaluation process	Meagan Jooste	28 January 2015
Assessment Report at Moderation.pdf	Assessment Report at Moderation	Mike Leslie	03 February 2015

Quality Assessment Summary

The overall score of this evaluation has been rated at 2.68 out of 5 on the Likert-type scale applied to assess the quality of government evaluations. This rating has been assigned to the evaluation as it is viewed to have been done to a fair standard. The planning phase underpinning the evaluation was utilized to formulate the study but relied on the evaluation team having to exert quite a bit of effort to clarify expectations and the focus of the study (well beyond the inception phase). The team also raised concerns regarding the poor timing of the study in terms of accessing key stakeholders over the festive season (December 2011-February 2012). The planning & design phase of the study was thus scored 2.49.

Despite delays in accessing stakeholders, the evaluation was implemented fairly well and allowed for the collation of stakeholder inputs and a desktop literature review. The implementation phase of the study was thus scored 2.66.

While the evaluation report is fairly well written some improvements to the focus of the assessment (specifically to give more context on the Gauteng region) would have enhanced the evaluation's fulfillment of the study's objectives. The report was thus scored 2.94.

Parties interviewed for this assessment had mixed views on the added value of the evaluation given that it affirmed some known facts regarding the Master Skills Plan. However, as it was the first evaluation of the Plan and the province was conducting mid-term reviews of its policies and plans, the evaluation's timeliness was of high importance. It provided the province an important platform to identify key trigger points in the Plan as well as what information gaps were evident. The follow-up, use and learning phase of the study was thus scored 2.38.

In terms of overarching considerations, the evaluation was fairly adequate. As the evaluation was conducted by an academic institution, there were good processes in the planning phase to ensure the study's ethical and moral adherence to academic research protocols. This explains the high score allocated to the Evaluation Ethics consideration (3.11). The evaluation team were also able to work freely without interference and this enhanced the openness of the evaluation (thus the score of 2.83 for the 'free and open evaluation' overarching consideration).

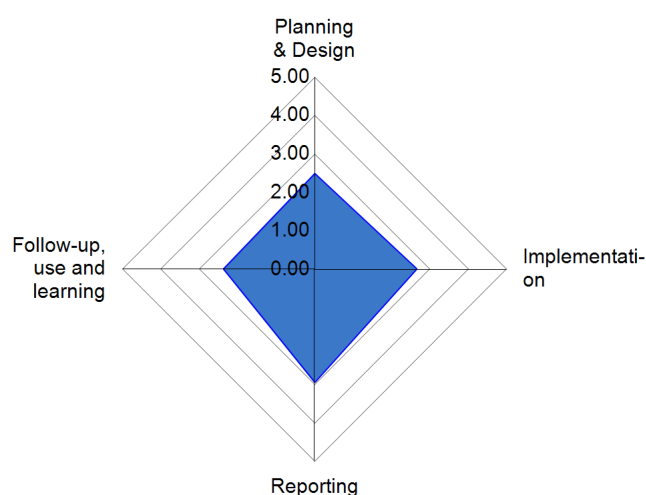
This assessment supports the view held by parties interviewed that while the evaluation was of a fair quality, there were areas in which it could have been enhanced to support its conceptual value to the Plan's implementation.

Quality Assessment Scores

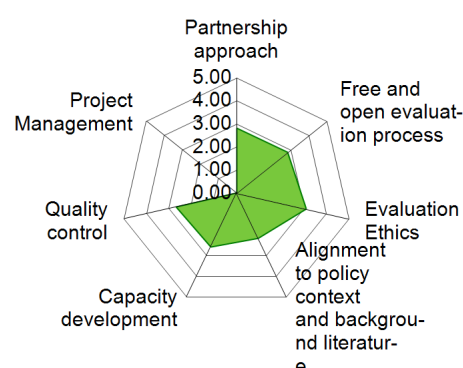
Phase of Evaluation	Score
Planning & Design	2.49
Implementation	2.66
Reporting	2.94
Follow-up, use and learning	2.38
Total	2.68

Overarching Consideration	Score
Partnership approach	2.81
Free and open evaluation process	2.83
Evaluation Ethics	3.11
Alignment to policy context and background literature	2.17
Capacity development	2.58
Quality control	2.68
Project Management	
Total	2.68

Scores: Phases of Evaluation



Scores: Overarching Considerations



Phase of Evaluation	Area of Evaluation	Score
Planning & Design	Quality of the TOR	2.67
Planning & Design	Adequacy of resourcing	2.36
Planning & Design	Alignment to policy context and background literature	1.00
Planning & Design	Appropriateness of the evaluation design and methodology	2.83
Planning & Design	Project management (Planning phase)	2.00
Implementation	Evaluation ethics and independence	4.00
Implementation	Participation and M&E skills development	2.40
Implementation	Methodological integrity	2.20
Implementation	Project management (Implementation phase)	2.00
Reporting	Completeness of the evaluation report	3.25
Reporting	Accessibility of content	3.27
Reporting	Robustness of findings	2.82
Reporting	Strength of conclusions	3.07
Reporting	Suitability of recommendations	2.77
Reporting	Acknowledgement of ethical considerations	2.08
Reporting	Project management (Reporting phase)	4.00
Follow-up, use and learning	Resource utilisation	1.80
Follow-up, use and learning	Evaluation use	2.53
Total	Total	2.68

Planning & Design

Quality of the TOR

Standard:	The evaluation was guided by a well-structured and complete TOR or a well-structured and complete internal evaluation proposal (e.g. Background, Purpose, Evaluation Questions, Design & Methodology, Deliverables & Timeframes, Resource requirements, Intended Audience & Utilisation, etc).
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was guided by a Terms of Reference (ToR) which outlined the objectives and main tasks and deliverables of the study as well as time-frames. However, some key details on the scope of work were absent, including the intended target audience of the study, an indication of the main champion behind the Master Skills Plan and what use the evaluation outputs would be put to on its completion.
Rating:	2: The evaluation was guided by a TOR or internal evaluation proposal but it was not well-structured or omitted a number of key sections

Standard:	The purpose of the evaluation stated in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) was clear and e
Comment and Analysis:	The aim of the evaluation is explicitly outlined "...to provide an overview and assessment of the implementation of the Master Skills Plan and related projects and programmes within the province as it relates to the skills needs within the province's economy." As such it was clearly outlined in the ToR.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	The approach and type of evaluation was suited to the purpose and scope of the evaluation TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal)
Comment and Analysis:	The ToR states that "...an assessment of the implementation of the Master Skills Plan and related projects and programmes..." is sought. Further to this, it highlights to key components to the study, including a review of relevant documentation, stakeholder engagements and report compilation. The required methodology was thus a mix of desktop and stakeholder engagement research. It is viewed that such an approach is appropriate for an implementation evaluation as it allows holistic insight to the nature of the programme as well as the extent to which it is fulfilling its design in its implementation.
Rating:	3: The approach and type of evaluation was suited to the purpose and scope of the evaluation TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal)

Standard:	The TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) identified the intended users of the evaluation and their information needs
Comment and Analysis:	The ToR makes no explicit mention of the intended users of the evaluation. It does implicitly suggest that the evaluation was being commissioned for the Gauteng Provincial Government to inform the mid-term review of its performance at the time, but there is no mention of the specific target audience of the evaluation nor the owners of its outputs.
Rating:	2: The TOR made only implicit or indirect mention of the users of the evaluation and their information needs

Standard:	The evaluation questions in the TOR (or an internal evaluation proposal) were clearly stated and ap
Comment and Analysis:	The ToR does not outline specific evaluation questions. Rather, these are embedded within a component of the 'scope of work' in that it stipulates that the "...study should explore how this [the Master Skills Plan] contributes to addressing the skills shortage and mismatch in Gauteng and the extent to which skills development initiatives contribute to improving beneficiaries' access to employment and other opportunities to generate income on a sustainable basis, especially among young people from disadvantaged communities." There is thus an implicit indication of the key focus aspects to the evaluation, but it is not honed into as a set of separate questions.
Rating:	2: 2

Standard:	Key stakeholders were involved in the scoping of the TOR and choosing the purpose of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was discussed with the political and administrative heads of the lead department, Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), prior to its commencement. The GDE were also given the opportunity to comment on the ToR before its finalisation. It is thus viewed that key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Plan, were involved in the scoping of the ToR and selection of its main purpose.
Rating:	4: A wider range of stakeholders (i.e. beyond government stakeholders) were meaningfully involved in the scoping of the TOR and choosing the purpose of the evaluation

Adequacy of resourcing

Standard:	The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of time and budget allocated
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluator reported that time was significantly constrained for this evaluation. The project kicked off in December 2011 with the expectation that it be completed by the end of January 2012. Given that there was a need for interviews to be conducted, which over the festive season is notably challenging, this was a big ask. Ultimately the report was finalised in June 2012 but this was only due to a comment period after the draft report's delivery in March 2012.
Rating:	2: The evaluation was resourced with tight timeframes and budget which were challenging from the outset

Standard:	The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of original budget
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team overspent their time on the project, notably on the stakeholder engagement process. This engagement process was done by parties outside of the evaluator's research organization because the external researchers had greater mobility to meet parties more easily than the evaluation team leader. In the end, the team overspent but could not request a budget extension as the project was commissioned under a fixed-price contract.
Rating:	2: 2

Standard:	The team conducting the evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of staffing and skills sets
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team comprised three key persons including a University of Witwatersrand Professor leading the project and two fairly experienced researchers, one of whom was working part-time at the WITS at the time of the evaluation. The Professor had previously worked in the Department of Labour within the Skills Development component with extensive familiarity with skills development policies and plans in South Africa. The Professor thus focused on the policy literature review component of the evaluation and guided the two researchers in engaging with stakeholders to garner feedback on the programme's implementation. While the teams skills-set was suited to the evaluation, it may have helped to have an additional researcher to support the stakeholder engagement process.
Rating:	3: The evaluation was adequately resourced in terms of staffing and skills sets
Standard:	Where appropriate, the evaluation planned to incorporate an element of capacity building of partners
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was implicitly meant to build the capacity of the 2 researchers on the evaluation team but there was not a structured plan to do so. It was more of an ad hoc result of the researchers working with the Professor through which they were exposed to the various policies and programmes related to skills development in South Africa as well as some of the key players within the Gauteng region. In effect, there was some in-built capacity-building amongst the evaluation team.
Rating:	3: 3

Alignment to policy context and background literature

Standard:	There was evidence that a review of the relevant policy and programme environments had been conducted
Comment and Analysis:	At the time that the evaluation was initiated, it is understood that the Plan was still in its infancy in terms of implementation. It is understood from the interviews for this assessment that the GDE had a breadth of documents and other information which was used to frame the Plan but it was not evident that a review of policy and programme environment was done for the framing of this study.
Rating:	1: 1
Standard:	There was evidence of a review of appropriate literature having been conducted and used in planning
Comment and Analysis:	Interviews for this assessment revealed that the GDE had a breadth of documents relating to the Plan but it is not evident that a specific literature review was completed to support the planning of this research. It is understood that the evaluation was intended to fill some of the information gaps particularly in regards to international experiences with Skills Plan's.
Rating:	1: 1

Appropriateness of the evaluation design and methodology

Standard:	There was explicit reference to the intervention logic or the theory of change of the evaluand in the planning of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The ToR does not make any explicit or indirect reference to the intervention logic of the evaluand.
Rating:	1: There was no reference to the intervention logic or the theory of change in the TOR or the Inception Report

Standard:	Key stakeholders were consulted on the design and methodology of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was discussed with the political and administrative heads of the lead department, Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), prior to its commencement. The GDE were also given the opportunity to comment on the ToR before its finalisation. It is thus viewed that key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Plan, were involved in the scoping of the ToR and selection of its approach and design.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	The planned methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked
Comment and Analysis:	The intended methodology comprised a mix of desktop and stakeholder engagement research. The evaluation indirectly required the study "...explore how this [the Master Skills Plan] contributes to addressing the skills shortage and mismatch in Gauteng and the extent to which skills development initiatives contribute to improving beneficiaries' access to employment and other opportunities to generate income on a sustainable basis, especially among young people from disadvantaged communities." The desktop research involved the evaluation team reviewing available literature on international skills development programmes as well as South African national policy in regards to skills development. Further to this, the team engaged with a range of stakeholders within the provincial government and in skills development institutions, to gather additional documents for review as well as insights to experiences with the implementation of the Plan up until the time of the evaluation. By complementing a desktop review with an engagement process, the intention was to unpack the nature of the Plan's design and the extent to which it was being implemented to meet its intended purpose. While it is viewed that such a mixed methods approach was appropriate for an implementation evaluation as it allowed holistic insight into the nature of the Plan, it would have added value had the team extended its approach to the engagement process by targeting the beneficiaries of the Plan too. This would have helped garner greater insight into understanding if and how the Plan was contributing to improving beneficiaries' access to employment and other opportunities to generate income on a sustainable basis.
Rating:	3: The planned methodology was appropriate to the questions being asked
Standard:	The sampling planned was appropriate and adequate given the focus and purpose of evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	It is understood that the choice of the sample for the stakeholder engagement process underpinning the evaluation, was made in consultation with the Gauteng Provincial Government to ensure a representative sample of stakeholders was chosen. Ultimately the sample comprised representatives from the GDE, Gauteng City Region Academy (GCRA) as well as skills plan beneficiaries in the form of Further/Sector Education Institutes, were consulted. Accessing stakeholders was dependent on their availability over the study's time-frame but in general given the evaluation was intended to provide an overview and assessment of the implementation of the Plan, it is felt that the chosen sample was appropriate given the focus and purpose of the study.
Rating:	3: The sampling planned was appropriate and adequate given focus and purpose of evaluation

Standard:	There was a planned process for using the findings of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The ToR indirectly outlines the planned process for using the evaluation findings in that it indicates that the evaluation was commissioned to inform the mid-term review of its performance at the time. The evaluation was intended as an independent review of key programmes to feed into the mid-term review which provided a basis for public communication of government's achievements in implementing its mandate. Interviews for this quality assessment also shed further light on the context to the evaluation. In particular, November 2011 marked the midpoint of the previous term of office. As part of the Midterm review process, the Gauteng province commissioned a series of independent reviews and evaluations of some of its key programmes. The Gauteng Master Skills Plan (GMSP) was developed to address skills shortages and skills demands for the period 2010 to 2015 and beyond. One of its main objectives was to give impetus to the government's strategy of providing the province with a sustainable pool of economically relevant skills so as to contribute towards the eradication of poverty and unemployment. The Plan was thus a key programme in terms of the GPG prioritisation of skills development for the economy, which was a key focus in the previous political term. Ongoing review of provincial statistics and data in relation to skills development pointed to major weaknesses in the Plan's conceptualisation and design, as well as implementation. This ongoing review provided a major impetus for the decision to evaluate the programme, together with feedback from provincial stakeholders that the Plan was less than optimal. There was thus a clear rationale for the use of the outputs of the evaluation to inform the revisiting of the Plan in terms of its key implementation components.
Rating:	4: 4

Project management (Planning phase)

Standard:	The inception phase was used to develop a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented
Comment and Analysis:	A project briefing meeting was held between the evaluation team and an external consultant commissioned by the Gauteng Provincial Government to brief the team. While the evaluation team did not find the briefing itself helpful, they engaged with the client after the briefing (and beyond the inception phase) to clarify expectations, tasks as well as the preferred outcomes of the research. As such a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented was partially reached through the evolution of the study but was not contained to the inception phase.
Rating:	2: There was an inception phase but it was not utilised appropriately or failed to affirm a common agreement on how the evaluation would be implemented

Implementation

Evaluation ethics and independence

Standard:	Where data was gathered in contexts where ethical sensitivity is high, informed consent, assurances of confidentiality and appropriate clearance were achieved; e.g. through an ethics review board, in evaluation involving minors, institutions where access usually requires ethical or bureaucratic clearance
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation was completed by the then Education Policy Unit of the University of Witwatersrand. As the evaluation team were running the study through the university they were, as per university rules and regulations, required to seek ethical clearance from an ethics review board.
Rating:	4: There was clear evidence that ethical protocols were observed for most data collection instances including: informed consent agreements; confidentiality; documenting and storing data notes, recordings or transcripts; Where data was gathered in contexts where ethical sensitivity is high, appropriate clearance was achieved through an ethics review board; e.g. in evaluation involving minors, institutions where access usually requires ethical or bureaucratic clearance, and situations where assurances of confidentiality was offered to participants
Standard:	Where external, the evaluation team was able to work without significant interference and given access to existing data and information sources
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluator reported complete independence in completing the evaluation work. There was no sense of interference from the client. As such, the evaluation team were able to work freely without significant interference.
Rating:	4: The evaluation team was able to work freely without interference and was given access to all sought data and information sources
Standard:	The evaluation team was impartial and there was no evidence of conflict of interest
Comment and Analysis:	While the evaluation team comprised a senior sector expert and a team of experienced researchers, the team were seen to be impartial, evidencing no conflict of interest in completing the evaluation. While the senior sector expert had previously worked within government and is a renowned expert in the education sphere, she and her team were not active participants in the implementation of the Plan. As such the evaluation team were sufficiently impartial.
Rating:	4: 4

Participation and M&E skills development

Standard:	Key stakeholders were involved in the evaluation through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement
Comment and Analysis:	The stakeholder engagement was fairly limited during the early stages of the evaluation. However, as the work progressed, engagement was at more regular intervals to establish progress, assist in facilitating access to information sources/data, provide feedback and then more intensely at the draft and final report stages. Engagements were fairly formally enacted through either face-to-face meetings or telephonic communication.
Rating:	3: Key stakeholders were involved in the evaluation through a formalised mechanism or institutional arrangement (e.g. a steering committee or reference group)

Standard:	Where appropriate, an element of capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluand and evaluators was incorporated into the evaluation process
Comment and Analysis:	Interviewees reported that capacity building was not an explicit objective of the evaluation project and there was no formal process around skills transfer. It is possible that there was some knowledge transfer between the evaluation and client teams but this was not formally done and could not be tangibly recollected by stakeholders interviewed for this assessment.
Rating:	1: There was no evidence of any capacity building of partners responsible for the evaluand or evaluators being incorporated into the evaluation process

Methodological integrity

Standard:	The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team pointed to data access as a key limitation in undertaking much of the work and at arriving at more robust analysis and findings. In this respect, the client felt that gaps appeared in the 'storyline' about the Plan, which were never really mitigated in the final report. Key methodological considerations were thus only partially addressed. The final product was thus ultimately more of a review than an evaluation. As such, while the intended research approach aligned with those planned, these had to be adapted due to apparent data access constraints and thus led to some divergence from the planned methods.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned and implemented adequately
Comment and Analysis:	The team employed a mixed of methods to gather the most relevant information for the evaluation. This included interviews with the key stakeholders to: i. collate available information resources pertaining to the Plan and the background to its formulation (including fairly regular engagements with the client evaluation team to source further relevant information resources) and, ii. unpack the extent to which the implementation of the Plan was aligning with the Plan's implementation goals. The latter matrix is provided in Appendix 1 of the final report. This engagement process was then complemented with desktop research to understand the international context to skills plans and national policies and programmes related to the Plan in South Africa. As such, the forms of data gathering comprised qualitative data gathering and desktop research. Given this was an implementation evaluation, it is viewed that this approach was appropriate. The only suggested adjustment to the approach would be to have had more data gathering to understanding the Gauteng policy and programme context in more depth than was ultimately documented in the report.
Rating:	3: The methods employed in the process of the evaluation were consistent with those planned and implemented adequately

Standard:	A pilot of basic data collection instrumentation occurred prior to undertaking data collection and it was used to inform the research process
Comment and Analysis:	The purpose of the evaluation was "...to provide an overview and assessment of the implementation of the Master Skills Plan and related projects and programmes within the province as it relates to the skills needs within the province's economy." The data analysis approach and methods involved a review of the available literature regarding skills plans internationally and in relation to South African national policies and programmes which influence or have bearing on the Gauteng Master Skills Plan. In addition, the evaluation were tasked with providing a review of one case study programme (Ithutlere-Tiro) which was a flagship Skills Plan programme. Through reviewing the policy direction of skills development in South Africa, assessing case studies of Plans applied globally and by gleaning interviewee feedback for comment threads of views on the appropriateness of the Plan's implementation in South Africa, the team collated a perception on whether the Plan was being applied to match its design. While this approach was appropriate given the kind of evaluation, it would have added value if the team had tried to unpack the extent of skills needs in the Gauteng province more explicitly.
Rating:	2: A pilot of data collection instrumentation occurred but not in a way that could meaningfully test or improve upon instrumentation
Standard:	Data collection was not compromised by fieldwork-level problems or unplanned diversions from origina
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluator reported that there was a long waiting period to get a list of key stakeholders from the client to allow the interview process to begin. The team also faced some difficulty in securing engagements with the identified stakeholders (particularly those with government officials) and, to facilitate fair coverage of a representative sample of stakeholders, had to employ a snowballing effect to get leads from the key stakeholders on whom else to engage. While there were thus some challenges in accessing stakeholders, the team were able to engage as many stakeholders as they could although some parties were ultimately only accessed by March 2012.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	Data was collected from key stakeholders (e.g. implementers, governance structures, indirectly affected stakeholders) as data sources
Comment and Analysis:	The executive summary is brief and provides a useful summary of the key elements of the report including the context to the evaluation, a brief overview of the approach to the evaluation as well as some of the key findings which emerged through the desktop review and stakeholder engagements. The executive summary also concisely talks to the study's recommendations.
Rating:	3: Data was collected from key stakeholders (e.g. Implementers, governance structures, indirectly affected stakeholders) as data sources
Standard:	The methodology included engaging beneficiaries appropriately as a key source of data and information
Comment and Analysis:	The introduction and background sections to the report outline the context underpinning the development intervention (in the form of the skills plan) as well as the logic and timeliness of the study in relation to the mid-year review which was underway at the time. More specifically, the report outlines the key objectives of the Skills Plan and documents that: "...2012 marks the mid-point for the GMSP [Gauteng Master Skills Plan] in operation and it is therefore appropriate to review how it is working before it can be taken forward for the remaining period (2012-2015)". As such, the report makes clear what the development intervention is as well as the reasons for the evaluation.
Rating:	3: The methodology included engaging beneficiaries as a source of data and information (or if based on secondary data, includes data from beneficiaries)

Standard:	Key stakeholders were significantly engaged as part of the methodology
Comment and Analysis:	Key stakeholders were directly engaged as part of the methodology through the stakeholder engagement process. This process was guided by a list of contacts which the client shared with the evaluation team. The evaluation team used a snowballing effect to access further relevant stakeholders to inform the study's analysis.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	The methodology included engaging beneficiaries appropriately as a key source of data and informatio
Comment and Analysis:	In the case of the Plan, the evaluation team proxied for beneficiaries by engaging with Further and Sector Education Institutes who implement the out-of-school programmes in particular. While these parties host the beneficiaries of the Plan, they are not the direct recipients of its benefits and so it is viewed that by not engaging programme beneficiaries, the study's methodology insufficiently assessed a key data source. Given that a key question underlying the evaluation was the need to understand how beneficiaries are gaining opportunities from the Plan, this represents a noticeable pitfall to the study's methodology.
Rating:	1: 1

Project management (Implementation phase)

Standard:	The evaluation was conducted without significant shifts to scheduled project milestones and timefram
Comment and Analysis:	Some time-frame adjustments had to be made to facilitate the completion of the study. It was initially meant to kick-off in December 2011 and close-out by January 2012. However, with some challenges experienced in accessing key stakeholders and additional time required for the team to redraft the report after client feedback, the study was only completed in June 2012. There were thus time-frame shifts to the study which meant there was a challenge inherent in the project management of the study.
Rating:	2: 2

Standard:	The steering committee, technical working group and service provider worked together adequately to facilitate achievement of the objectives of the evaluation
Comment and Analysis:	The Terms of Reference for the study did not outline any specific evaluation questions. Rather, it was embedded in the 'scope of work' which says the "...study should explore how this [the Master Skills Plan] contributes to addressing the skills shortage and mismatch in Gauteng and the extent to which skills development initiatives contribute to improving beneficiaries' access to employment and other opportunities to generate income on a sustainable basis, especially among young people from disadvantaged communities." This statement is reiterated in the evaluation report and the rationale given for the focus is outlined to relate to the need for an assessment of the Plan to feed into the mid-term review process which the Gauteng Provincial Government commissioned at the time.
Rating:	3: The steering committee, technical working group and service provider worked together adequately to facilitate achievement of the objectives of the evaluation

Completeness of the evaluation report

Standard:	The scope or focus of the evaluation is apparent in the report
Comment and Analysis:	Within the report, the rationale for the study is outlined as: "...providing an overview and assessment of the implementation of the Master Skills Plan and related projects and programmes within the province as it relates to the skills needs and the province's economy.". The report then indicates that it's focus would thus be on assessing how the Plan was: "...addressing the skills shortage and mismatch in Gauteng and the extent to which skills development initiatives contribute to improving beneficiaries' access to employment and other opportunities that generate income on a sustainable basis, especially among young people from disadvantaged communities." Further to this, within the 'State of the Problem...' section of the report, the focus of the evaluation in terms of the key focal points of the study and the means by which information (from literature and stakeholders) would be compiled, was made clear. As such, the report makes sufficiently apparent the focus of the study. The scope of the evaluation was focused on international case studies, the national (South African) skills planning policy and programme environment as well as the Gauteng region. The report could have focused more on the Gauteng region and on the extent to which the Skills Plan has independent or interactive impacts with national skills development policies and programmes.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	A detailed methodology is outlined in the relevant section of the report to the point that a reader
Comment and Analysis:	The report contains a 'methodology' section. The main approach underpinning the study is outlined here but the stakeholder engagement methodology is only discussed at a high level. It would have been valuable had the report elaborated further on the process behind the stakeholder engagement process. In particular, there is no mention of how the interviewees were arrived at, what types of questions they were asked or what the purpose of speaking to those stakeholders were. However, the methodology does talk to the mixed methods approach behind the study. As such, the report does provide insight into the data collection, analysis and interpretation approaches.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	Acknowledgement of limitations of all aspects of the methodology and findings are clearly and succinct
Comment and Analysis:	The report contains a 'limitations' section which outlines a concerning limitation to the research in terms of the data collection process being compromised by the lack of availability of key stakeholders and as a consequence, the lack of accessibility to critical documents to inform the evaluation. Further, the section notes that this lack of information affected the evaluator's ability to fulfill part of the scope of work (in terms of analyzing the Plan against reports from the province). The issue regarding the limited time allocated to the study is also noted which presented a notable challenge to the fieldwork process. Based on the interview with the evaluator, it is viewed that the report documents the key limitations to the study well.
Rating:	4: 4

Standard:	Key findings are presented in a clear way; they are made distinct from uncertain or speculative find
Comment and Analysis:	The key findings of the study in regards to the effect the Plan had had until the time of the evaluation, are presented as an output from the literature review and stakeholder review analysis. The findings are well supported by reference to literature or by the use of quotes from the interviews conducted as part of the study. As such, the findings are presented clearly, substantiated by references and no unused information is presented in the body of the report.
Rating:	4: 4

Standard:	Conclusions and recommendations are clear and succinctly articulated
Comment and Analysis:	The study's recommendations are presented as an output in relation to a discussion based on the interviews and desktop literature review. The recommendations are presented before the conclusions in the report and the concluding section in fact articulates the arguments within the recommendations and discussion section to derive the key findings of the study. It would have been useful had the recommendations been presented as separate from the discussion section so as to make them more succinct and tangible.
Rating:	3: 3

Accessibility of content

Standard:	The final evaluation report is user-friendly, written in accessible language and adequate for publication (e.g. adequate layout and consistent formatting; complete sentences and no widespread grammatical or typographical errors; consistency of style and writing conventions; levels of formality; references complete and consistent with cited references in reference list and vice versa; etc.)
Comment and Analysis:	The data analysis for the evaluation included a review of literature in relation to the Gauteng Master Skills Plan, interrelated national policies and programmes as well as international experience with skills plans. Data analysis thus included a desktop literature review and stakeholder engagement feedback review to draw out key findings in relation to the extent of success with the implementation of the plan to date. While the literature review appears to have been well executed, it is not immediately clearly that the best approach was used to draw out key stakeholder comments. In particular, it appears that comments/quotes were hand-picked to shed light on specific issues. As the methodology component to the report does not explain the full process behind the stakeholder engagement aspect to the study, it makes it hard to articulate why certain quotes were pulled out (and others may not have been). While the analysis seems to have been well executed, this limited insight to the methodology of the study, inhibits full comment on whether the data analysis was sufficiently well done.
Rating:	2: The final evaluation report is characterised by either inaccessible language or frequent formatting, spelling and grammar mistakes

Standard:	The final evaluation report is user-friendly, written in accessible language and its content follows
Comment and Analysis:	The final evaluation report is user-friendly and written in a tangible fashion. The organization of the document could however do with improvement. In particular, it is only through reading the document that one realises that the report first reviews and analyses the Skills Plan and then goes onto show a case study example of the province's experience to date with its implementation. The report however also then separately reviews the national, broader legislative environment separately. In general, the flow of the content does not follow a very clear logic. The report could have been better presented had more guiding sub-headings been included. One suggestion would be to have 6 core sections: i. introduction and methodology, ii. background (reviewing the full set of literature on the Plan, inter-related policies in South Africa and similar examples abroad), iii. a review of a case study example of the Plan's implementation, iv. key findings, v. conclusions , vi. recommendations. This would improve the overall flow of the document.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	Figures, tables and appropriate conventions are used in presentation of data (e.g. use of appropriate statistical language; reporting of p-values where appropriate; not reporting statistically insignificant findings as significant; clarifying disaggregation categories in constructing percentages; not using quantitative language in reporting qualitative data, etc.) and are readily discernible to a reader familiar with data presentation conventions
Comment and Analysis:	The main information gathered for analysis comprise the qualitative stakeholder feedback and the literature. While there is a good interrogation of the literature, it would have been nice to have seen further unpacking of the interview findings. As this is an implementation evaluation, the perceptions of parties responsible for or affected by the Plan, are a key part of understanding the extent of its effectiveness. Further, conversations with the GDE revealed that more emphasis on the provincial policy and programme environment affecting the Plan could have helped add value and articulation to this study's findings. As such, while a fair amount of information is presented, it could have been further elaborated to support insight to the effect of the Plan's implementation at the time.
Rating:	2: Some figures, tables and conventions are used in presentation of data but not entirely appropriately or consistently
Standard:	Quality of writing and presentation is adequate for publication including: adequate layout and consi
Comment and Analysis:	There are some minor grammatical errors including a mix between perspectives which is at times confusing to the reader in discerning which findings or views are based on literature and which are based on feedback from stakeholders (or the evaluator's view). There are some dates missing in the reference list and an inconsistent approach to presenting the references. Overall, while the quality of writing and presentation in the report is okay it could do with some improvement.
Rating:	3: 3
Standard:	Appropriate conventions are used in presentation of data (e.g. use of appropriate statistical langua
Comment and Analysis:	The only data which the report documents explicitly, comprises a few direct quotes from stakeholders interviewed, expressing their views on the way in which the Plan had been implemented by the time of the evaluation. This information is presented in the report as comments in italic text format. This approach is applied consistently in the document and proper conventions are followed in terms of omitting mention of the interviewee's identity. As such, it is viewed that appropriate conventions were applied in presenting this qualitative information.
Rating:	4: 4

Standard:	The use of figures and tables is such that it supports communication and comprehension of results; a
Comment and Analysis:	The main body of the report does not contain figures or tables. Some use of text boxes are used to outline global case studies and/or summarised findings based on experiences with the Plan. While these are useful, they are not always explicitly referred to or introduced appropriately to the reader. It would have been nice to see the use of figures and tables in the report to break its 'text-heavy' nature, but in the absence thereof, the text boxes provide a useful reflection on some of the suggested findings.
Rating:	3: 3

Robustness of findings

Standard:	Data analysis appears to have been executed to an adequate standard
Comment and Analysis:	The qualitative stakeholder engagement process is only documented on a limited scale in the report. While it would not be just to pre-judge the quality of the methodology employed for that exercise (as at the time of this quality assessment many of the questionnaire and transcript information records were non-recoverable due to university server upgrades), it would have been valuable to have a clearer picture of how this component of the methodology was completed. Overall, the report does not appear to have methodological flaws.
Rating:	3: Data analysis appears to have been executed to an adequate standard for most datasets

Standard:	Findings are supported by available evidence
Comment and Analysis:	The key findings of the study in regards to the effect the Plan had had until the time of the evaluation, are presented as an output from the literature review and stakeholder review analysis. The findings are well supported by reference to literature or by the use of quotes from the interviews conducted as part of the study. As such, the findings are well supported by available evidence.
Rating:	4: 4

Standard:	Findings are supported by evidence which is sufficiently and appropriately analysed to support the argument, integrating sources of data
Comment and Analysis:	Through a review of international experiences with skills plans, the report makes reference to relevant empirical work. Even though not directly referenced within the conclusions reference to such case studies informed the conclusions.
Rating:	3: The evidence gathered is analysed to support the argument to an adequate standard and integrates sources of data

Standard:	There is appropriate recognition and exploration of the possibility of alternative interpretations
Comment and Analysis:	The main purpose of the evaluation was outlined to provide: "...an overview and assessment of the implementation of the Master Skills Plan and related projects and programmes within the province as it relates to the skills needs and the province's economy.". The conclusions make evident concerns with the usefulness of the Plan as an implementation strategy particularly as there was, apparently at the time, still a need for the province to prioritize the skills needed to stimulate the province. While the conclusions do draw out some of the key findings from the study, they only talk to some of the implicit evaluation questions to a limited degree. In general, the conclusion addresses the evaluation purpose to some degree.
Rating:	3: There is appropriate recognition of the possibility of alternative interpretations

Standard:	The report appears free of significant methodological and analytic flaws
Comment and Analysis:	The conclusions are not drawn explicit reference to the intervention logic of the Plan. Rather, the conclusions are presented more as a summary of the study's key findings in relation to the programme's effect. There is some implicit reference to the intervention logic insofar as the conclusions proposing how the Plan's structure can be enhanced to support its improved delivery on its objectives, but this is not explicitly clear. As such, there is an indirect reference made to the Plan's intervention logic.
Rating:	2: The report appears to include some minor methodological and analytic flaws, but these are not significant

Standard:	There is appropriate recognition of the possibility of alternative interpretations
Comment and Analysis:	Through reflecting on a spectrum of stakeholder views (in quotation marks) within the report, the report does make recognition of alternative interpretations as relates to, for example, the 'role of the GCRA'. As such, the report recognizes alternative interpretations.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	Limitations of all aspects of the methodology and findings are clearly articulated (e.g. limitations of scope or evaluation design, recommendation for additional research, data collection challenges, etc)
Comment and Analysis:	From the interviews from this quality assessment, it is understood that a consultant external to the evaluation team and the Gauteng Provincial government, helped brief the evaluation team on the study on behalf of the province. However, this consultant had only an indirect role and it is not apparent (and parties interviewed could not recall) if this person was consulted for feedback or input to the recommendations.
Rating:	2: There is some acknowledgment of the limitations of the methodology and findings but these are not clear or exhaustive

Strength of conclusions

Standard:	Conclusions are derived from evidence
Comment and Analysis:	While the evaluation team arrived at their own findings and recommendations, informed by their independent review of the Plan and their vast expertise and knowledge of this sector, the Office of the Premier, GDE and GCRA were consulted to garner views on the proposed recommendations. As such, relevant government officials involved in the implementation of the plan, were consulted for inputs on the recommendations.
Rating:	3: Conclusions are derived from evidence

Standard:	Conclusions are derived from evidence
Comment and Analysis:	The conclusions of the document are written as a consolidated view based on the results of the review of the Plan, a case study of its implementation and by contrasting it to international experience with skills plans. As such, they are derived on the basis of the evidence gathered.
Rating:	4: 4

Standard:	Conclusions address the original evaluation purpose and questions
Comment and Analysis:	The recommendations are fairly clearly outlined to the reader in that they are comprised within text boxes in the 'Discussion and recommendations' section of the report. These are also fairly specific insofar as being categorized into the key focus areas in reorganizing the Skills Plan's implementation (e.g. 'strengthen institutions of learning', etc.).
Rating:	3: Conclusions adequately address the original evaluation purpose and questions

Standard:	Conclusions are drawn with explicit reference to the intervention logic or theory of change
Comment and Analysis:	Relevant limitations of the evaluation are noted explicitly in a dedicated section to the report, but these are not distinct from the methodological limitations which the evaluator's experienced.
Rating:	3: Conclusions are drawn with explicit reference to the intervention logic or theory of change

Suitability of recommendations

Standard:	Recommendations are made in consultation with relevant government officials, stakeholders and sectoral experts
Comment and Analysis:	The report does not explicitly document the procedures undertaken to ensure stakeholder confidentiality or whether any informed consent was acquired.
Rating:	1: There is no evidence that recommendations were made in consultation with relevant government officials, stakeholders or sectoral experts

Standard:	Recommendations are useful- they are relevant, specific, feasible, affordable and acceptable
Comment and Analysis:	A workshop was held at the end of the evaluation where the final report was presented to stakeholders. This provided the space for reflections on the process and content of the evaluation. As such, the evaluation was presented to key relevant government stakeholders.
Rating:	3: Recommendations are useful- they are relevant, specific, feasible, affordable and acceptable to an extent

Standard:	Recommendations are relevant to the current policy context
Comment and Analysis:	One party interviewed felt that the report focused more on the international and national policy and programme context and experiences, than the provincial context. As such, there was possibly room to improve the extent to which the recommendations were contextualized to the province. In general however, the recommendations contained in the report appear to be relevant to the time at which they were compiled.
Rating:	3: 3

Acknowledgement of ethical considerations

Standard:	The full report documents procedures intended to ensure confidentiality and to secure informed consent where necessary (in some cases this is not needed - e.g. evaluation synthesis - in which case N/A should be recorded)
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team reported that there was a notable overspend on the study but that, due to the contract being a fixed price one, there was no scope for the team to request a budget extension or cost recovery.
Rating:	3: The full report documents some procedures intended to ensure confidentiality and to secure informed consent where necessary

Standard:	Peer review of the draft evaluation report occurred prior to finalisation of the evaluation report
Comment and Analysis:	Parties interviewed for this quality assessment indicated that no external peer reviewer was appointed or asked to review the draft evaluation report before its finalization. As such, no peer review of the report was completed.
Rating:	1: 1

Standard:	There are no risks to participants or institutions in disseminating the evaluation report on a public website
Comment and Analysis:	The report is not publicly available online and interviewees had mixed views on whether a final version of the report has been published as yet. It is understood that the report can be made available on request.
Rating:	2: There are some risks to either participants or institutions in disseminating a summary version of the evaluation report on a public website

Standard:	There are no risks to participants in disseminating the original report on a public website
Comment and Analysis:	The report represents a review of the national policies and programmes influencing the Skills Plan in South Africa, makes reference to international examples of Skills Plans and consolidates feedback from stakeholders in a generic fashion. As such, there does not appear to be risks in disseminating the original report on a public website.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	There are no unfair risks to institutions in disseminating the original report on a public website
Comment and Analysis:	As the report does not attribute specific quotations to institutions, there does not appear to be any risk in disseminating a summary version of the evaluation report on a public website.
Rating:	3: 3

Project management (Reporting phase)

Standard:	A project closure meeting that reflected on the challenges and strengths of the evaluation process o
Comment and Analysis:	While no formal project closure meeting was held, the evaluation team were given the chance to amend the Plan based on stakeholder feedback. A significant amount of feedback was garnered and collated which helped the province reflect on the pros and cons of the study and to inform the reports revision as well as future evaluations. While the process of reflecting on the evaluation was not formalised, the evaluation team and the GDE (who implements the Plan) took lessons from the experience with this evaluation. It has helped the GDE solidified its approach to commissioning evaluations (a process which it initiated prior to the commissioning of this work but which could be further adapted based on lessons from this study).
Rating:	4: 4

Follow-up, use and learning

Resource utilisation

Standard:	The evaluation was completed within the planned timeframes
Comment and Analysis:	There were two main drivers for the revision of the evaluation's time frame: i. Challenges in the evaluation team accessing key stakeholders over the December 2011, January 2012 festive break season and, ii. Additional time required for the evaluation team to revisit the evaluation report and amend it based on feedback from the key client stakeholders. While the project was, as per the ToR, meant to close-out in January 2012, it only completed in June 2012. While the evaluation was completed outside of the agreed time frames, the commissioning organization allowed for this adjustment to facilitate a fair commenting period. These shifts did however represent notable shifts to the evaluation's timeframes particularly as these extended well beyond the end of government's financial year.
Rating:	1: 1

Standard:	The evaluation was completed within the planned timeframes and budget
Comment and Analysis:	The conceptual value which the evaluation study was viewed to have been limited. There was a need to understand out-of-school impacts of the Plan. The evaluation was meant to evidence the role provinces in skills development as well as its concomitant economic impacts. Stakeholders interviewed for this assessment did not feel that that the study provided enough insight into whether the Plan's implementation at the time was effective in achieving its high-level impacts. As such, the evaluation was viewed to have limited conceptual value in understanding what happened and in thus shaping policy or practice.
Rating:	2: The evaluation was completed outside of the planned timeframes and over budget, but with approval of the commissioning organisation

Evaluation use

Standard:	Results of the evaluation have been presented to relevant stakeholders
Comment and Analysis:	Sufficient time has not elapsed since completion of the evaluation.
Rating:	: N/A

Standard:	A reflective process has been undertaken by the steering committee with the service provider (if no steering committee exists then by the evaluation management team or the involved department officials) to reflect on what could be done to strengthen future evaluations
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluation team comprised a senior education/skills sector expert and two experienced researchers, one of whom was knowledgeable in stakeholder engagements and the other who had notable expertise in the South African policy arena. The evaluation team leader indicated that there was implicit knowledge transfer from her to the experienced researchers through their interactions on the study. While this was not done in a formalised fashion, it was conducive to skills development between the senior expert and recent graduates.
Rating:	3: A reflective process has been undertaken by the steering committee with the service provider to reflect on what could be done to strengthen future evaluations

Standard:	A reflective process has been undertaken by the steering committee (if no steering committee exists)
Comment and Analysis:	A reflective process was undertaken after the evaluation by the Office of the Premier. It was resolved that future evaluations would align more closely with National and Provincial Evaluation policy, frameworks and guidelines, particularly with respect to stakeholder involvement and consultation. Further to this, the evaluation also made the GDE project managers more aware of their responsibilities in terms of being a key information resource to external evaluators and has encouraged them to enhance their report management systems to help to strengthen baseline documentation used on future evaluations. There has thus been notable acknowledgement of the lessons for future evaluations.
Rating:	4: 4
Standard:	The evaluation study is seen by interviewed stakeholders as having added significant symbolic value
Comment and Analysis:	The decision to review the Plan was a political one which coincided with the period during which the evaluation was being undertaken. The objective of the evaluation was to independently verify the performance of the Plan in relation to its stated objectives and to its contribution to achieving provincial objectives. Stakeholders interviewed for this assessment expressed mixed views on the symbolic value which the evaluation made. On the one hand, as it was the first evaluation of the Plan it revealed some key information gaps to the province in its understanding the quality of its implementation of the Plan. On the other hand, there was a sense that the evaluation confirmed many known issues regarding the Plan's implementation and yet did not provide enough 'new' information to help revise the design and implementation of the Plan.
Rating:	2: 2
Standard:	The evaluation study is seen by interviewed stakeholders as having added significant symbolic value to the policy or programme (e.g. raised its profile)
Comment and Analysis:	As the evaluation was completed by the then Education Policy Unit of the University of Witwatersrand, the evaluation team were required to seek ethical clearance from an ethics review board. It is understood that through the process of communicating the purpose and approach underpinning the study, there was an external peer review of the intended process of data collection.
Rating:	3: The evaluation study is seen by interviewed stakeholders as being of symbolic value to the policy or programme
Standard:	The evaluation study is of conceptual value in understanding what has happened and possibly in shaping future policy and practice
Comment and Analysis:	The evaluator could not recall if a pilot of the data collection instrumentation occurred prior to data collection.
Rating:	1: The evaluation study is not of conceptual value in understanding what has happened and shaping policy and practice
Standard:	Development of a draft improvement plan has been started, but not completed, based on the findings a
Comment and Analysis:	The study confirmed some of the known weaknesses in the Skills Plan and its implementation. A follow-up review and revision of the Master Skills Plan commenced in 2014 (in the new term of office) which takes cognisance of this evaluation but is also a function of the GDE's own internal reviews of the Plan and its implementation impacts to date. There is thus a process underway to review the Plan which relies on some of this evaluation's findings.
Rating:	3: 3

Standard:	There is clear evidence of instrumental use - that the recommendations of the evaluation were implem
Comment and Analysis:	The extent to which the recommendations of the evaluation have been implemented is limited given there were significant concerns around its conceptual value add (particularly the fact that the report had lots of recommendations about the broader human resources debate than about what the Plan was meant to achieve and if it was achieved in the mid-term). However, it's real 'use' can only be established once the review and revision of the Master Skills Plan which commenced in 2014 (in the new term of office), has been concluded. As such, there is some emergent evidence of instrumental use of the evaluation but this evidence is thin and not well supported as yet.
Rating:	2: 2

References

- Lolwana, P; Rossiter, G and Dieltiens, V. 2012. 'A Review of the Gauteng Master Skills Plan'. Education Policy Unit, University of Witwatersrand.
- Gauteng Province: Department of Education. 2012. 'Gauteng Skills Development Implementation Plan for 2013-15: Implementing the Gauteng Master Skill Plan'.
- Gauteng Provincial Government - Directorate: Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, Gauteng Planning Commission. 2012. 'Comments on the Master Skills Plan Evaluation Draft report (dated 11 03 2012)'.
- Gauteng Provincial Government Mid-Term Review. 2011. 'Terms of Reference: Independent evaluations of key programmes - Master Plan'.
- Education Policy Unit, University of Witwatersrand. 2011. 'Mid-Term Review: Master Skills Plan - Expression of Interest'
- Education Policy Unit, University of Witwatersrand. 2012. 'A Review of the Gauteng Master Skills Plan'. Draft report.
- Gauteng Province: Department of Education. (Date unknown). 'Critique of Gauteng Master Skills Plan'. Memo submitted by Dr David Makhado to Mr Albert Chanee.

List of Interviewees

- Ms Annette Griessel (Deputy Director General: Performance Monitoring & Evaluation and Gender, Youth and People with Disabilities). Email feedback to questionnaire on 23 January 2015.
- Mr Albert Chanee (Gauteng Province, Department of Education - Deputy Director-General: Strategic Planning Management). Telephonic interview conducted on 23 January 2015.
- Professor Peliwe Lolwana (University of Witwatersrand, Director of the Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL)). Telephonic interview on 11 December 2014.