



**Skills Development for Economic Growth**

# **GRADUATE PLACEMENT TRACER STUDY**

## **FINAL REPORT MARCH 2024**

Prepared by Wholesale and Retail chair Department of the Durban  
University of Technology (DUT)



# RESEARCH PROJECT

## TRACER STUDY: GRADUATE PLACEMENT

---

**Submitted to:** The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority  
(W&RSETA)

**Contact Persons:** Mr. Mxolisi Maphakela  
*Contact:* 012 622 9500

**Submitted by:** The Wholesale and Retail chair Department of the Durban University  
of Technology (DUT)  
ML Sultan Campus: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, B-Block  
Wholesale and Retail chair Department  
Durban University of Technology  
*Contact person:* Mr Doba Goolam Yunus  
*Contact:* 0837867527  
*Email:* [YunusD@dut.ac.za](mailto:YunusD@dut.ac.za)

---

### Tracer study of Graduate Placement Team Members:

**Retail Chair:** Mr. Yunus Doba  
**Research Coordinator:** Dr Tanzala Kikasu  
**Research Assistant:** Ms Nozipho Cele

#### Project Lead Researchers:

1. Dr Andrew R Kamwendo
2. Dr Tanzala Kikasu
3. Ms Tessa Reddy
4. Mr Sandile Mkhize
5. Ms Makhosazane Buthelezi
6. Ms Mandisa Mncwabe

#### Strategic Partners:

**UNIZULU:** Dr Utete  
Dr Dengetsha

**Steering Committee Members (W&RSETA):** Mr Mxolisi Maphakela (Centurion)

### **COPYRIGHT**

THIS REPORT REMAINS THE PROPERTY OF THE WHOLESALE AND RETAIL  
SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (W&RSETA)  
IN GENERAL, PUBLICATION OF RESULTS IN JOURNALS IS TO BE WELCOME,  
BUT ONLY AFTER THE REPORTS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED TO CABINET, AND  
SUBJECT TO  
PERMISSION BY THE W&RSETA/CUSTODIAN DEPARTMENT TO ENSURE THAT  
CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION IS NOT USED.

HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT: GRADUATE PLACEMENT TRACER STUDY  
(GPTS): FULL REPORT MARCH 2024.

---

### **DISCLAIMER**

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT ANY OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS REPORT  
ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SERVICE PROVIDER AND NOT THE  
GRADUATE PLACEMENT TRACER STUDY COMMITTEE (W&R SETA).

---

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Tracer Study of Graduate Placement is a W&RSETA-funded research project developed and carried out in collaboration with the Durban University of Technology's Wholesale and Retail Leadership Chair Department. The W&RSETA (Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority) provides a variety of skill-based programmes focused on training students and employees in the wholesale and retail industry. The graduate placement programmes include a variety of training interventions funded by the W&RSETA in collaboration with companies operating within the South African wholesale and retail sector. Participants in these programmes are graduates who have completed their academic studies and have been put in internship programmes (job shadowing programmes) to learn about and build workplace culture, skills, experience, and abilities. Graduate placement is a work-based learning programmes designed to prepare students for job readiness and employability. Students are expected to gain practical knowledge and experience in a retail setting. The purpose of these programmes is to provide beneficiaries with work competencies and hands-on experience required to secure employment within the company where they are placed or in the appropriate field of study. By participating in these programmes graduates are better prepared to advance their careers and seize new opportunities in sector. The W&RSETA is committed skills development, creating opportunities for unemployed graduates, promoting industry growth and development through these essential training programmes. The Dashboard Report - Tracer study of graduate placement below provides an overview of the main themes addressed, as well as particular findings and recommendations for the W&RSETA to consider.

## **GRADUATE PLACEMENT AND THE VALUE-CHAIN OF EMPLOYABILITY**

### **Graduate placement and transitioning in the value chain**

Graduate placement at industry is a critical component in the value chain of employment with each component in the value chain playing a significant and promotional role. The value chain is rooted at basic education level which provide pivotal skills in communication, creativity, computation and analysis and career orientation. Transitioning from basic education has to be informed by career choices and the labour market. Skills acquired are subsequently channelled professionally at higher institutions into specific fields linked to industry demands. Transitioning from the higher education to the world of employment has to be nurtured and the graduate placement programmes plays ‘mid-wife’ and pastoral care role nurturing the graduate to employment and entrepreneurship. This is a critical link in the value chain of employability as the graduate fit to industry has to be relevant and the graduate has to be work and mindset prepared for engagement as a prospective employee.

### **Graduate Placement as a job interview process**

In essence, the workplace experience is a yearlong job interview as the graduate will be at the work site for the duration of the programme. The manner in which the graduate performs, behaves, excels and fits into the organizational culture of the host employer can determine the retention or non-retention of the graduate. The work engagement during the placement tenure goes beyond writing a good curriculum vitae and how one shines at an interview. Graduates require the relevant (hard and soft) skills. Students in their extended learning at the workplace should regard the placement experience as a stepping stone to retention in the host company or taking away valuable learnings for potential employers. Students need to display a enhanced work ethic and be committed to the learning to extract maximum benefit.

### **Need for Collaboration and Engagement amongst stakeholders**

If there is non-delivery by institutions of skillsets (hard skills and soft skills) required, the graduate experience at the work site will be a challenge and this could significantly impact on the absorption or non-absorption of graduates into permanent employment. The issues are complex as institutions and industry lack constructive and deep-dive

engagements resulting in the supply of graduates not being aligned to the demand of skills required. To compound a not fit for purpose product, graduates lack soft skills and are deemed as having 'an attitude' and not mindset ready. Institutional programmes must extend beyond academics and lecturers should deliver programme content directly linked to industry demands. There should be wider curriculum driven programme engagement between institutions and industry to wedge the gap.

### **The role of the W&RSETA in the value chain**

The W&RSETA plays a key facilitating role in the value chain of employability as part of its skills development agenda and funding stipends for graduates. Funds are channelled via institutions and employers. The funding model is a good one but for it to be a great one and for the funding agency to experience a real return of investment it should consider funding beyond handing out stipends only and expecting multiplier returns in absentia. For the programme to yield productive and desirable returns it has to invest in the gaping gaps of the placement ecosystem which results in student unemployment post the placement period. The W&RSETA should investigate the reasons for disconnecting between key role players in the placement ecosystem, by evaluating the quality and relevancy of institutional delivery, employer roles and responsibilities and student expectations and required commitment. The disconnect between key actors in the graduate placement ecosystem is the weak link in the value chain. The W&RSETA should be actively involved in and playing a facilitating role for the effective functioning of the ecosystem to debunk the siloed nature of its current functioning. As an investor it has a vested interest on the outcome, and this can only be achieved by active engagement. The W&RSETA can further aid students to becoming more employable by investing in a work readiness programme for all graduates before progressing to the final link of employability chain. This can reduce the burden of student expectations and more importantly it could be empowering from an employee or entrepreneur mindset preparation which is lacking in the value chain of employability. Additionally, funding should be invested in the preparation of industry mentors who can contribute to better absorption by being given the tools of trade for managing graduates with greater care and guidance at the workplace. The table below outlines the dashboard report – tracer study of graduate placement comprising themes, key findings, potential reasons for findings and recommendations of the study.

## DASHBOARD REPORT – TRACER STUDY OF GRADUATE PLACEMENT

Evolving Themes	Key Findings	Potential Reasons	Recommendations
<b>Graduates Non-absorption</b>	<p>* 74.6% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are still unemployed and actively seeking employment at the time of this study's completion.</p>	<p>* The population surveyed may lack the necessary qualifications or skills required to secure employment in their desired field.</p> <p>* The population surveyed may be facing structural unemployment, where there is a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the requirements of available jobs.</p> <p>* The population surveyed may lack access to support services such as career counselling, or job placement assistance that could help them find and secure employment.</p> <p>* Students are placed in hospitals; police, pre-schools, services, and mining are a disservice to the student and the retail sector.</p> <p>* Students placed at, TVET Colleges, universities as additional 'hands or help'.</p>	<p>* Qualification aligned to skillset requirement should be considered in funding placements</p> <p>* Career counselling of students should commence at school level linked to the employment market</p> <p>* The W&amp;R SETA as a custodian of skills development in retail should ensure and promote the placement of students in relevant sector and linked to the field of study</p> <p>* Due diligence must be conducted amongst organisations before students are placed ensuring student support and student responsiveness</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Organisation taking on students as 'free' labour and providing limited support and job -rotation.</li> <li>* Lack of student mentorship at organizational level</li> <li>* Paucity of work readiness programmes at institutional level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should demonstrate their expertise in managing graduate placement programmes by offering structured training, development opportunities, and mentorship programmes designed to address the unique challenges of HTFVs roles</li> <li>* The W&amp;R SETA should establish mechanisms that can facilitate mentorship, academic counselling, and career services to help beneficiaries navigate their internship programmes successfully.</li> <li>* Structured employer mentorship programmes should be funded so that graduates are given appropriate pastoral and professional care</li> <li>* The W&amp;R SETA should facilitate a process of monitoring mentors and receive feedback on a quarterly basis. The mentorship programme should be evaluated for effectiveness.</li> <li>* To close the gap between academics and work life a work readiness programmes should be funded by the W&amp;R SETA to allow for a seamless movement of graduates into work experiences</li> </ul>
--	--	--	--



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Poor student attitudes, irregular attendance, punctuality, and lacking initiative at the workplace</li> <li>* Students not viewing the placement as an extension of study, professional experience and employment opportunities.</li> <li>* High expectations amongst students in view of qualification titles (e.g. Retail Manager). Students expect to be placed as managers and having an office.</li> <li>* A disconnect between all stakeholders in the graduate placement process. All entities working in silos.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Work readiness programmes should include soft skills training and psychological preparedness to manage transitioning from student life to the word of work</li> <li>* Work readiness programme should entrench the idea that the placement process is a learning experience and a “Job Interview” in action.</li> <li>* Induction and work-readiness programmes should infuse that work learning commences from the bottom of an organization</li> <li>*Theoretical knowledge, work readiness, graduate placement and absorption constitute a student retention ecosystem. The ecosystem must be harnessed by constant engagement between stakeholders for better synergy.</li> </ul>
<b>Graduates Absorption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* 6.1% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes have obtained a full-time employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Boxer has a very absorption rate of 95%.</li> <li>* Absorption is based on skillset requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Organizations which absorb students should be supported</li> <li>* Best practices from successful organizations should be shared, encouraged, and rooted into the placement programme for future employer participants to follow</li> <li>* Organizational needs and skills set match must be factored in when students are funded and placed.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Graduates are more willing and are adaptable.</li> <li>* Retention is based on vacancies that are available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The value of adaptable graduates must be funnelled via various industry stakeholder forums to expand the placement programme</li> </ul>
<b>Entrepreneurial activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* 0.9% beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are self-employed (have started their own business or became entrepreneur).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Beneficiaries may not have access to strong support networks or communities of like-minded entrepreneurs who can provide guidance and advice.</li> <li>* Lack of support can make it difficult for beneficiaries to navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.</li> <li>* All graduate programmes do not have an entrepreneurship module to enhance entrepreneurial aspirations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* W &amp; R SETA graduate placement agenda should consider placing students at SMEs for exposure to entrepreneurial activities and developing an entrepreneurial mindset.</li> <li>* W &amp; R SERTA should incentivise SMEs to take graduates and interns</li> <li>* Placement of students with SME's serves as mutual benefit for both student and the SME. Entrepreneurial tenacity exchanged with theoretical knowledge.</li> <li>* Institutions should consider offering entrepreneurship in all its programmes</li> <li>* W&amp;R SETA work readiness programmes should include basics of entrepreneurship.</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers to Absorption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Respondents were least satisfied with employer responsiveness to their presence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* This may be attributed to the company bureaucracies and procedures.</li> <li>* The possibility that graduates are treated as temporary staff and receive less attention as a result.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Companies embracing graduate placements should be inclusive in their engagements with graduates as part of the team.</li> <li>* Inclusivity would contribute to the professional growth of graduates</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Respondents were least satisfied with the alignment between their academic training and the tasks allocated to them at the workplace.</li> <li>* Respondents were least satisfied with the collaboration between their institution of learning and the workplace employer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The existence of operating in silos between the supply side and the demand side of the programme and labour force requirements</li> <li>* Each entity does not see its role as part of wider common purpose of employment creation and growing the economy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* There should be wider consultation and communication between institutions as a supplier of skills required and industry which demand fit for purpose graduates.</li> <li>* Collaboration between stakeholders will highlight the interdependency and benefit to the stakeholder and the graduate. This will enhance quality output from institutions meeting the demand of skills required.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional level factors that can aid student absorption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Effectiveness of the placement programme is linked to academic departmental support, preplacement activities, and host company support.</li> <li>* Student experiences in academic skills, personal skills, and enterprise skills are pivotal.</li> <li>* Respondents felt that it was important that their institutions provided them with adequate preparation. Focus was on “my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Collaboration amongst various stakeholders in each delivery point in the graduate placement experience will still enhance synergy in the ecosystem.</li> <li>* Students lack all aspects of the skills required to be to be more likely to be absorbed.</li> <li>* The limited preparedness for graduates to enter the workplace.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The launch of a graduate placement initiative should ensure that stakeholders are in conversation and each assuming responsibility for its supportive role</li> <li>* Academic programmes should be more inclusive of personal and enterprise skills to make students work ready</li> <li>* Institutions should ensure that work preparedness for students is given due attention in the curriculum and is part of the study programme.</li> <li>* Institutions should consider entrenching work integrated learning and increasing work integrated hours in experiential learning</li> <li>* Universities should provide adequate and relevant skills that facilitate graduates to meet the job-skills requirements.</li> </ul>

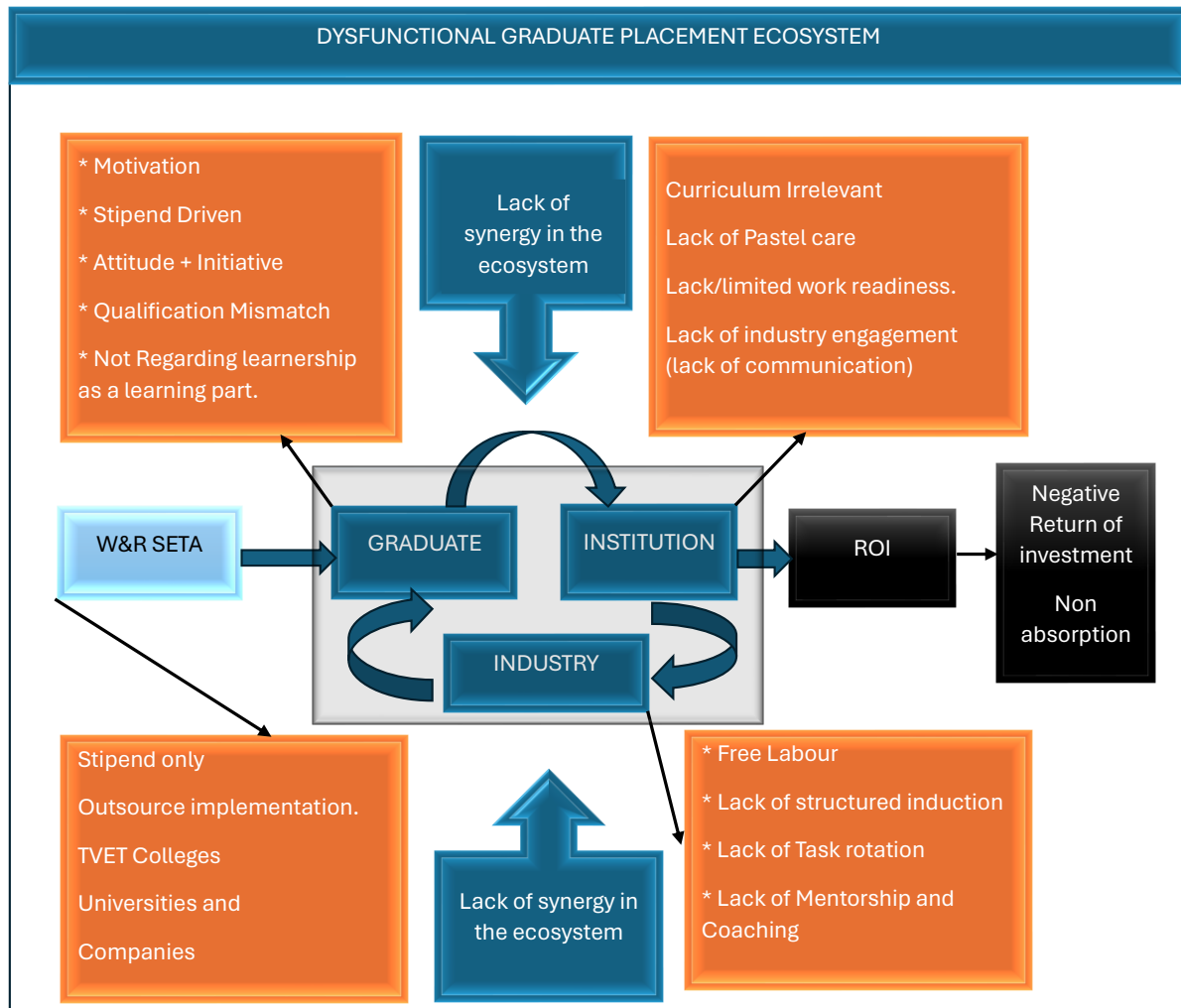
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The university-based skills were inadequate, and some were too academic and irrelevant for the graduates to meet the job-skills requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers felt that graduates lack the relevant skills to compete in the open labour market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Collaboration between industry and institutions in curriculum design and developed is essential</li> </ul>
<b>Industry level factors that can aid student absorption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students perceived that employer's responsiveness in their management of the programme, the provision of critical support, and the speed with which graduate applications are processed and feedback provided were important.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers which provided support and feedback to students are likely to have students who performed better during the placement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers should proactively manage the graduate's placement programme, by providing support, facilitating placement, and providing encouraging feedback to students</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Graduates placed in companies gives industry a prior window and access to the talent pool available before the graduate enters the open labour market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Companies can benefit by having available potential talent with qualifications at work sites via graduate programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employer support of students should be fostered so that student challenges and anxieties are addressed</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The absence of structured industry training aligned with the graduate's qualifications may lead graduates to perceive that they did not receive any training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers are not adequately prepared to receive students making the placement less effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers should participate in graduate placement programmes and harness student talent at their disposal. Companies could benefit substantially by getting the best 'crop' who would know their organizational culture before seeking talent in the open market at a higher cost of employment and re-training.</li> <li>* Companies should be more prepared to receive graduates and have a well-defined and structured programme so that graduates are fully aligned to the company vision, mission, and needs.</li> <li>* There should be ongoing connect session and pastoral care to understand the needs of students in the placement experiences.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The low rate of student absorption by employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers possibly view the student placement as an opportunity for recruitment of talent.</li> <li>* Employers lack the confidence of graduates produced.</li> <li>* Employer perceptions based on academic institutions' graduates attended, when offering employment opportunities e.g. TVET College</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Employers can adjust and proactively rethink human resource procedures and policies (e.g., recruitment, orientation, training, compensation, company cultural fit) by participating graduate placement programmes</li> <li>* Employers should offer opportunities for graduates based on the appropriate skills required.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* There is a poor perception of a career in the South African retail industry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Possible reasons could be the perceived remuneration, poor work-life balance, and limited career advancement due to students not seeing beyond shelf-packing and being cashiers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Greater energy should be dedicated to presenting retail as a career with wider opportunities (finance, IT, HR, supply-chain, etc...) at institutional and basic education level.</li> </ul>
<b>W&amp;R SETA enablers which can aid student absorption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The value of paid (stipend) and appropriate work experience cannot be negated in enhancing career outcomes amongst divergent student groups.</li> <li>* The benchmark of success should be continued employment and vertical mobility in the graduates' career path.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students not having the financial resources to travel to workplace sites as interns.</li> <li>* A dearth of evaluation of student successes, career tracking and employer good practice models shared.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The value of paid (stipend) and appropriate work experience cannot be negated in enhancing career outcomes amongst divergent student groups. However, it has to be more supportive to achieve a return on investment.</li> <li>* The W&amp;R SETA and employers should ensure that positive social experiences during placements, support identity transformations, map out career paths which could be monitored and supported. This can be achieved by constant placement visitation to identify best practices, successes and vertical mobility. This should be shared.</li> </ul>

	<p>* The success in the transition between institutional learning and industry is a 'game-playing' benefit as employability skills are best learnt in the 'habitus of work'.</p>	<p>* Skills development and transitioning to sustainable employment is limited to providing funds for student stipends</p>	<p>* The W&amp;R SETA should develop and facilitate a career ecosystem from the perspective the employer and the graduate by being instrumental in highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence that exists between graduates and graduate employers.</p> <p>* The W&amp;R SETA should become the champion in the sector that a period of work placement in a landscape of practice is a requisite for entry into higher levels of employment where graduates can experience professional conduct and practice on the expected behavioural outcome.</p> <p>This can be achieved via:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roadshow stakeholder workshops on the benefits for employers to take on students</li> <li>2. Contract line items outlining commitment to absorption</li> <li>3. Mentorship programmes to guide employers on how to manage students</li> <li>4. Workshops for students on how to effectively engage at workplace</li> <li>5. Entrench a work-readiness programme.</li> <li>6. Workshops with institutions about placement management and sector fit placement</li> </ol>
--	--	--	---

The issues of graduate placement and return of investment are complex as the key actors (graduate, industry, and institutions) in the implementation are not aligned. To unlock this, a greater involvement from the W & R SETA is required. The diagram below highlights the complexity.

## GRADUATE PLACEMENT ECOSYSTEM



## Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	i
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND OF WHOLESALE AND RETAIL SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (W&RSETA) GRADUATE PLACEMENT PROGRAMME.....	2
1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY .....	4
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	5
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT.....	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	9
2.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PLACEMENT PROGRAMMES .....	11
2.3 CONCEPTUALIZING THE PLACEMENT PROGRAMMES.....	14
2.3.1 Theories supporting the placement programmes.....	15
2.3.2 Graduate Placements with the Career Ecosystem .....	17
2.3.3 Skills Development .....	18
2.3.4 Role of the W & R SETA.....	19
2.3.5 Work Placement .....	20
2.3.6 Impact within the Wholesale and Retail Sector.....	26
2.4 PROGRAM ALIGNS WITH THE EVOLVING SKILL DEMANDS AND EMERGING TRENDS.....	28
2.5 HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.....	29
2.6 CONCLUSION.....	30
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	31
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN .....	31
3.1.1 Benefits of mixed methods approach for this study .....	33
3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION.....	34
3.2.1 Sampling.....	34



3.3	DATA COLLECTION METHODS .....	35
3.4	DATA ANALYSIS.....	35
3.5	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	36
3.6	CONCLUSION.....	38
4	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS .....	39
4.1	BIOGRAPHICAL DATA .....	39
4.1.1	Responses Rate .....	39
4.1.2	Biographical Statistics.....	39
4.1.3	Age Category.....	41
4.1.4	Gender category .....	42
4.1.5	Ethnicity .....	42
4.1.6	Nationality .....	43
4.1.7	Highest Level of Education .....	44
4.1.8	Position within the organisation. ....	45
4.1.9	Provinces .....	46
4.1.10	Employment status of W&R SETA funded beneficiaries. ....	47
4.2	INFERENTIAL STATISTICS.....	51
4.2.1	Satisfaction .....	52
4.2.2	Exploratory Factor Analysis .....	54
4.2.3	Reliability Cronbach.....	56
4.2.4	One Sample T Test.....	57
4.2.5	Satisfaction Constructs: One sample t-test.....	63
4.3	IMPORTANCE .....	64
4.3.1	Importance: One sample t-test.....	66
4.4	RELIABILITY .....	72
4.5	IMPOTANCE AND SATISFACTION .....	73
5	QUALITATIVE RESULTS .....	75

5.1	DATA ANALYSIS.....	75
5.1.1	Graduate Employment.....	76
5.1.2	Types of graduates employed.....	76
5.1.3	Graduate Skills and Relevancy of Academic programme .....	77
5.1.4	Graduate Placement Funding .....	78
5.1.5	Graduate Absorption.....	80
5.1.6	Factors Affecting Absorption.....	81
5.1.7	Monitoring and Evaluation .....	83
5.2	CONCLUSION.....	84
6	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	85
6.1.1	Perceived Value of the Program in Enhancing Skills in HFTVs According to Graduates.....	85
6.1.2	Student Support Offered by the Employer (SUPP) .....	85
6.1.3	Understanding the Graduates' Needs (NEED).....	86
6.1.4	Employer Expertise in Managing Graduate Placement Programme (EE).....	86
6.1.5	Physical Resources and Facilities at the Workplace (RES_FAC).....	86
6.1.6	Graduate Preparedness and Institutional Partnership (PP) .....	87
6.1.7	Employer Responsiveness/Interaction with Graduate (RESP_INT).....	87
7	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	88
8	CONCLUSION .....	103
	REFERENCES.....	104
	APPENDICES .....	120

## Table of tables

Table 1: Objectives of the study .....	4
Table 2: Employer perceptions of learners who were absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete the graduate programs .....	24
Table 3: Benefits of mixed methods approach for this study .....	33
Table 4: Graduate satisfaction scoring patterns .....	52
Table 5: Exploratory factor analysis .....	55
Table 6: Satisfaction - Cronbach Alpha .....	57
Table 7: Resources and facilities - One sample t-test .....	59
Table 8: Employer Responsiveness - One sample t-test.....	60
Table 9: Employer Expertise in Management of graduate placement - One sample t-test .....	61
Table 10: Understanding Graduates Needs - One sample t-test.....	62
Table 11: Graduate preparedness - One sample t-test .....	63
Table 12: One sample t-test .....	64
Table 13: Importance Scores .....	65
Table 14: Subconstructs – One sample t-test .....	67
Table 15: Physical resources and facilities at the workplace (IMP_RES_FAC) .....	67
Table 16: Student Support (SUPP) – One sample t-test .....	68
Table 17: Employer responsiveness/interaction – One sample t-test.....	69
Table 18: Employer Expertise (EE) – One sample t-test.....	70
Table 19: Understanding the graduates needs (IMP_NEED) – One sample t-test...	71
Table 20: Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (IMP_PP) .....	72
Table 21: Cronbach Alpha – Importance.....	72
Table 22: Recommendations aligned to literature review.....	88

## Table of figures

Figure 1: Monitoring and Evaluation process (Rosenberg and Ward 2020) .....	12
Figure 2: Conceptual model for graduates and graduate employers (Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh 2020) .....	13
Figure 3: Employers' Perceptions of Graduate Student Employability (Chhinzer and Russo 2017).....	23
Figure 4: Stages of the Kano Model (Stighfarrinata and Ashari 2022) .....	26
Figure 5: Mixed methods design implemented for data collection and analysis .....	32
Figure 6: Number of respondents.....	39
Figure 7: Biographical statistics.....	40
Figure 8: Age of respondents .....	41
Figure 9: Gender of respondents .....	42
Figure 10: Ethnicity of respondents .....	42
Figure 11: Nationality of respondents.....	43
Figure 12: Highest level of education .....	44
Figure 13: Position within the organisation.....	45
Figure 14: Province of respondents.....	46
Figure 15: Employment status.....	47
Figure 16: Importance and Satisfaction.....	74
Figure 17: Graduate Placement Issues .....	83
Figure 18: Graduate Placement Ecosystem (Disfunction).....	102

## **Table of figures**

APPENDIX 1: Student Information letter and questionnaire.....	120
APPENDIX 2: W&RSETA Research Questionnaire .....	121
APPENDIX 3: Questionnaire for Internship Evaluation Higher Institutions of Education .....	128
APPENDIX 4: Interview Guide (Employers) .....	131

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition of graduates into the dynamic wholesale and retail sector in South Africa. Central to this mission is the W&RSETA graduate placement program, which aims to connect aspiring professionals with suitable employment opportunities within the industry. However, to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the programme, it was imperative to conduct a comprehensive assessment. This assessment encompassed multiple dimensions, including programme effectiveness, skills development, employer and student satisfaction, and the overall impact of the programme. Assessing the programme's effectiveness was essential to determine its ability to successfully place graduates in suitable employment. By examining, for example, the programme placement completion the match between graduates' skills and the positions they were placed in, Researchers evaluated the programme's overall efficacy in achieving its intended outcomes.

Furthermore, evaluating the extent to which the programme contributes to the development of relevant skills among graduates was crucial in ensuring that it meets the evolving demands of the wholesale and retail sector. By examining the acquisition and perceived value of skills that are linked to Hard-To-Fill Vacancies within the sector, researchers ascertained the programme's effectiveness in equipping graduates with the necessary competencies that will help address skills shortages. Understanding the perceptions and satisfaction levels of both employers and students was also paramount in gauging the programme's overall impact. Assessing employers' perceptions of graduates' quality, preparedness for the workforce, and their overall satisfaction with programme outcomes provided valuable insights into the programme's alignment with industry needs. Simultaneously, gathering feedback from students regarding their satisfaction levels, the programme's usefulness, and its impact on their career development allowed researchers to gauge the programme's effectiveness from the perspective of its primary beneficiaries. Lastly, exploring the impact of the programme on graduates' career progression, long-term, within the wholesale and retail sector assisted in the determination of programme success in facilitating sustainable and fulfilling employment opportunities.

Tracking graduates' career trajectories and advancement opportunities allowed for the measurement of the programme's lasting influence. By comprehensively evaluating the W&RSETA graduate placement program, researchers identified areas for improvement, recommended ways of optimising the attainment of desired outcomes, and assisted in the continued relevance of the programme in supporting the growth and development of the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF WHOLESALE AND RETAIL SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (W&RSETA) GRADUATE PLACEMENT PROGRAMME**

The Minister of Higher Education and Training mandated the SETAs to offer bursaries to learners within their respective sectors. The Skills Development Act of 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998) which governs the operations of, and functions of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) provides the legal framework for the establishment, funding, and operation of the SETAs. It outlines the responsibilities and powers of the SETAs in developing and implementing sector-specific skills development strategies, promoting leadership and apprenticeships, facilitating workplace training, and administering skills levies. Compliance with the Skills Development Act to promote skills development, enhance employment opportunities, and improve the quality of work in South Africa led to the decision by the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) Board to approve a bursary scheme. This endeavour is in line with the SETAs mission:

*To develop a skilled, capable, competent, and professional workforce to transform the Wholesale and Retail sector.*

The W&RSETA's Bursary Scheme was established that provide financial support to students studying Wholesale and Retail Qualifications identified by the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) as hard-to-fill vacancies in the sector. The bursary scheme was established as one of the initiatives to further the transformation agenda of the W&RSETA by assisting students to develop their capabilities, skills and competencies, thereby enhancing the sector's workforce. The Bursary Scheme has evolved through

sector consultations and has further developed to include various student support initiatives which include but are not limited to Graduate Placements. The above-mentioned changes led to the Bursary Scheme being renamed to '*The Bursary and Graduate Placement Scheme*'. The Wholesale and Retail sector is a dynamic sector impacted by imminent changes in its environment, economy, political climate, social-ecological landscape, culture, Information technology and pandemic. These are driving forces that necessitate the constant review of the strategies aimed at the implementation of an impactful and efficient Bursary and Graduate Placement Scheme. The B&P Strategy aims to provide direction to the W&RSETA and the Sector on the implementation of the Bursary and Graduate Placement programmes. The strategy contributes to the W&RSETA's mission, which is embodied in the Strategic Plan as follows: "To develop a skilled, capable, competent and professional workforce to transform the wholesale and retail sector". In line with the mission of the W&RSETA, the B&P Strategy aims to "develop a skilled, competent and professional workforce in the Wholesale and Retail sector through the provision of Bursaries and facilitating impactful and sustainable placements to employed and unemployed beneficiaries within the W&R sector".

The completion rate for both bursary beneficiaries and graduates has been identified as an area of concern, as the dropout rate continues to increase. In addition, the B&P programmes must ensure that there is an envisioned progression and articulation in terms of learners who are offered W&RSETA bursaries so that they can be placed in the sector for graduate opportunities on completion of the qualification and possible absorption. The Graduate Placement and Internship Project of the W&RSETA was implemented due to the SETAs cognisance of the plight of unemployed graduates which is largely attributed to the skills mismatch of the graduates and the needs of the industry. To this end, the W&RSETA, supported by the Wholesale and Retail Sector, offers students work experience to prepare them for the world of work. The trend for graduate placements has demonstrated a fluctuating trend, with the total number of graduate placements decreasing from 791 in 2016/17 to 728 in 2020/21. The number of completions has been recorded to be very low, showing an increase from 21 in 2017/18 to 230 in 2020/21, which is quite low compared to the placements.



## 1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The review aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the graduate placement programme funded by the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority. The objectives of the study are discussed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Objectives of the study**

Project Objectives		W&RSETA Targets
<b>Program Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduate placement into HFTV employment within the wholesale and retail sector</li> <li>Graduate enrolment vs graduate completion rates</li> <li>Description of students who have benefited from the program (inclusive of disabled graduates)</li> <li>support services and mentorship opportunities are provided to graduates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To outline key features, trends, challenges, and outcomes of the graduate programmes corresponding (in respect to) to the sub-sector vision and mission e.g., Clothing, Fuel retail,</li> <li>To determine the nature of employment of learners who received employment</li> </ul>
<b>Skills development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program contribution to the development of relevant skills among graduates</li> <li>perceptions of employer's perceptions of students</li> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To outline employer perceptions of learners who were absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete the graduate programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Satisfaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employer and Graduate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide further insight into individual and social benefits based on the graduate programmes.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduates' career progression within the wholesale and retail sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To conduct a tracing study and determine whether the graduate programmes achieved the mandated</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>W&amp;RSETA graduate placement program reach and engage a diverse range of students.</li> <li>Barriers and challenges faced by students in accessing and participating in the programme.</li> <li>programmes align with the evolving skill demands and emerging trends</li> </ul>	<p>mission or perspective (outcome)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide further insight into individual and social benefits based on the graduate programmes.</li> <li>To determine the learner employment status (absorbed, not absorbed, and did not complete), career path, and current geographical location of those who have completed the graduate programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Perspective (Impact)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The perceptions and experiences of higher education institutions regarding the effectiveness and value of the W&amp;RSETA graduate placement program</li> </ul>	

### 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 1. Programme Effectiveness:

- How long do graduates typically remain employed in their placements?

#### 2. Skill Development:

- What is the perceived value of the program in terms of enhancing skills in HFTVs according to graduates and employers?

#### 3. Satisfaction:

##### *Employer Satisfaction*

- What is the satisfaction level of employers who have hired graduates from the program in terms of their quality and preparedness for the workforce?

- How satisfied are employers with the program's outcomes in terms of the suitability of placements and the contribution of graduates to their organizations?

#### *Graduate Satisfaction*

- What is graduates' satisfaction with the support provided during the placement process?
- How do graduates perceive the relevance of the training received through the program, and how does it impact their career development?

#### 4. Impact:

- What are the career progression opportunities for graduates of the program within the wholesale and retail sector?
- How does participation in the program influence graduates' salary growth and overall career satisfaction over the long term?

#### 5. Stakeholder Perspectives:

- What are the perceptions and experiences of higher education institutions regarding the effectiveness and value of the W&RSETA graduate placement program?
- How do industry employers perceive the relevance and quality of graduates from the program in meeting the workforce needs of the wholesale and retail sector?
- What are the expectations and feedback from students regarding the program's ability to facilitate their transition into suitable employment within the wholesale and retail sector?

#### 6. Program Outreach and Accessibility:

- How effectively does the W&RSETA graduate placement program reach and engage a diverse range of students studying towards retail qualifications in South Africa?

- What are the barriers and challenges faced by students in accessing and participating in the program, and how can they be addressed to ensure equitable opportunities?

**7. Industry Alignment:**

- To what extent does the program align with the evolving skill demands and emerging trends within the wholesale and retail sector?
- How well does the program adapt and respond to changes in the industry landscape and technological advancements?

**8. Program Support and Mentorship:**

- What types of support services and mentorship opportunities are provided to graduates during and after their placement within the wholesale and retail sector?
- How do these support mechanisms contribute to the successful integration and professional development of graduates?

## **1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The research report contains the following key elements:

- Introduction:
  - Background and context of the research problem.
  - Research question(s) or objective(s).
  - A brief overview of the methodology used.
- Literature Review:
  - A review of relevant previous research and literature related to the research topic. This section provides the theoretical framework and context for the study.
- Methodology:
  - Description of the research design, including the approach (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.
  - Participants or sample description (if applicable).

- Ethical considerations and measures taken to protect participants' rights (if applicable).
- Results:
  - Presentation of the findings from the data analysis. Use tables, graphs, and figures to illustrate the data, and provide clear explanations of the results.
- Discussion:
  - Interpretation and analysis of the results in the context of the research question(s) and the existing literature.
  - Comparison of the findings with previous studies.
  - Limitations of the study and potential sources of bias.
- Conclusion:
  - Summary of the main findings.
  - Answer to the research question(s) or confirmation of the hypothesis.
  - Implications of the findings and their relevance to the broader field.
- Recommendations

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In 2018, Rhodes University was contracted by the Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA) and the Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) to develop Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) tools for the SETA environment. The purpose of this initiative was to facilitate monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of the management performance of SETAs, as well as the delivery and impact of skills development programs. The study introduced three frameworks: one for assessing management performance, another for monitoring progress toward objectives, and a third for evaluating the relationship between management performance and skills development. These frameworks were built upon global best practices and incorporated the key areas identified by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). Additionally, a theory of change was collaboratively developed to clarify objectives and guide M&E efforts in the SETA environment.

The study recommends an evaluation cycle based on expansive learning and guidelines from the DPME, which can support the evaluation of management performance, skills development delivery, and the alignment of these SETA functions with the identified responsibilities in the theory of change. The introductions of the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995), White Paper on New Employment Policy (1995), and the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (1997) were among the significant public service transformations that were linked to training and development. At the core of this legislation and reforms, was the transformation agenda from the pre- to the post-1994 era of public service, which involved, inter alia, viewing the public as the client, being sensitive to the needs of the client, accountability, and transparency (Modise, Taylor and Raga 2022). The study by Modise, Taylor and Raga (2022) focused on the monitoring and evaluation of the South African Police Services. However, the review highlighted the need to evaluate the success of training programmes designed to produce human capital and develop

necessary skills that will be absorbed in a key sector of South African service provision. Training, according to Erasmus et al. (2010), is a systematic process used by employers to develop employees' knowledge, skills, and behaviour to meet organizational goals. It aims to improve task performance based on job descriptions and has diverse benefits, such as boosting morale, enhancing performance, improving the organization's image, and increasing productivity. However, the effectiveness of training is compromised when there is no chance to apply the acquired knowledge and skills. Monitoring, as defined by the Republic of South Africa (2007a), is a continuous process of gathering, analysing, and reporting data on inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It involves providing regular feedback to M&E practitioners, facilitating progress reporting on government interventions, and considering external factors to support effective organizational management. Monitoring also serves as a foundation for evaluation in certain cases. According to Modise, Taylor and Raga (2022) evaluation have been described in the study, involves a systematic assessment of project designs and implementation processes, analysing indicators and designs in relation to the work carried out (Lucen 2015). It focuses on evaluating the results achieved through key-performance information concepts such as inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

A monitoring and evaluation system encompasses various elements, including standards, structures, management processes, strategies, reporting mechanisms, accountability lines, information systems, and indicators. These systems enable government institutions to effectively perform monitoring and evaluation functions. It is crucial for the system to be integrated into the existing policy framework that guides budgeting, planning, and reporting. According to the Republic of South Africa (2007), all government accounting officers are legally obligated to establish an M&E system for their institutions. In response to the need to monitor and evaluate the programmes within the W&RSETA, an approach taken in the study by Modise, Taylor and Raga (2022) highlighted a customer focus in the approach to ensuring quality management is deemed appropriate. Similarly, the adoption of four elements from the eleven Batho Pele Principles are also noted as the focus of this study, with emphasis on the following principles: Consultation, Service Standards, Value-for-Money and Service Delivery Impact (Modise, Taylor and Raga 2022). The four principles from the Batho Pele

handbook are deemed essential to the monitoring and evaluation of training program outcomes in public services (Pietersen 2014).

Adequate consultations through employing methods such as surveys, interviews, suggestion boxes, mass training outcome meetings, and other research activities to ensure effective consultation within the public service. In addition, the setting of service standards to uphold high work ethics through the establishment of clear performance standards and regular audits has been emphasized to facilitate easy monitoring and evaluation of training program outcomes. Moreover, adopting a Value-for-Money in evaluation may play a role in determining whether interventions yield the anticipated results. The monitoring process helps ensure that interventions align with the goal of achieving an adequate return on investment. Furthermore, the fourth element that has been pinpointed emphasizes the importance of public service making a positive impact on the communities it serves (service delivery impact). In conclusion, the significance of training programs in transforming the South African public service, as a priority to the country, emphasises the need for accountability, transparency, and client-oriented service provision. Additionally, the relevance of adopting customer-focused approaches and principles from the eight Batho Pele principles listed in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (WPTPSD) (Republic of South Africa: 1997), including consultation, service standards, value-for-money, and service delivery impact, in monitoring and evaluating training program outcomes should be emphasised. In accordance with the principles of monitoring and evaluation, the following sections will expand on the various approaches that have been used in the evaluation of placement programmes at different levels locally and globally.

## **2.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PLACEMENT PROGRAMMES**

According to the Bank SETA project developed by Rosenberg and Ward (2020), the conceptualisation of the M&E process for SETAs is a cyclical process that begins with the appointment of an expert panel with expertise in Post-Secondary Education Training (PSET), M&E, and PSETA M&E. Thereafter, the panel of experts gathers data from all relevant stakeholders followed by the preparation of the data for presentation at National Skills Conference, guided by the panel. Preparation for the



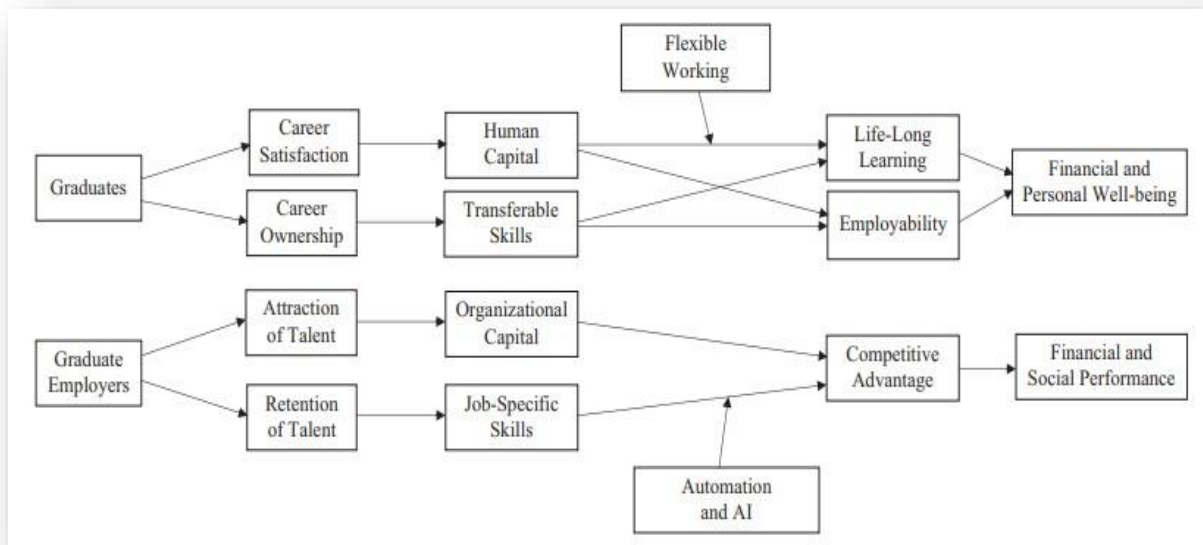
conference would entail the identification and collection of existing data, in terms of existing evaluation findings. At the National Skills Conference, further evaluations of the findings would be conducted. The last step in the process would involve synthesis of all the evaluations which would be published in a SETA Monitor to build up towards the next conference. The process would be repeated in the future considering new evaluation findings (figure 1).



**Figure 1: Monitoring and Evaluation process (Rosenberg and Ward 2020)**

The focus of this study was on the second step of the M&E process proposed in the Bank SETA project. The identification and collection of data from the relevant data points in the W&RSETA project. The perception of graduate work has undergone a notable change. Traditionally, graduates were seen as more capable, knowledgeable, and deserving than non-graduates, holding a dominant position in various fields. However, with the massification of higher education, graduates now possess diverse

cultural, social, and economic capital, resulting in a wider range of labour market outcomes. Despite a decrease in collective esteem for middle-class graduates, the classification of graduates as a distinct group remains relevant in media and policy discussions. Higher education is often portrayed as crucial for social mobility and economic well-being within the knowledge-based economy. The association of valuable characteristics with university education persists due to its historical elite status and the institutionalized value of qualifications. This maintains the perception of a strong connection between professional work and its perceived market value, even as the nature of work evolves (Tholen 2017a; Tholen 2017b; Burke, Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2020). For the purpose of this study, the researchers adopt the conceptual model developed by Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh (2020) in their study of the sustainable graduate career. The study emphasised the notion of a career ecosystem from the perspective of two key players, namely, the employer and the graduate. The study also highlights a psychological contract by evidencing the interconnectedness and interdependence that exists between graduates and graduate employers. The conceptual model highlights key aspects necessary for the development of career sustainability from the perspective of the employer and the graduate (see figure 2).



**Figure 2: Conceptual model for graduates and graduate employers (Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh 2020)**

The conceptual model illustrates the graduate and the employer as separate actors on either side of the same coin who are in pursuit of sustainable careers that satisfy either party's individual needs. Consequently, the factors identified in the model highlight key elements that may be used to assess graduate work placement program from the perspective of the graduate and employer. Moreover, in their study Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh (2020) note that career management takes place in an ecosystem that exists in three tiers, namely, the first tier (individual level), second tier (organisational level) and third tier (national level). It is from this tiered and multi-relationship perspective that all the players relevant to the ecosystem of the labour market may be identified (Baruch 2015; Donald, Baruch, and Ashleigh 2020). At the national level, the combination of individual and organizational sustainability can help nations to improve their competitive advantage within the global labour market. From a South African viewpoint significant player that shape the labour market are outlined in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2014 which identifies the inclusion of public universities, public technical and vocational education, and training (TVET) colleges, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the regulatory bodies responsible for quality assurance. In an effort to support the development of the South African labour market and its overall competitiveness, investment, through the SETAs, is aimed at improving the transition of graduates into the labour market.

### **2.3 CONCEPTUALIZING THE PLACEMENT PROGRAMMES**

Work placements supported by universities represent a unique combination of education and work, where students temporarily leave their studies to engage in full-time work within an organization. These placements are time-limited, integrated into the broader academic curriculum, and often supervised by academic staff. Drawing on Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transitions, we argue that education-facilitated placements are vital experiences that contribute to career adaptation and the development of career resources. Unlike regular newcomers to an organization, the outcomes of work placements are predetermined. Therefore, placements provide a safe environment for researching education-to-work transitions and the changes individuals undergo during this process. Viewing placements as transitions has both

theoretical and practical implications, aligning with career construction theory (Savickas, 1997) and the increasing need for understanding the dynamics of education-to-work transitions in today's rapidly changing career landscape. Enhancing our knowledge of work placements can contribute to a broader understanding of related employment transitions while offering a distinct research context (Inceoglu et al., 2019).

### **2.3.1 Theories supporting the placement programmes**

Neyt et al. (2019) conducted a review of scientific literature on the impact of student work on educational outcomes. They discussed several theories that explain the relationship between student employment and education outcomes. The human capital theory suggests that education is an investment that leads to advanced skills, higher wages, and a stronger economy. However, this theory does not consider contextual factors and overly relies on academic qualifications. Alternative theories include the "signal theory," which emphasizes academic achievements as signals of ability and potential, and the "certificate theory," which uses academic qualifications to regulate the labour market (Melink and Pavlin 2012; Mortimer, Vuolo, and Staff 2016). Critics argue that these theories place excessive emphasis on academic achievements and overlook other factors like experience, attitude, and personal conditions, which also contribute to employability (Inceoglu et al., 2019). According to Gbadamosi et al., (2019) many established career theories emphasize the significance of career resources in predicting employability and career success. Hirschi's (2012) career resources model highlights the importance of human capital, social, psychological, and identity resources for self-directed career management.

Work placements provide opportunities to enhance human capital through learning new knowledge and gaining experience. They also contribute to social capital by facilitating interaction with diverse individuals and expanding networks. Placements foster relationship learning and enable observation of workplace behaviours, supporting the development of career intelligence. Psychological resources, such as self-efficacy and career confidence, play key roles in adapting to career transitions. Placements are viewed as transformative experiences that involve redefining one's

identity and integrating newly acquired knowledge and experiences. Traditional career approaches often overlook the process of resource accumulation and identity restructuring during placements. Understanding how individuals effectively integrate these experiences into their identity structure is crucial for determining the impact of placements on successful career outcomes. Work placements offer a unique opportunity for individuals to acquire and develop career resources through learning, socialization, and identity change processes (Gbadamosi et al., 2019). Inansiti and Levien (2004) introduced the theory of ecosystems to the field of business management. They defined an ecosystem as a system consisting of interconnected actors who rely on each other for overall effectiveness. In the context of a business ecosystem, it refers to an economic community supported by interactions among organizations and individuals. Similarly, a career ecosystem involves multiple entities, such as graduates, institutions (universities and employers), and societal entities like governments. These actors communicate, interact, and make career decisions, while institutions and employers play a role in managing and shaping careers. Governments and agencies also contribute by setting procedures to develop human capital at a national level. The interconnectedness of actors within a career ecosystem is facilitated through various structures like legal and psychological contracts.

Career outcomes are influenced by interactions between graduates and employers, and organizations must devise strategies to attract and retain talented individuals. It is evident that there exists an interdependency among the actors in the career ecosystem, including graduates, academic institutions, and nations (Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh 2020). Using the ecosystems theory and Hirschi's career resource model along with the social learning theory (Bandura 1978), it is the researchers' belief that in South Africa, SETA placement programs are underpinned by this understanding. The social learning theory thereby highlights learning through socialisation and observation and in the context of graduate placements, graduates learn by observing more experienced employees.

### **2.3.2 Graduate Placements with the Career Ecosystem**

The transitioning of a graduate from an academic journey to becoming economically active can be best explained in the context of a career ecosystem pillared by interacting, interdependent and a series of interconnected engagement between various stakeholder organizations, institutions of learning, skills development agencies, government, employers and graduates (Donald, Baruch and Ashleigh, 2019). There has to be an alignment in the transitioning process between universities and colleges, the graduates career path and employers. Developing the 'craft' of a professional career and entry to a job market is a competitive process with varying barriers to entry. However, according to Herbert, Rothwell, Glover and Lambert (2020) Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory makes a profound contribution to employability by stating that the success in the transition between institutional learning and industry is a 'game-playing' benefit as employability skills are best learnt in the 'habitus of work'. A period of work placement, in 'a landscape of practice', is a requisite for entry into higher levels of employment where graduates can experience professional conduct and practice on the expected behavioural outcome. Government and its entities attempt to address skills shortages by funding human capital development to drive economic growth and repel challenges of unemployment. State entities like the SETA's serve as 'midwives' by providing funding via bursaries and stipend for graduate placement programmes to build capacity and competencies for aspiring youth to transition from education to employment. Ultimately the interconnectedness between graduate competencies and employer requirements is what shape and provide opportunities and career progression of new entrants into the labour market. The career ecosystem has critical stakeholders, with each having a vested interest and by effectively working in tandem all can achieve respective objectives and goals. The elements of the ecosystem follow a 'push-pull' scenario as government, educational institutions and individual graduate aspirations push towards economic activity and industry pulling competent talent into their organizations.

### **2.3.3 Skills Development**

Skills are developed for different motives or interests, mostly, for the kind of society that is planned to be created or built, the kind of social services that need to be delivered, the kind of work that need to be done, and the kinds of problems that need to be solved. The ILO (2018) postulates that countries take different approaches to develop the qualitative and quantitative skills needed. This depends on the counties' principal objectives, whether to support economic growth, policy formulation, contribute to strategic planning, or provide a pool of skills for career choices. In South Africa, skills are developed for similar objectives (socio-economic transformation). The current government policy on skills development is guided by the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), which recognises that education and training are important in facilitating economic development. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2022), the NSDP provides eight key alternatives for skills development including:

- Identifying and increasing the production of occupations in high demand; linking education and the workplace.
- Improving the level of skills in the South African workplace.
- Increasing access to occupationally directed programmes.
- Supporting the growth of the public education and training system; supporting skills development for entrepreneurship and cooperative development; encouraging and supporting worker-initiated training; and
- Supporting career development services.

In addition, the government policy allows the identification and analysis of skills shortages, skills surpluses, and skills mismatches, in order to guide strategies that can achieve the aforementioned alternatives (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2022). In the same vein, the W&RSETA skills development for economic growth Report (2022) and the South African Government Gazette (2017) disclose the skills development act, 1998 (act 97 of 1998), as well as the SETA (workplace-based) learning programme agreement regulations, which elucidate that a learning programme for skills development is essential for the following purpose: a learnership;



an apprenticeship, and saskills programme and any other prescribed learning programme that comprises a structured work experience component.

#### **2.3.4 Role of the W & R SETA**

The W & R SETA, as an organ of the state, is focused on skills development interventions addressing skills gaps and facilitating a route to the labour market. Its motto 'skills development for economic growth' is its fundamental driver to prepare a competent workforce and to rewire the economic trajectory on a positive growth path. The SETA's further play an instrumental and significant 'midwife' role by linking potential entrants into the economy to realizing their desire to becoming economically active. Graduates are supported to bridge the gap between their studies and the work with the provision of stipends over a designed period to travel to work sites for graduates to gain industry exposure and experience. The payment of stipend to graduate is supported by Jackson and Bridgstock's (2021) study findings which articulate that the value of paid and appropriate work experience cannot be negated in enhancing career outcomes amongst divergent student groups. This reaffirms the W&RSETA's graduate placement programme which funds stipends for work integrated learning and graduates seeking industry experience, networks, and employability. The W & R SETA has further aligned its employment-creating interventions to the NSDP outcomes and further championed the government's economic reconstruction and recovery plan (ERRP) in a drive to counteract South Africa's compounded challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The W&RSETA sees itself as a conduit between industry and education by expanding the provision of workplace-based learning. Its bursary and placement strategy focuses on ensuring that workplace-based learning (WBL) programmes and relevant and appropriate to addressing the myriad of occupational shortages and evolving skills gaps and limitations. The W&RSETA's strategies lucidly articulate a progressive and intertwined strategy so that youth step up the educational value chain from basic education to tertiary level and the workplace focused on becoming employable and significantly contributing to the South African economy.



Based on a development agenda the W&RSETA has devoted substantial sums of its budget to funding bursaries and placement, however, the completion rate, dropout rate, and return in investment begs the question on the success of these interventions (Bursary and Graduate Placement Strategy 2022/23-2026/2027, 2022). A standard business transactional norm expects investment to yield financial growth or tangible and impactful returns. Noting this the return-on-investment W&RSETA should reflect large contingents of its bursary beneficiary's graduate annually. Additionally, the graduates must be successfully placed in the industry as part of its placement strategy and seamlessly flow into the workforce. The critical conundrum is the measurement and feedback of the success of the investment. If the output picture is opaque and laden with uncertainty as a sponsoring agency the W&RSETA must reflect on its measurement tool. An efficient beneficiary management system should serve as an enabler to monitor and evaluate overall delivery. The benchmark of success should be continued employment and vertical mobility in the graduates' career path.

### **2.3.5 Work Placement**

First work experiences have a significant impact on individuals' future careers and employability. Understanding the processes that effectively prepare undergraduates for the world of work is crucial. Work placements or internships offer structured and educationally embedded opportunities for students to transition into the workforce. Reports suggest impressive employability benefits, such as higher job offer rates for students with internship experience. Placements have a transformative effect on individuals through learning and identity change. They create opportunities for individuals to experience mismatches between their actions and self-perceptions, leading to identity construction and learning from failures and successes. Practicing new behaviours enhances self-efficacy and allows for the discovery of new aspects of oneself. Placements also provide novel social encounters that challenge individuals to redefine themselves in new social environments. Feedback and validation from others shape the newly developed identity, while role models and vicarious learning expand awareness of potential selves (Ngonda, Shaw and Kloot 2022). These social contexts contribute to the acquisition of social and socialization resources.

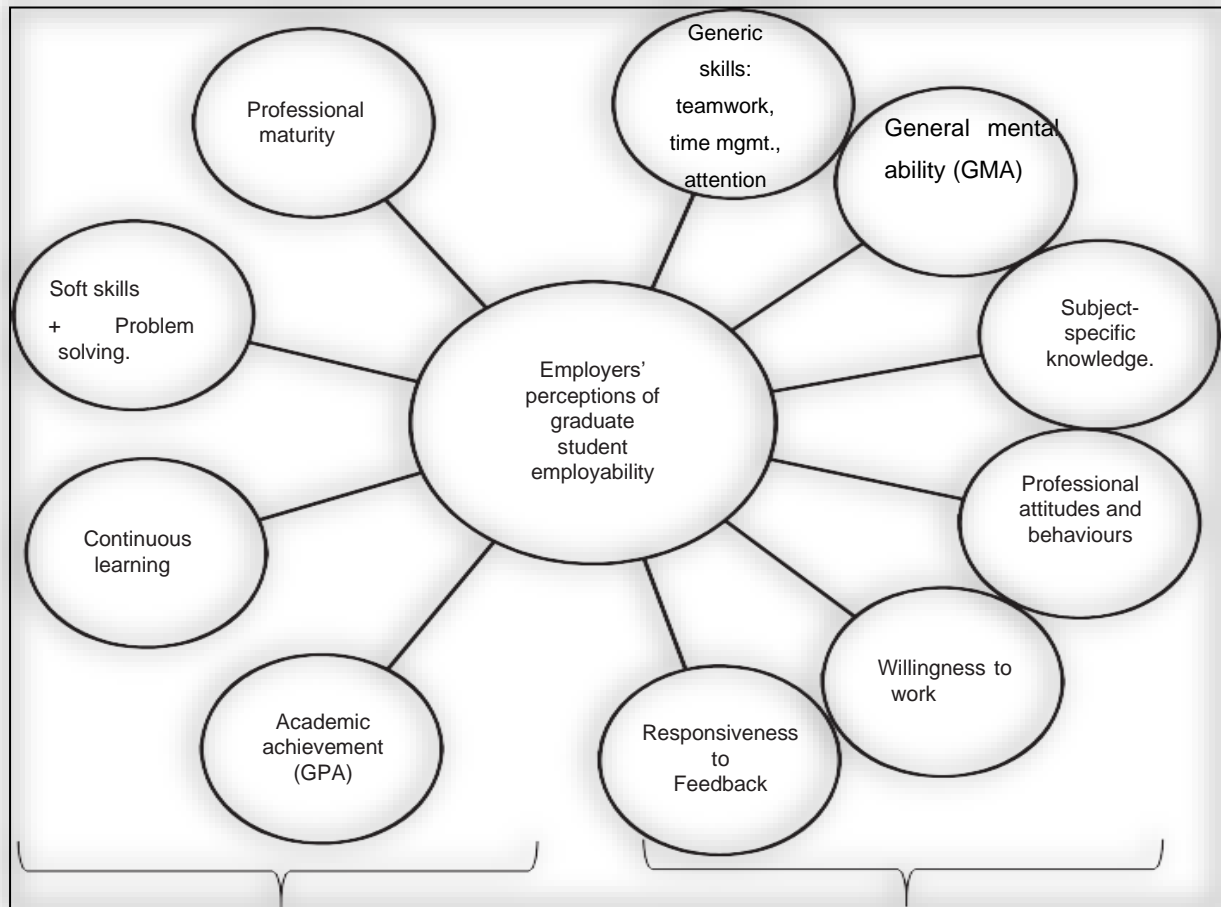
The experience of placements is influenced by the development of new identities, which play a crucial role in goal selection, learning behaviour orientation, and identifying opportunities for performance. Placement students strive to align their learning experiences with their evolving identities (Okolie 2022). Changes in self-perception impact future aspirations and behaviours, potentially leading to changes in career goals and actions. Individuals with a clear understanding of their identity and positive beliefs about their capabilities are more likely to pursue ambitious goals. Attitude changes, reflective of shifts in underlying value systems and self-perceptions, are observed in relation to one's field of study. Positive social experiences during placements support identity transformations and lead to more favourable attitudes (Inceoglu et al 2019).

#### 2.3.5.1 Work Placement Research

Basically, the aim of training is to improve the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of trainees. The intersection of knowledge, attitudes, and skills is known as the competency of individual to achieve an organization competency (Rahmana et al., 2014). Moreover, across the world, higher education has been moving towards an outcome-based approach where universities are required to identify the knowledge, skills, and attributes that they expect their graduates to have achieved (Makhathini 2016). There has been wide acceptance of the benefits of work placement programmes in general. Many studies have been conducted to investigate student's perceptions of work placement programmes in their various forms as well as the perceptions and experiences of those who have supervised them (Renganathan, Karim and Li 2012; Brooks and Young 2016; Inceoglu et al. 2019; Bond, Drake and Becker 2020; Sutiman et al 2022). While students and employers value internships, success depends on various factors like student participation and support (Hussien and La Lopa 2018). Some empirical studies retrospectively report positive experiences of work placements. Despite the wide acceptance of the benefits of work placement programmes on students no studies particularly within retailing, especially in a South African context, have investigated such programmes. Karunaratne and Perera (2019) conducted a study on an industrial internship programme at the University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka where they investigated the perceptions of students in the engineering

field. The study focused on three variables that they determined as moderators of the effectiveness of the placement programme, namely, departmental support, preplacement activities, and host company support. The study also highlighted the student experiences in three categories academic skills, personal skills, and enterprise skills. Similarly, a study conducted by Hordósy, Clark and Vickers (2018) investigated the perceptions of students from lower-income households and their experiences in a placement programme. In the study, the student's part-time placements were perceived in terms of their advantages and disadvantages in accordance with student's perceptions of the length of their contract, the timing of the employment, the locus of employment and the type of employment. Other studies conducted in South Africa such as the study by Makhathini (2016) investigated industrial supervisors' perspectives where workplace supervisors identified workplace competencies student participating in the programme.

Examples of student attributes identified in the study include for example, the development of technical skills, produces an acceptable quantity of work, accepts responsibility, and exhibits an interest in the job. The study highlighted the notion of multiple stakeholders in such programmes and the need for both soft and hard skills. Nonetheless, several other studies have been conducted which have investigated student's employability prospects (Kapareliotis, Voutsina and Patsiotis 2019), student experiences and satisfaction in relation to their career prospects (Jawabri 2017), students' perceptions and expectations in the hospitality industry (Bairwa and Kumari 2021); skills development (Laguador, Chavez-Prinsipe and De Castro 2020); determinants of internship effectiveness (Phoebe 2010). Figure 3 displays employers' perceptions of graduate student employability from a study conducted by Chhinzer and Russo (2017).



**Figure 3: Employers' Perceptions of Graduate Student Employability (Chhinzer and Russo 2017)**

According to Chhinzer and Russo (2017), employers' perceptions; employability perceptions, are dependent not only on individual employee responsibility but also on organizational context. Employers can adjust their human resource procedures and policies (e.g., recruitment, orientation, training, compensation) to focus on establishing parameters or expectations of professional maturity, soft skills, problem-solving, and continuous learning of those with higher educational attainment. In addition, employers can benefit from considering employability in its entirety. The perceptions of employers are also not limited to students who complete the placement programme but may also include those that did not complete the programme. Table 2 highlights an adapted view of the perceptions of different students; perceptions of learners absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete the graduate programs.

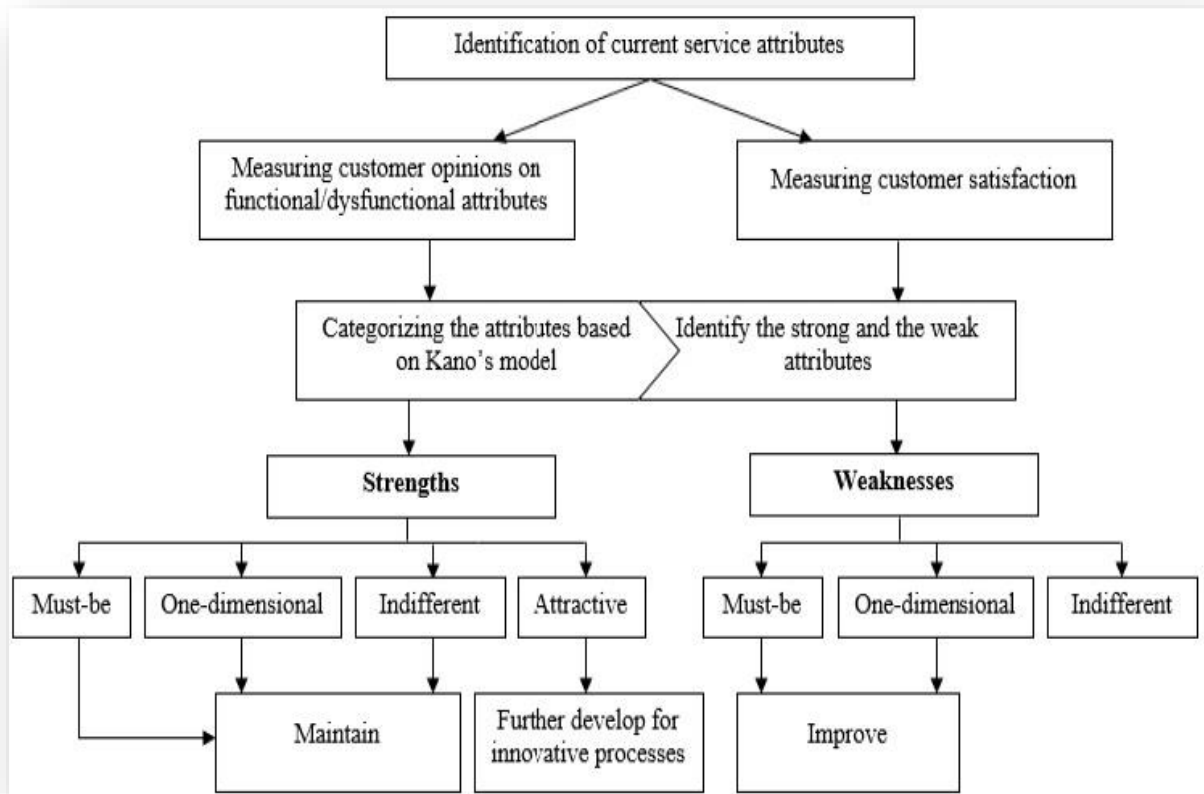
**Table 2: Employer perceptions of learners who were absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete the graduate programmes**

PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS WHO WERE ABSORBED FROM THE GRADUATE PROGRAMMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers absorbed graduates with skills and experience.</li> <li>Graduated with degrees that had a professional focus tended to be employed faster than those with general degrees.</li> <li>The perception is that the qualifications will create employment opportunities.</li> <li>The so-called “retail myth” holds that working in retailing is associated with store-based activities, requiring minimal training, poor working hours, low compensation, dull and boring work content, and limited advancement.</li> <li>Careers in the South African retail industry lag behind what students consider important, especially when it comes to payment, work-life balance, and advancement issues.</li> </ul>
<p>PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS WHO WERE NOT ABSORBED IN THE GRADUATE PROGRAMMES</p> <p><u>Factors causing unemployment among graduates:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of job market information; Lack of job search skills.</li> </ul> <p>No professional networks; No formal working experience.</p> <p>A mismatch between qualifications and available jobs; High cost of job search; Geographical area one lives in; No political or personal connections; Factors not influencing graduate unemployment; Age; Race; Not believing in one’s abilities; Higher education institution attended, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unemployed graduates blamed employers for a lack of employment opportunities.</li> <li>Employers viewed computer science graduates as having a negative attitude towards work; hence, employers were reluctant to hire them.</li> <li>Graduate unemployment in South Africa results from employers’ perceptions of the institutions graduates attend.</li> <li>Employers urge higher education institutions to produce employable graduates.</li> </ul>
EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS WHO DID NOT COMPLETE THE GRADUATE PROGRAMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment prospects of black students are significantly affected by the inadequate schooling system in South Africa.</li> <li>Students and graduates appear to hold negative perceptions of careers in retailing.</li> </ul>
PERCEPTION OF THE EMPLOYER FROM LEARNERS WHO WERE ABSORBED FROM THE GRADUATE PROGRAMMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fields such as engineering and medical science qualifications were absorbed into the labor market faster than other fields such as humanities and arts.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The university-based skills were inadequate, and some were too academic and irrelevant for the graduates to meet the job-skills requirements.</li> </ul>

<p>EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS WHO WERE NOT ABSORBED IN THE GRADUATE PROGRAMS:</p> <p>Underestimating the importance of social skills; Strong expectations of hard and soft skills; Universities should put less emphasis on foreign language; proficiency, cultural diversity, community engagement; etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of soft skills, cultural fit, and management skills that would enable them to lead organizations competitively.</li> <li>▪ Students should be encouraged to focus on careers with better employment opportunities, learners should be adequately prepared to enter the labor market and investment in soft skills.</li> <li>▪ Humanities and arts do not feed directly professional occupations; hence these graduates took longer to find jobs compared to natural and management sciences.</li> <li>▪ Employers, feel that graduates lack the relevant skills to compete in the open labour market.</li> </ul>
---	--

**Source:** Adapted from Ndebele and Ndlovu (2019), Harry & Mjoli (2018), and W&RSETA Report (2018).

Table 2 indicates satisfaction and lack of satisfaction perceptions from both employers and learners who were absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete the graduate programs. Based on these findings, a comprehensive view of the performance of a placement programme should not be limited to one group of students but must be more inclusive to provide a holistic view of the performance of the programme. Moreover, a major factor that has emerged from several of the studies investigating work placements is the use of simplified methodologies when evaluating the programmes from the students' or supervisors' perspectives. Conversely, a study conducted by Rahmana et al., (2014) highlights an attempt at conducting a comprehensive assessment of trainee satisfaction with a focus on improving quality. Although the study focused on students using simulations, it entailed an amalgamation of multiple methods (SERQUAL, Kano Model, and Quality function deployment) (see figure 4). Furthermore, the use of this integrated approach has been adopted in more recent studies where researchers assessed customer satisfaction (Stighfarrinata and Ashari 2022). This approach has also been adopted in studies that have looked at project management (Lo, Shen and Chen 2017) and civil engineering (Aji and Lukmandono 2021). Therefore, to fully understand the impact of placement programmes, a similar approach that incorporates multiple research themes may be deemed necessary, given the broad themes that have been covered in work placement research.



**Figure 4: Stages of the Kano Model (Stighfarrinata and Ashari 2022)**

### 2.3.6 Impact within the Wholesale and Retail Sector

According to W&RSETA Report (2018), the wholesale and retail industry is the fourth largest contributor to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while employing approximately 21% of the total workforce. South African retailers are also attempting to expand to the rest of Africa, which indicates that there will likely be a high demand for management candidates in the future. The W&RSETA (2018) study indicates that for the most important career attributes in the retail industry, students were more likely to rate their importance more highly than they would rate retailing on these attributes. This shows that careers in the South African retail industry lag behind what students consider important, especially when it comes to payment, work-life balance, and advancement issues. In addition, it was revealed that especially for some very important characteristics, the retail industry is rated poorly in terms of attribute importance when choosing an industry for a career. There could be various individual and social benefits aligned to graduate programmes. A study conducted Jackson,



Riebe, and Macau (2022) to determine factors which contribute to graduate recruitment and preparing students for success, it was found that 40% of the employers regarded internships and graduate placement programmes as vital to recruiting across positions and roles. Industry engagement can further inculcate business competencies of agility, problem-solving skills in work contexts, divergent thinking, and a positive mind-set. Whilst the trimmings of capital and social capital are harnessed and cultivated new entrants can build cultural and organisational culture towards developing a professional identity, the right disposition and cultural fit and access to the organizational talent identification pipeline. Internship opportunities offer organizations a prior and protracted window and access to the talent pool. It further provides employers an enabling platform to 'conduct' an extended interview process of graduate placed in their organisations. Active engagement in the workplace allows the resident organisation to assess the student's level of motivation, commitment, competencies, and organisational cultural fit. Outstanding graduates are more likely to be offered extended employment and 'misfits' will be rejected.

The graduate placement recruitment platform can cement enhanced productivity, better financial performance, employee retention and ultimately a competitive edge (Donald, et al 2019). This explains why some organisations have focused investment in-house internships which serve as a pipeline into specific positions in the organisations. Graduate placement is, therefore considered as an important initiative for identifying talent and should be entrenched in mapping out career pathways to the labour market (Jackson et al, 2022). Significantly the concept of 'plug and play' will be well-received by employers as skills deficiencies between academia and the workplace can be remedied with active work engagement. 'Plug and play' will see a swifter employee return in investment as compared to graduates who are exposed to workplace and require prolonged industry training. Therefore, investigation into the impact of placement programmes may lead to the discovery of various outcomes that extend beyond the individual into broader society. Furthermore, in the case of retailing, according to the W&RSETA (2018), statistics aligned with the student's retail career preferences are weak compared to other industries. For example, the study indicates that among 1 363 South African study beginners who started their studies in retail, 47% of retail students did not want to study retailing, and 33% decided on studying



retailing because it was the only field of study they could get into, and only 27% indicated it as their preferred choice. Most students believe that a career in retailing does not offer them the attributes they consider important, such as retailing is often associated with unattractive working hours, boring jobs, low wage increases, and low starting salaries (W&RSETA, 2018). Therefore, the impact of work placements may also affect the overall career perceptions of graduates through greater exposure to the industry. Therefore, an assessment of placement programmes would need to have broad consideration of the impact of the programme.

## **2.4 PROGRAM ALIGNS WITH THE EVOLVING SKILL DEMANDS AND EMERGING TRENDS**

The ILO and OECD (2018) indicate that evolving and fast-changing labour markets will impose a massive challenge on traditional education and training systems. This will require new approaches to lifelong learning, approaches that introduce integrated models of governance and financing in education and LLL systems and give greater emphasis to local and regional coordination to ensure that employers and individuals are better engaged in education and training. However, the actionable principles for skills Strategy and the Training Strategy consist to improve the contribution of skills to stronger and more inclusive growth, policy coherence through a whole-of-government approach and social dialogue, and reaffirm the importance of a well-functioning and well-resourced education and lifelong learning system for promoting strong and inclusive growth. A set of meta-skills, such as agility, flexibility, grit, and learning how to learn along with technical skills, core skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, initiative, etc., become an employment security mechanism that allows smooth transitions between jobs, occupations, and sectors.

The OECD Skills Outlook highlights the growing importance of skill mixes, in the context of the transition to a digital world of work (OECD, 2018). The right skill mix would include strong general cognitive skills, like literacy and numeracy, which can provide a solid foundation to pursue lifelong learning. It also includes basic ICT skills, analytical skills, and a range of complementary skills like creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking. In addition, interpersonal and communication skills, as well as

emotional skills like self-awareness and the ability to manage stress and change, are also increasingly important. These emerging skill needs are already generating skills mismatches and shortages in several countries, pointing to where action in skills development or in supporting the demand for high-level skills might be needed.

## **2.5 HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Higher education (HE) is progressively becoming competitive, and institutions are benchmarking the quality of output by the number of graduates employed. Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, and Lambert (2020) postulate that the dual benefit to employers and HE institutions is a 'plug and play' graduate. At exit level fit for purpose graduates can effortlessly flow into an organizational culture, agile and malleable work ethic, and quality delivery of expected work outcomes. The success of a 'plug and play' student can serve as a marketing strategy amongst HE institutions to attract entrants on the promise of employment success upon graduation. Therefore, student employability is increasingly become a strategic directive for HE institutions subsequently shaping pedagogic models. In a study on students and employability conducted in Australia Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) conclude that universities are assuming the responsibility to enhance student employability by encouraging the development of behaviours required to gain access to labour market by enhancing social and cultural capital. This is being gradually entrenched via embedded internships and shaping curriculum design.

Jackson and Tomlinson (2020) are of the view that work-based learning must be entrenched into the curriculum and centralized university internship arrangements must be facilitated to play an impactful role in employability. Work experience which is fixed in a curriculum permits graduates to develop a pre-professional identity in which they can hand-pick and internalize the vital skills and behaviours of the chosen professional pathway Herbert, Rothwell, Glover, and Lambert (2020). HEI's are steadily introducing co-curricular activities to enable employability to provide positional advantage for graduating students Jackson and Bridgstock (2021). Academic programmes are also encouraging extra-curricular activities in the workplace as contributing to employability to enhance student confidence, self-awareness,

developing competencies in an array of professional skills, acquiring of appropriate experience, establishing networks, and employment prospects. Consequently, institutions of higher learning are devoting extensive energy in work-based learning with a belief that it is positively coupled with student employability. However, there are divergent opinions whether internships organised as an extra-curricular activity is more effective as compared to programmes delivered as work-integrated learning. Notwithstanding the differences in perspectives the significant role of industry engagement in learning and employability is irrefutable (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021). It would be interesting to investigate students' and employers' perceptions of students entering into graduate placement programmes from different institutions of higher learning.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In retrospect graduates desire to augment their employability status and learn through their career journey by taking ownership of their careers, developing human capital and transferable skills and seeking career satisfaction. Aligned to these employers aspire to entice and hold on to competent graduates, to increase benefits through innovation and technology, to develop job-specific skills and nurture organizational capital towards entrenching a competitive advantage and exponential financial growth. The W&RSETA plays a fundamental intermediate role between the retail sector, institutions of learning, and the student. Assessing the collective involvement of all stakeholders in ensuring a competent workforce and ultimately developing relevant skills for economic development may provide key insights into the performance of a work placement programme. Moreover, the existing literature shows that's the subject of evaluating work placement programmes has been approached from several perspectives which include but are not limited to student and supervisor perceptions, perceptions of value and an assessment of the satisfaction levels of participants. In accordance with existing literature a comprehensive assessment should involve measuring multiple constructs.

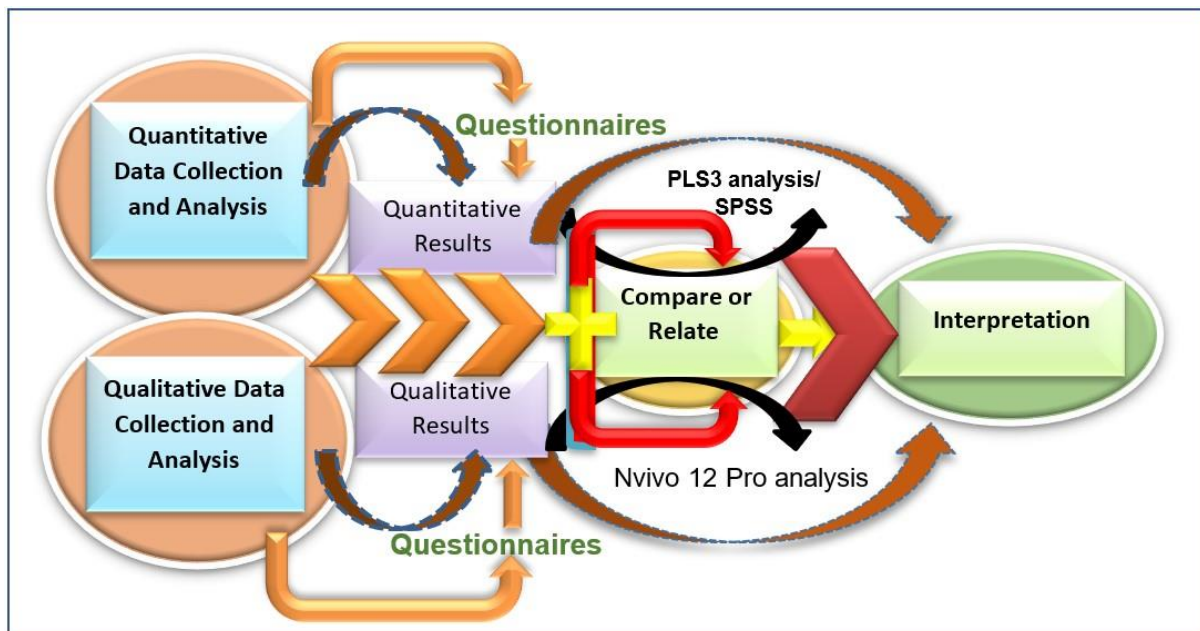
### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The term “research” is related to seeking out information and knowledge on a particular topic, matter, or subject. In other words, research represents the art of systematic investigation. Kumar (2014) specified that research is a process involving the collection of data, as well as the analysis and interpretation of information to answer questions. This implies that the research process must fulfil certain characteristics linked as far as possible to a control and rigorous system, namely: it must be systematic, valid, and verifiable, empirical, and critical. According to Creswell (2015), research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypotheses or suggested solutions; collecting, organizing, and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last, carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis. The following section highlights the chosen research methodology for this study.

#### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design consists of one of the ways of collecting accurate, sound, and reliable information about the effectiveness of the researchers’ interventions in providing useful evidence (Kumar, 2011). In addition, the research is conducted by providing the collection of relevant information with minimal expenditure of effort, time, and money through the conceptual structure. Therefore, the research design implemented for this study was a “Mixed methods approaches”, which consisted of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Noble, 2019; Heale, 2013 and Nelij, 2010). Creswell (2015) and Turner (2010) define a mixed methods approaches as combining both quantitative and qualitative research in a research study. Specifically, mixing approaches was essential to get more viewpoints upon the variables being studied. Therefore, mixed methods involve procedures that enable the validation of data from both quantitative and qualitative studies. It assists in confirming assumptions where findings from the qualitative study confirm those from quantitative study (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, this study employed the mixed approaches in converging the survey data and the interview data for purposes of reflecting the process of interaction, priority, timing, and mixing data. Consequently, the mixed methods comprising quantitative data collection and analysis and qualitative data

collection and analysis were designed following the study's framework, which comprises descriptions, relationships, comparisons, as well as interpretation (Creswell, 2011). In this study, data were collected by employing mixed instruments, namely a survey questionnaire and interview questions (Online questions and focus groups). Mixed methods selected for the project involved online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In this study, the survey approach provided a numerical description of trends using an online questionnaire. The mixed methods approach assisted and facilitated the researchers to combine, compare, and interpret results from both quantitative and qualitative data. Figure 5 illustrates mixed methods designs was implemented for data collection and analysis.



**Source:** Adapted from Creswell (2011): *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*

**Figure 5: Mixed methods design implemented for data collection and analysis**

### 3.1.1 Benefits of mixed methods approach for this study

**Table 3: Benefits of mixed methods approach for this study**

Mixed Methods Approach	
Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides detailed perspectives of a few people.</li> <li>- Captures the voices of participants.</li> <li>- Allows participants' experiences to be understood in context.</li> <li>- Is based on the views of participants, not of the researcher.</li> <li>- Appeals to people's enjoyment of stories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draws conclusions for large numbers of people.</li> <li>- Analyses data efficiently</li> <li>- Investigates relationships within data.</li> <li>- Examines probable causes and effects.</li> <li>- Controls bias</li> <li>- Appeals to people's preference for numbers.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Creswell (2015): *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*

The core assumption of mixed methods is that when researchers combine statistical trends (quantitative data) with stories and personal experiences (qualitative data), this collective strength provides a better understanding of the research problem than either form of data alone (Creswell, 2015). The choice of mixed methods was relevant for this study to the level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands, the relative priority of the strands, the timing of the strands, and the procedures for mixing the strands. The strand is a component of a study that encompasses the basic process of conducting quantitative or qualitative research: posing questions, collecting data, analysing data, and interpreting results based on that data (Creswell, 2011). Thus, the level of interaction is the extent to which the two strands (quantitative and qualitative) are kept independent or interact with each other (Creswell, 2011).

## **3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION**

Any population that is the subject of a particular study formulates the research population (Goddard and Melville 2004:34). The research population refers to the total number of individuals from whom data will be gathered which is inclusive of individuals, households, businesses, companies, and or professional people (Wiid and Diggines 2021). The Bursary and Graduate Placement strategy of the W&RSETAs model fund both employed and highlighted the need for support for students and graduates in the retailing sector. For the purposes of this study, the research population for consisted of students in the retailing sector who have received support as participants of the W&RSETAs Graduate Placement programme. The beneficiaries (students) cohort formed the quantitative research population of the study. Moreover, the objectives of the placement programme emphasised the role played by the programme by assisting retailers in gaining access to a pool of skilled workers with formal tertiary qualifications from South African HEIs. In accordance with the convergent parallel mixed methods used in the study, retailers and HEIs who participated in this study formulated the research population for the qualitative study.

### **3.2.1 Sampling**

According to Wiid and Diggines (2021: 217) the research population must be clearly defined with respect to the “sample units, sample elements extent and time”. In accordance with Wiid and Diggines, this entails population should be divided into groups from which data should be obtained. For the purposes of this study, the research population was divided into three distinct units as follows:

- Retailing graduates (W&RSETA placement programme participants)
- South African HEIs (W&RSETA graduate placement participating institutions) and
- Employers (companies participating in the W&RSETA placement programme)

In the case of retailing graduates, the sampling unit and sampling element were the same. However, in the case of the HEIs the sampling unit consisted of academic and administrative staff with knowledge of graduate placement at their respective institutions. For employers participating in the W&RSETA programme, the sampling



element consisted of human resources: staff and supervisors directly involved in the placement of graduates. Furthermore, the sampling frame consisted of the W&RSETA database for all participating students, institutions, and employers. Simple random sampling was used to select students and avoid sampling bias on the part of the researchers. The sample size was determined following the population size.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

According to Creswell (2015), data collection refers to obtaining useful information on fundamental quality characteristics produced through a process. In qualitative research, data is usually collected from a smaller sample, which provides rich and deep insight into the phenomenon under study. To obtain a better understanding of the topic under study, data collection will be carried out using the convergent parallel design, a mixed-methods design which can be expressed a combination of qualitative and quantitative (QUAL+QUAN) (Morse, 1991 cited in Demir and Pismek 2018). A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). In this study, methods of collecting qualitative data involved direct interactions with individuals using Online questions, telephone interviews, focus groups, or a one-to-one basis to gather people's perceptions, meanings and definitions of situations and constructions of reality (Punch and Oancea, 2014). In addition, the research process used online questionnaire distribution for quantitative data collection (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009).

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis in mixed methods research relates to the type of research strategy chosen for the procedures. According to Creswell (2018), data analysis in mixed methods consists of separately analysing the quantitative data using quantitative methods and qualitative data using qualitative methods. Data analysis involves combining both databases using approaches that mix or integrate the quantitative and qualitative data and results (the mixed methods analysis). The analysis occurs from both quantitative (descriptive and inferential numeric analysis) and qualitative (description and thematic text analysis) approaches and often includes the two



approaches (Creswell, 2009). This study employed the software program of Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS version 24.0) for quantitative method and Nvivo (12 pro) software package and thematic text analysis for qualitative method respectively. The two techniques were helpful and assisted the researchers in terms of the interpretation of numerical and theoretical data within Tables and Graphs, which represented an easier way to understand data analysis, particularly in explaining the necessity for developing graduates' placement programmes. According to Creswell (2011), data are processed through four basic mixed methods designs that comprise the convergent parallel design, the explanatory sequential design, the exploratory sequential design, and the embedded design. The convergent parallel design framework was implemented in this study for the purposes of reflecting the process of interaction, priority, timing, and mixing data (Creswell, 2011).

The usage of the convergent design consisted of understanding or developing a more complete comprehension of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary data for validation purposes. Therefore, quantitative data collection and analysis, and qualitative data collection and analysis were processed, compared, and interpreted using the framework of mixed methods design for data analysis, which involved descriptions, relationships, comparisons and interpretation or predictions of both quantitative and qualitative results. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data considered the examination of research questions in line with descriptive analysis (quantitative results), inferential analysis (qualitative results), mixing and interpretation of data, representation and interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Results.

### **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ensuring ethical research is essential to the safety and security of research participants. Informed consent was made available to assist participants understand the purpose of the survey, how their data will be used, and any potential risks or benefits related to their participation. For the study, the following ethical consideration were considered:

- **Clear and Comprehensive Consent Statement:**

A clear and comprehensive consent statement that explains the purpose of the survey, how the data will be used, including the duration of participation, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participation were made available to respondents. A consent form was also presented to interviewees before the collection of data. A checkbox at the beginning of the survey, which participants supposed to check to indicated their informed consent before proceeding with the survey was provided in the case of the online survey. The study instruments incorporated simple and easily understandable language, avoided technical jargon.

- **Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in the data collection process was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the survey or interviews at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that non-participation or withdrawal will affect their relationship with the researcher or organization.

- **Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Participants were assured that their responses will be kept confidential and that their identities will be anonymized in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

- **Contact Information:**

Participants were provided with contact information of the researcher and the office of the DUT Wholesale and Retail Chair to allow them to ask questions, raise concerns, or seek clarification about the data collection process and their participation.

- **Data Handling and Storage:**

The researchers ensured participants that data collected should be handled and stored responsibly, guaranteeing data accuracy and security. They were also ensured that Data should be stored for an appropriate duration and disposed properly as directed by the W&RSETA.

Adhering to these ethical considerations was essential for maintaining trust and integrity of research and for ensuring that research was conducted in a responsible and respectful manner. Researchers were aware of and followed the relevant ethical guidelines and standards set forth by the Durban University of Technology and professional associations. The research team also consisted of researchers who have been trained in research ethics.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

In this study, the mixed methods approach helped the researchers collect and analyse data using the procedure shown in Figure 5. The team has decided to collect quantitative data using Microsoft's web infrastructure and qualitative data through focus groups. Data were collected, collated, and analysed using SPSS and NVivo software for quantitative and qualitative data analysis, respectively. The next section presents the study's findings.

## 4 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### 4.1.1 Responses Rate

According to Wu (2022) and SurveyMonkey (2024), a response rate refers to the number of people who completed the survey divided by the number of people who make up the total sample group.



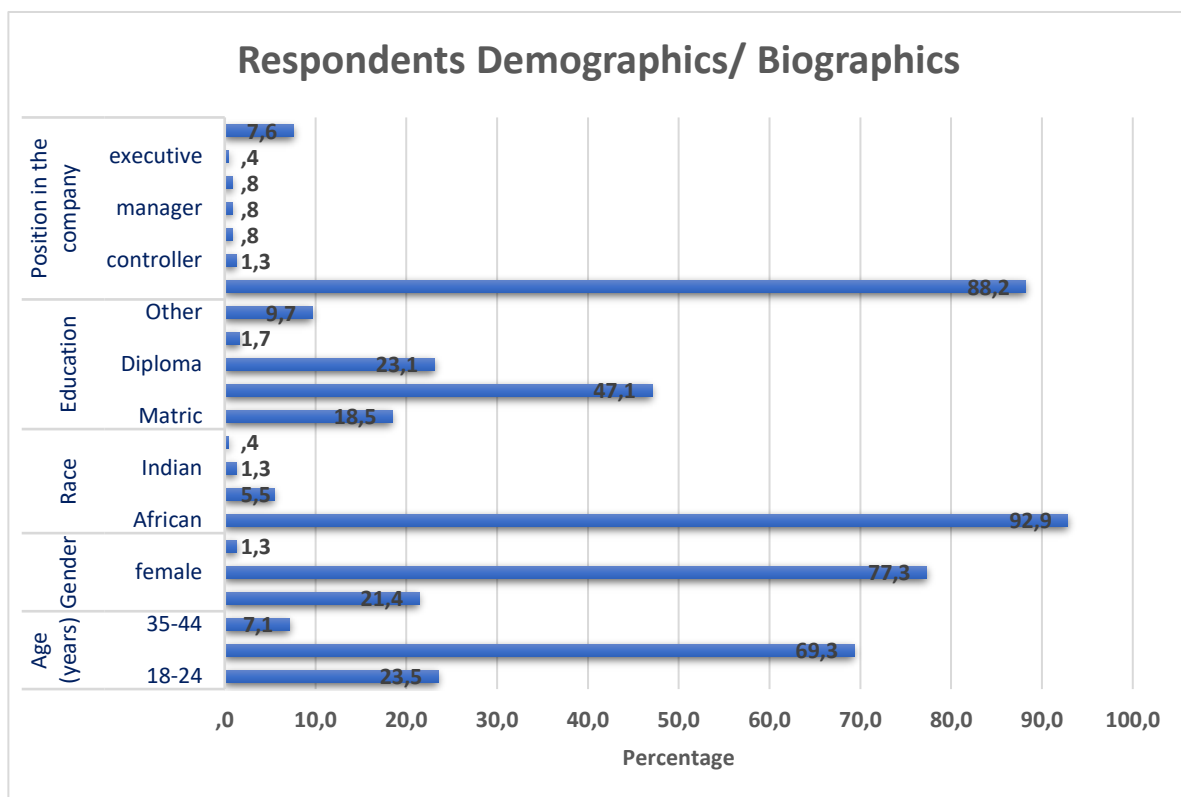
**Figure 6: Number of respondents**

Therefore, 261 respondents participated in this study. Figure 6 indicate the statistical results, which reveal that most respondents, specifically 97.7% participated in the study. This high acceptance rate suggests that the study garnered significant interest and cooperation from the targeted participants. Additionally, the low refusal rate of only 2.3% indicates that the number of individuals who declined to participate was relatively small compared to the overall sample size. This suggests a positive response rate from the potential participants, making the data collected more representative and possibly increasing the validity and generalizability of the study's findings.

#### 4.1.2 Biographical Statistics

According to APA dictionary of Psychology (2023), biographical statistics refers to information on job candidates for use in personnel selection. The data are usually obtained from application forms or special questionnaires (biographical inventories)

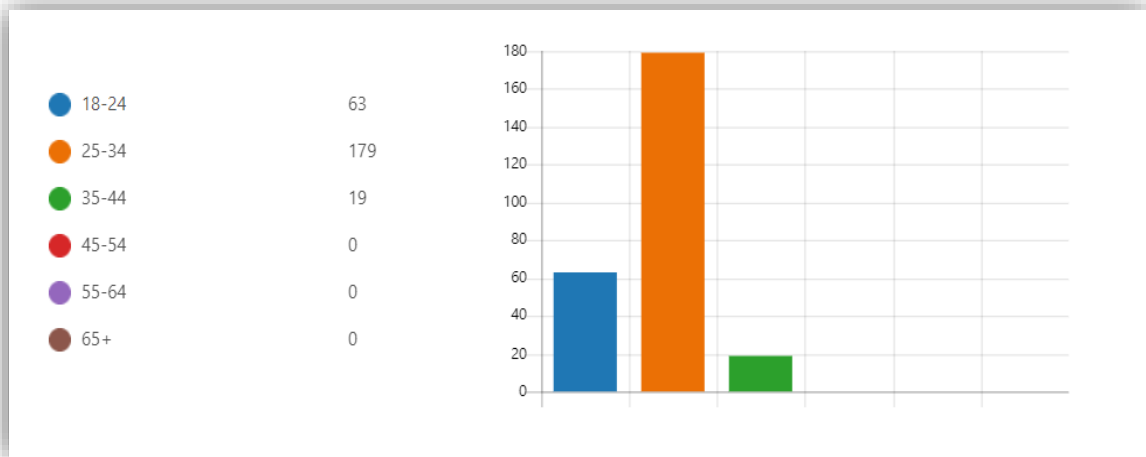
and include such items as age, sex, education, work experience, and interests. Therefore, Figure 7 below shows an overview of biographical statistics, including age categories, gender categories, ethnicity or race categories, degree or level of education, position and employment status of beneficiaries placed within the Wholesale and retail organisations. To clarify the knowledge of these categories, each aspect of biographical statistics is broken down for easy explanation and interpretation.



**Figure 7: Biographical statistics**

The following sections derived from Figure 7 discuss the demographics of the sampled respondents focusing on each variable, namely, age, gender, ethnicity, highest level of education, and position in the organisation.

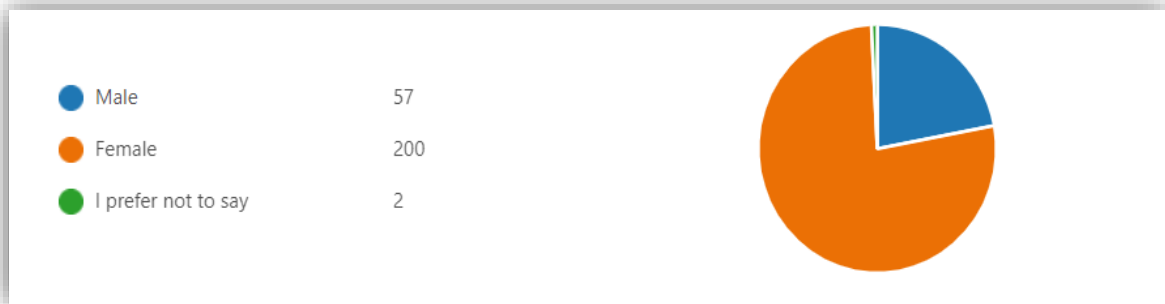
### 4.1.3 Age Category



**Figure 8: Age of respondents**

The statistical results suggest that the respondents were categorized into six age groups, namely 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65 and older. However, when examining the distribution of respondents across these age groups (as shown in Figure 8), it is evident that the highest proportion (69.3%) falls within the 25-34 age range. This implies that the largest group of respondents in this survey were between the ages of 25 and 34. The second largest group comprises individuals aged 18-24, accounting for 23.5% of the respondents. The smallest group consists of respondents aged 35-44, making up only 7.1% of the total respondents.

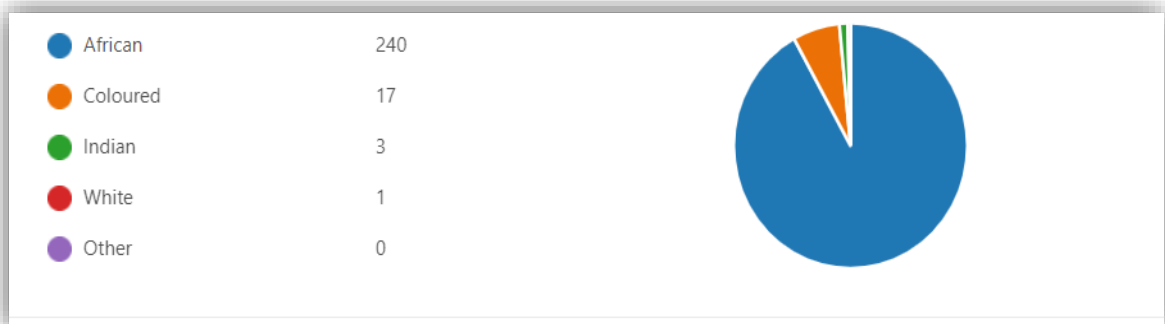
#### 4.1.4 Gender category



**Figure 9: Gender of respondents**

The statistical results of Figure 2 indicate that in the sample population of respondents, there were more females than males. Females accounted for 77.3% of the total respondents, while males made up 21.4% of the total. Additionally, a small portion of the respondents (1.3%) chose not to reveal their gender.

#### 4.1.5 Ethnicity



**Figure 10: Ethnicity of respondents**

The given statistical results provide from Figure 10 information about the distribution of respondents according to their ethnicity or race. It indicates the following:

- Most of the respondents (92.8%) were African. This indicates that a large proportion of the sample consisted of individuals who self-identified as African.

- Coloureds accounted for 5.5% of the respondents. This suggests that a smaller proportion of participants identified themselves as belonging to the coloured racial category.
- Indians made up 1.3% of the respondents. This indicates that a small fraction of the sample identified themselves as Indian.
- Whites represented only 0.4% of the respondents. This suggests that a very small portion of the sample consisted of individuals identifying as white.

Thus, these statistics provide an overview of the ethnic or racial distribution within the sample surveyed. It is important to note that these percentages are specific to the sample under consideration and may not necessarily reflect the actual demographic distribution in the larger population.

#### 4.1.6 Nationality

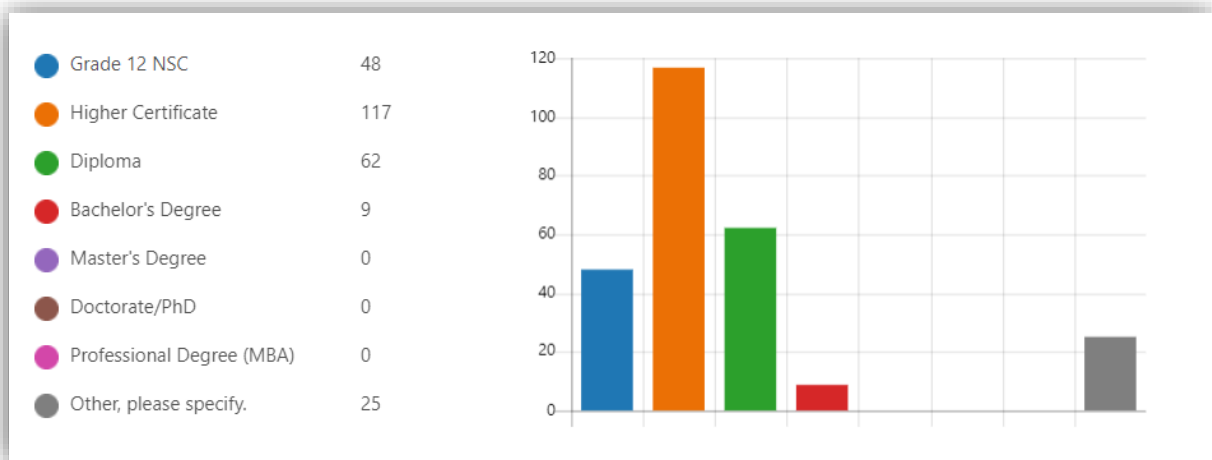


**Figure 11: Nationality of respondents**

The statistical result stated in Figure 11 is that all respondents (100%) were South Africans. This means that every participant in the study or survey identified themselves as a citizen or resident of South Africa. This information is significant because it suggests that the sample used for the study was representative of the South African population, which can be important for drawing conclusions or generalizing findings to the wider population.



#### 4.1.7 Highest Level of Education



**Figure 12: Highest level of education**

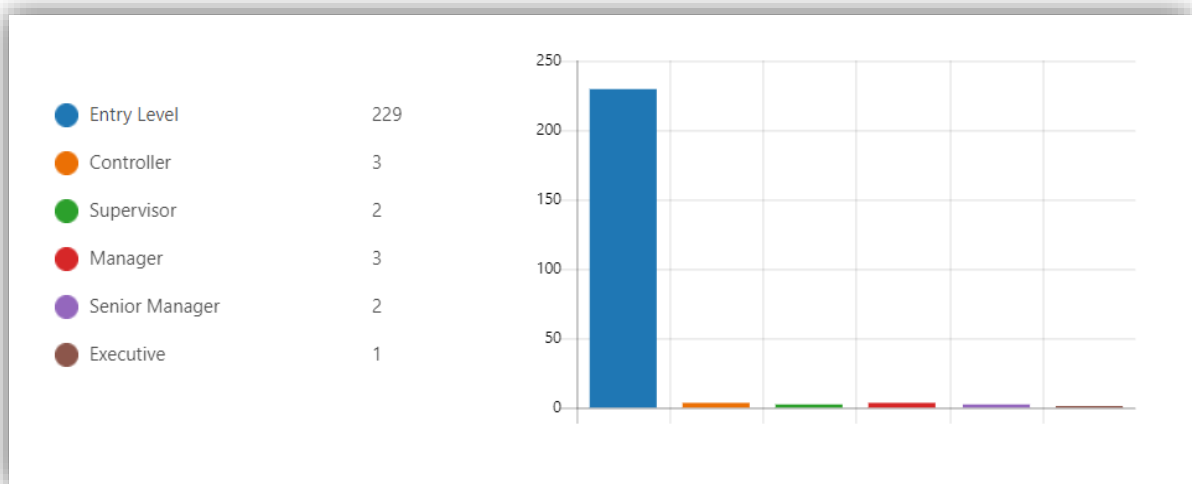
The statistical results from Figure 12 indicate the distribution of educational levels among the respondents. It suggests the following:

- **Higher Certificate:** Most respondents, accounting for 47.1%, reported having a Higher Certificate as their highest level of education. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample population has completed a formal education program beyond high school that awards a Higher Certificate.
- **Diploma:** Following behind, 23.1% of the respondents have a Diploma as their highest level of education. This indicates a considerable number of individuals who have pursued and completed diploma programs, which may be academic or vocational in nature.
- **Grade 12 NCS:** 18.5% of the respondents reported having a Grade 12 NCS. This likely refers to the completion of the 12th grade in a National Curriculum Statement system or similar educational program. It suggests that a reasonable portion of the sample either completed their formal education after high school or did not pursue further studies.

- **Professional Degree (MBA):** The statistics indicate that only 1.7% of the respondents hold a professional degree such as an MBA (Master of Business Administration). This implies a small proportion of the sample population has pursued advanced education on a professional track, typically specializing in business administration.
- **Unspecified Education Level:** The data shows that 9.7% of the respondents did not specify their level of education. This may indicate missing or incomplete information, or individuals who chose not to disclose their educational background.

Therefore, the statistical results disclose and provide insights into the proportions of respondents with different educational levels within the sample. The majority possess a Higher Certificate, followed by individuals with a Diploma, grade 12 NCS, professional degrees (like an MBA), and a small percentage of respondents who did not disclose their education level.

#### 4.1.8 Position within the organisation.

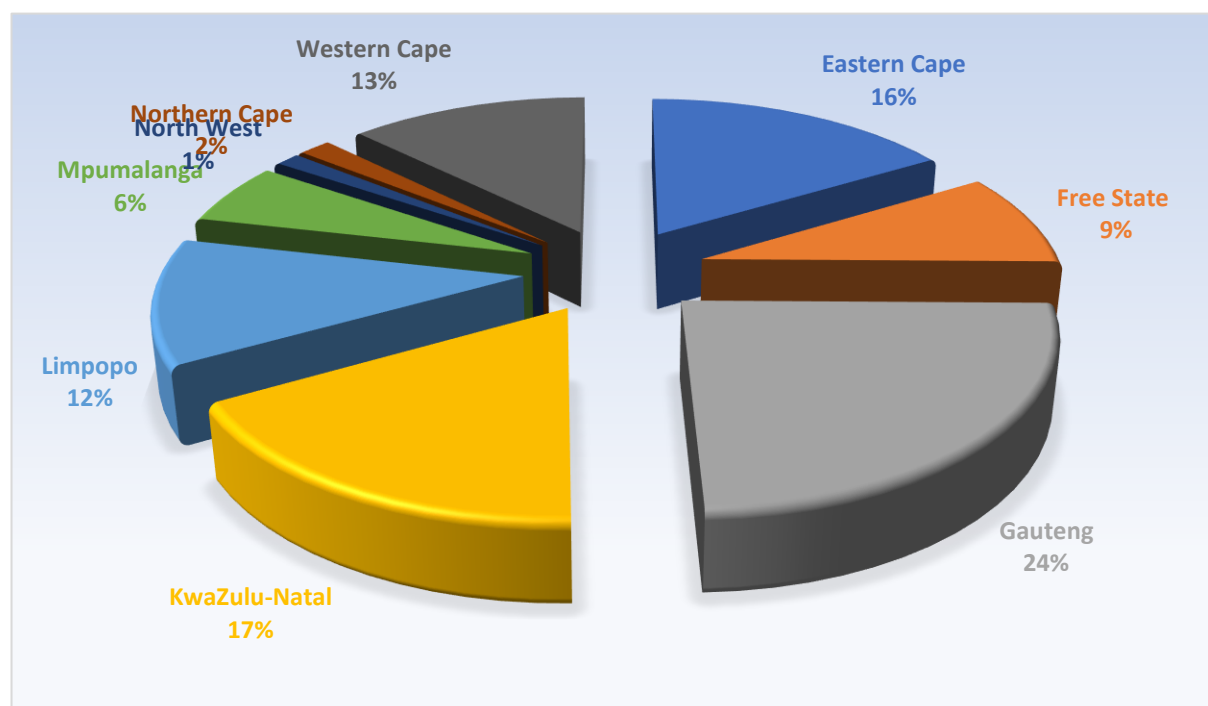


**Figure 13: Position within the organisation**

The statistical results indicate the distribution of respondents' positions within the organization at the time of the study. Based on Figure 13, it can be inferred that the

respondents (87.7%) held entry-level positions at the time they participated in the study. Only a small percentage of respondents were in higher-level positions, such as controllers (1.1%), supervisors (0.7%), managers (1.1%), senior managers (0.7%), and executive managers (0.4%). It is worth noting that 8.3% of respondents did not indicate their position within the organization, which suggests a lack of information in those cases. Thus, the statistical results provide information about the respondents' positions within the organization, with a clear majority being in entry-level positions.

#### 4.1.9 Provinces



**Figure 14: Province of respondents**

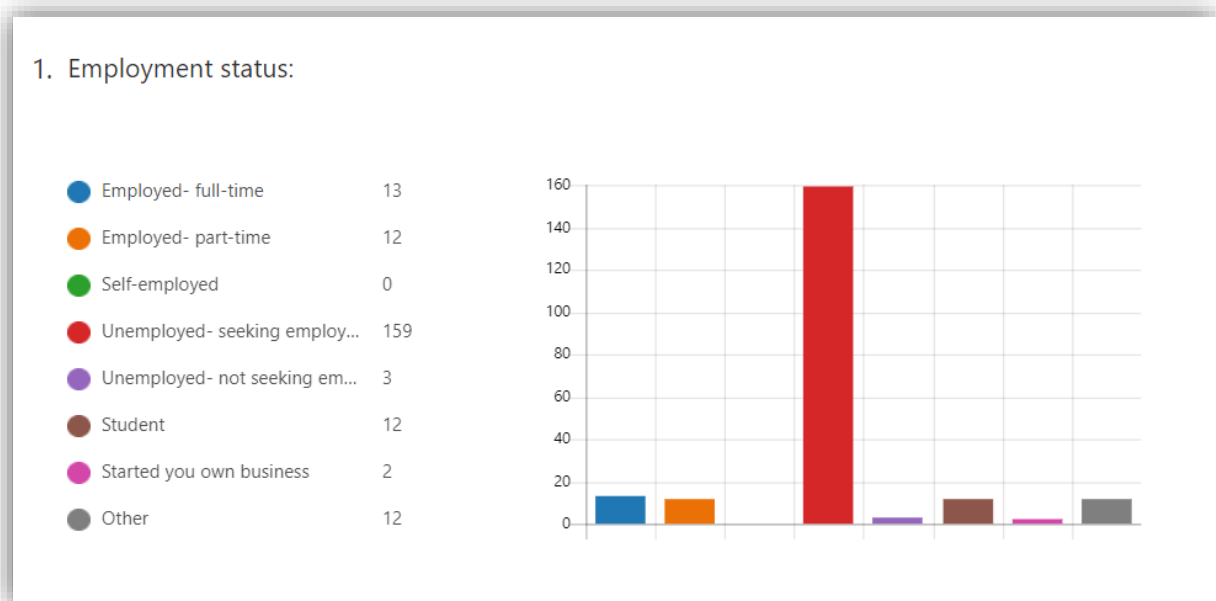
Figure 14 determines Graduate Distribution per Province. The statistical results related to provinces, which participated in this study indicate the following:

- 24% of respondents were from the province of Gauteng.
- 17% of respondents were from the province of KZN.
- 16% of respondents were from the province of Eastern Cape.
- 13% were from the province of Western Cape.
- 12% were from the province of Limpopo.
- 9% were from the province of Free State.
- 6% were from the province of Mpumalanga.

- 2% were from the province of Northern Cape.
- 1% were from North-West province.

These results indicate the distribution of respondents across different provinces in the study. For example, the province of Gauteng had the highest number of respondents, accounting for 24% of the total. On the other hand, the North-West province, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, and Free State had lower numbers of respondents, accounting for 1%, 6%, 2%, and 9% respectively. This information is useful for understanding the representation of different provinces in the study and can help identify any regional variations in the data or potential biases. It can also be used to compare the responses of participants from different provinces and analyse any differences or similarities in their opinions or behaviour.

#### 4.1.10 Employment status of W&R SETA funded beneficiaries.



**Figure 15: Employment status**

Figure 15 presents the employment status of the W&RSETA-funded beneficiaries. These statistics show the distribution of individuals in different employment categories. The results indicate the distribution of beneficiaries' (respondents') employment status

within the wholesale and retail organizations, after the completion of their internship programmes. Accordingly, Figure 15 indicates the following:

- 6.1% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes have obtained a full-time employment.
- 5.6% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are employed part-time.
- 0.9% beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are self-employed (have started their own business or became entrepreneur).
- 74.6% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are still unemployed and actively seeking employment at the time of this study's completion.
- 1.4% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes are still unemployed and are not seeking for employment.
- 5.6% of the beneficiaries are still students placed on internship at the time of completion of this study.
- 5.6% of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes fall into the category of those who did not reveal their employment status. In other words, 5.6% of beneficiaries did not indicate whether they are employed, unemployed or they have started their own business.

Overall, the statistical data suggest a high rate of unemployment in the population surveyed, with a small percentage of individuals engaged in full-time or part-time work, self-employment, or starting their own business. However, different reasons may contribute to this situation. For example, the cause of high rate of unemployment in the population surveyed, with a small percentage of individuals engaged in full-time or

part-time work, self-employment, or starting their own business could include the following:

- The population surveyed may lack the necessary qualifications or skills required to secure employment in their desired field.
- Economic downturn may lead to a decrease in job opportunities and an increase in unemployment rates, or there may be limited job opportunities available, particularly in the wholesale and retail industry or sector.
- The population surveyed may be facing structural unemployment, where there is a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the requirements of available jobs.
- It may also be assumed that discrimination or bias in the hiring process may be contributing to the high unemployment rates in the population surveyed.
- Geographic factors: beneficiaries may be located in a remote or rural location, which can limit job opportunities and contribute to high levels of unemployment.
- Some individuals in the population surveyed may be facing personal issues that are preventing them from seeking employment.
- The population surveyed may lack access to support services such as career counselling, or job placement assistance that could help them find and secure employment.
- Cultural factors within the population surveyed may influence attitudes towards work and employment, leading to higher rates of unemployment.

These factors or elements may not be exhaustive. There could be different other factors that may contribute to the situation high rate of unemployment. Furthermore,

various factors may contribute to the low percentage of beneficiaries who completed their internship programmes and wanted to become entrepreneur (self-employed or start their own business). This may include the following:

- Many internship programmes may not provide the necessary resources or support for beneficiaries to successfully complete their internship and transition into entrepreneurship. This could include lack of mentorship, access to funding, or networking opportunities.
- Internship programmes may not adequately equip beneficiaries with the skills and knowledge needed to start and successfully run their own business. This could include technical skills, financial literacy, or communication skills.
- Some beneficiaries may lack the motivation or drive to become entrepreneurs, either due to personal circumstances, lack of interest in entrepreneurship, or a belief that they lack the necessary skills or resources.
- Fear of failure. Starting a business can be a daunting prospect, and some beneficiaries may be afraid of the potential risks and challenges associated with entrepreneurship. This fear of failure may deter them from pursuing a career as an entrepreneur.
- Limited access to support networks. Beneficiaries may not have access to strong support networks or communities of like-minded entrepreneurs who can provide guidance and advice. This lack of support can make it more difficult for beneficiaries to navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.
- Workforce expectations. Some beneficiaries may feel pressure to pursue traditional employment opportunities rather than starting their own business, due to societal expectations or familial obligations.
- Lack of awareness. Some beneficiaries may simply be unaware of the opportunities available to them as entrepreneurs or may not have the

knowledge or information needed to successfully start and run their own business.

- Financial barriers. Lack of access to funding or capital can be a significant barrier for beneficiaries looking to become entrepreneurs. Without the necessary financial resources, it can be difficult for beneficiaries to get their businesses off the ground and sustain them in the long-term.

Considering the above discussion, it may be important to further investigate the reasons for beneficiaries of the W&R SETA's high unemployment rate and low motivation for entrepreneurship and explore potential solutions to address this issue.

## **4.2 INFERENCE STATISTICS**

Inferential statistics is defined as using the sample descriptive statistics to make an inference (estimation) of the population. In this study 2 graduates were samples from the total population of graduates who participated in the W&RSETA placement programme. Data gathered during the research process focused on two main concepts, namely, graduate satisfaction after completing the placement programme as well as the importance of each element of the graduate's placement process. In the following section of this report data provided will be used to make inferences about experiences of the total population of graduates participating in the programme. As a key element of the evaluation of the graduate programme, respondents were asked to provided answers to questions relating to their satisfaction with several elements of the services provided during their time in the graduate placement programme. Using the SERVQUAL instrument, respondents provided data about their satisfaction with the following aspects:

- Physical Resources and Facilities
- Student Support (e.g., Mentoring & Coaching)
- Employer Responses/Responsiveness
- Employer Expertise
- Understanding Graduates Needs
- Graduate Institutional Preparedness and Partnership



The 6 aspects were divided into 38 questions categorised under two main themes, satisfaction, and importance. Therefore, 38 questions related to the 6 aspects were asked to determine graduates' satisfaction and 38 questions were asked to determine the importance of the 6 aspects.

#### 4.2.1 Satisfaction

Using the SEVQUAL instrument, respondents rated each statement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Dissatisfied), 2 (Dissatisfied); 3 (Neutral); 4 (Satisfied) and 5 (Strongly Satisfied). Table 4 shows the rating of each statement asked in the questionnaire that was designed to ascertain graduate satisfaction levels. These responses are ordered from the highest satisfaction level with a mean score of 3.97 (there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality) to 3.50 (there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges). Table 4 shows that there is little variance in the scoring patterns of graduates who participated in the survey.

**Table 4: Graduate satisfaction scoring patterns**

No.	Item	Satisfaction mean score (M)
1	there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality (B4.6)	3.97
2	my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism (B6.4)	3.92
3	my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning (B6.3)	3.91
4	support from the employer (B2.1)	3.86
5	there is support from the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities (B4.2)	3.85
6	mentorship from the employer (B2.3)	3.85
7	adequate office space/ workstations (B1.1)	3.84
8	there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme (B4.3)	3.84
9	there is relevance to the advice and recommendations provided by the team (B4.4)	3.84
10	input on my performance (B2.5)	3.84
11	my institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand possible reasons for dropout) (B6.2.)	3.84
12	there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team (B4.1)	3.83
13	necessary tools and equipment (B1.2)	3.82
14	guidance from the employer that is consistent B2.2	3.80

15	there is the ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively B4.7	3.80
16	there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals B4.5	3.77
17	on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide me with clarity and relevance B1.5	3.76
18	a good response to conflict between graduates and colleagues/line manager B2.11	3.73
19	materials and resources to assist me B1.4	3.73
20	there is a collaboration between my employer and my institution B6.5	3.72
21	regular feedback at mentorship sessions B2.4	3.70
22	on the job training B1.3	3.68
23	support team members are accessible via various communication channels B3.4	3.66
24	I will receive support during critical situations B3.2	3.66
25	opportunities to learn from senior managers B2.6	3.65
26	my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace B6.1	3.65
27	the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace B5.2	3.65
28	there is the readiness to provide additional assistance when needed B3.6	3.64
29	suitable work placements B2.10	3.63
30	there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement B5.7	3.62
31	the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings B5.4	3.57
32	there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during the placement process B5.6	3.56
33	the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests B5.5	3.55
34	there is the speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview B3.5	3.54
35	the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences B5.1	3.54
36	my inquiries and concerns are addressed timelessly B3.1	3.54
37	the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance B5.3	3.52
38	there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges B5.6	3.50

Table 4 shows that respondents were mostly satisfied with the way confidential matters were treated by their respective employers as the most satisfying aspect of their work placement with a mean score of  $M = 3.97$ . Respondents were also satisfied with their experiences as graduates during the work placement. Graduates rated that their work placement added value to their professionalism with a mean satisfaction score of  $M = 3.92$ . Respondents rated that they were satisfied with their work placement as it added value to their learning with a mean score of  $M = 3.91$ . The fourth, fifth, and sixth most satisfying statements all show that the respondents were satisfied with the support and mentorship showed to graduate by their respective employers with mean scores of  $M = 3.86$ ,  $M = 3.85$  and  $M = 3.85$  respectively (see Table 4). Although the respondents were generally satisfied with all the statements with a mean score of over 3.

However, the aspect that generally received lower satisfaction scores from respondents was the respondents rating of the employers understanding of graduate needs. All statements related to the employers' understanding of graduate needs received scores between the 31<sup>st</sup> and the 38<sup>th</sup> score.

#### **4.2.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used to establish a correlation between variables thereby establishing a model where such variables can be grouped into latent variables (Goretzko, Pham and Bühner 2021). In practical terms, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) serves as a method for evaluating the alignment of items with specific components within a construct. EFA is employed to investigate the data and offer insights into the optimal number of components required for an accurate representation of the data. Utilizing EFA in item selection can minimize the inclusion of irrelevant items (Abd Aziz and Yazid 2021). To explore the structure of the data gathered and validate the proposed sub-constructs as suggested in the questionnaire (Physical Resources and Facilities; Student Support; Employer Responses/ Responsiveness; Employer Expertise; Understanding Graduates Needs; Graduate Institutional Preparedness and Partnership) factor analysis with Promax rotation was applied to the 38 items.

Factor analysis with Promax rotation was applied to these 38 items. Six factors were extracted which account for 83.82% of the variance in the data. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) of .967 and a significant Bartlett's test indicate that the data was adequate for successful and reliable extraction. Rotation converged in 8 iterations. As a result, items found to be 0.5 or more imply an effective measurement along the various components. Except for B2.11 all other items were an effective measurement of their respective sub-constructs. Table 5 shows that all statements asked in the questionnaire loaded strongly enough onto six factors. The factors have been group into the following ways:

- Student support offered by the employer (SUPP)
- Understanding the graduates' needs (NEED)
- Employer expertise in managing graduate placement programme (EE)

- Physical resources and facilities at the workplace (RES\_FAC)
- Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (PP)
- Employer responsiveness/interaction with graduate (RESP\_INT)

**Table 5: Exploratory factor analysis**

	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
B2.2. guidance from the employer that is consistent	.884					
B2.3. mentorship from the employer	.866					
B2.5. input on my performance	.854					
B2.1. support from the employer	.788					
B2.6 Opportunities to learn from senior managers	.747					
B2.4. regular feedback at mentorship sessions	.738					
B2.10. suitable work placements	.660					
B2.11. a good response to conflict between graduates and colleagues/line manager	.489					
B5.4. the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings		.901				
B5.3. the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance		.881				
B5.5. the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests		.879				
B5.1. the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences		.843				
B5.6. there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during the placement process		.805				
B5.7. there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement		.691				
B5.2. the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace		.690				
B4.3. there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme			.926			
B4.5. there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals			.912			
B4.4. there is relevance to the advice and recommendations provided by the team			.847			
B4.6. there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality			.739			

B4.7. there is the ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively			.643			
B4.1. there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team			.591			
B4.2. there is support from the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities			.588			
B1.4. materials and resources to assist me				.878		
B1.2. necessary tools and equipment				.849		
B1.1. adequate office space/ workstations				.715		
B1.5. on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide me with clarity and relevance				.637		
B1.3. on the job training				.586		
B6.3. my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning					.966	
B6.4. my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism					.939	
B6.2. my institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand p...					.651	
B6.5. there is a collaboration between my employer and my institution.					.634	
B6.1. my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace.					.559	
B3.5. there is the speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview						.776
B3.6. there is the readiness to provide additional assistance when needed						.719
B3.2. I will receive support during critical situations						.679
B3.3. there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges (e.g., lack of exposure to other tasks due to no rotation)						.669
B3.1. inquiries and concerns addressed in good time						.629
B3.4. support team members are accessible via various communication channels						.560

#### 4.2.3 Reliability Cronbach

According to Amirrudin, Nasution and Supahar (2021) Cronbach's Alpha, is a widely employed objective measure of reliability. Cronbach's alpha serves as an indicator of

internal consistency, particularly in multi-item measurement instruments. More variability contributes to an increase in the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. Findings from experiments or tests suggest that using Cronbach alpha, the correlation of variance and standard deviation more effectively conveys the reliability. The reliability of combining the items into a single latent variable is tested using Cronbach's alpha. An alpha value of at least 0.7 is considered adequate. If items do not correlate strongly enough with the other items in the construct and negatively affect the reliability, they may be dropped. The factor extraction is deemed to be successful if the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) exceeds 0.6 and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant. These factors are tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The factors and their assigned labels and reliability are summarised in Table 6. The table shows that the items were a reliable measure of the sub-constructs.

**Table 6: Satisfaction - Cronbach Alpha**

Factor	Construct	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
1	Student support offered by the employer (SUPP)	B2.1 – B2.6; B2.10, B2.11	71.06	.973
2	Understanding the graduates needs (NEED)	B5.1 – B5.7	4.47	.979
3	Employer expertise in managing graduate placement programme (EE)	B4.1 – B4.7	2.54	.973
4	Physical resources and facilities at the workplace (RES_FAC)	B1.1 – B1.5	2.46	.964
5	Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (PP)	B6.1 – B6.5	1.80	.949
6	Employer responsiveness/interaction with graduate (RESP_INT)	B3.1 – B3.6	1.48	.967

#### 4.2.4 One Sample T Test

A t-test is a statistical hypothesis test used to test whether the difference between the responses of two groups is statistically significant or not. There are three types of t-tests, a one-sample t-test compares a sample mean to an assumed population value; a two-sample independent t-test compares means of independent groups; a paired t-

test compares means of dependent groups (Glickman, Shear and Wall 2018; Mishra et al., 2019). The one-sample t-test compares a sample mean to a hypothesized population mean. Validity requires independent, continuous data from a simple random sample, assuming a normal population distribution (Muhammed Al-Kassab 2022). In this study, the one-sample t-test was used to ascertain whether the mean satisfaction scores were statistically significant. Tables 7 - 11 show whether the mean scores of statements under each sub-construct are statistically significant and can be inferred from the rest of the W&RSETA graduate placement population.

#### **4.2.4.1 Resources and Facilities**

Table 7 shows the mean satisfaction scores for the statements that were designed to ascertain graduate satisfaction with the resourcing and facilities given to them during their work placement. Table 7 shows that not all the sampled respondents answered the same questions as indicated by differences in n-value for each statement. 225 respondents answered the statement relating to the presence of adequate office space/ workspace while only 219 responded to the statement relating to the provision of necessary tools and equipment. It should be noted that respondents were significantly satisfied with the provision of adequate office space/ workspace with a mean satisfaction score of  $M = 3.84 \pm 1.156$ . The statement that required respondents to respond to whether they received on-the-job training received the lowest satisfaction score with a mean score of  $M = 3.68 \pm 1.326$ ;  $p < 0.01$ . The standard deviation is also high when compared with the standard deviations for other statements (see Table 7). For on-the-job training, this shows that responses varied more compared to other statements relating to the provision of resources and facilities by the respondent's respective work placement organisation. This observation may be a direct result of the varied approaches to work placement by each organisation as well as the availability of staff that could train graduates. Moreover, some companies may have a more structured approach to training that is aligned with skills that graduates should learn during work placement. Hence, the absence of structured training aligned with the graduate's qualifications may lead graduates to perceive that they did not receive any training.

**Table 7: Resources and facilities - One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
During my graduate placement, the retail organisation provided me with...	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
adequate office space/ workstations	225	3.84	1.156	10.953	224	<.001*
necessary tools and equipment	219	3.82	1.198	10.099	218	<.001*
on the job training	227	3.68	1.326	7.760	226	<.001*
materials and resources to assist me	221	3.73	1.235	8.767	220	<.001*
on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide me with clarity and relevance	221	3.76	1.228	9.257	220	<.001*

#### **4.2.4.2 Employer Responsiveness**

Employer responsiveness saw respondent's mean satisfaction scores ranging from  $M = 3.50 \pm 1.180$  (there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges) to  $M = 3.66 \pm 1.134$  (I will receive support during critical situations) and  $M = 3.66 \pm 1.181$  (support team members are accessible via various communication channels). All statements show that respondents were significantly satisfied,  $p < 0.001$ . However, in comparison with the satisfaction mean scores in Table 4 and table 8 shows that respondents were least satisfied with employer responsiveness. This may be attributed to the presence of red tape and bureaucracy found in some companies as well as the possibility that graduates are treated as temporary staff members and may receive less attention as a result. However, satisfaction scores are higher for statement related to support during critical situations ( $M = 3.66 \pm 1.134$ ) and the availability of support team members via various communication channels ( $M = 3.66 \pm 1.181$ ).



**Table 8: Employer Responsiveness - One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
B3.1. inquiries and concerns addressed in good time	226	3.54	1.159	6.945	225	<.001*
B3.2. I will receive support during critical situations	224	3.66	1.134	8.665	223	<.001*
B3.3. there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges (e.g., lack of exposure to other tasks due to no rotation)	222	3.50	1.180	6.316	221	<.001*
B3.4. support team members are accessible via various communication channels	225	3.66	1.181	8.352	224	<.001*
B3.5. there is the speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview	222	3.54	1.194	6.745	221	<.001*
B3.6. there is the readiness to provide additional assistance when needed	221	3.64	1.158	8.190	220	<.001*

#### **4.2.4.3 Employer expertise in the management of graduate placement**

Respondents indicated that they were significantly satisfied with the expertise of the employers that they were placed with,  $p < 0.001$ . It is of note that the respondents were significantly satisfied with the ability of the employer to handle sensitive information with sensitivity ( $M = 3.97 \pm 1.284$ ) above all other statements. All satisfaction mean scores are  $\geq 3.80$  except for  $M = 3.77 \pm 1.341$  for the notion that there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals (see Table 9). Respondents may likely have no intention to pursue a career path linked to the expertise of the employer they were placed with.

**Table 9: Employer Expertise in Management of graduate placement - One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
B4.1. there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team	224	3.83	1.279	9.768	223	<.001*
B4.2. there is support from the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities	225	3.85	1.292	9.904	224	<.001*
B4.3. there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme	222	3.84	1.328	9.454	221	<.001*
B4.4. there is relevance to the advice and recommendations provided by the team	223	3.84	1.295	9.671	222	<.001*
B4.5. there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals	223	3.77	1.341	8.588	222	<.001*
B4.6. there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality	223	3.97	1.284	11.320	222	<.001*
B4.7. there is the ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively	221	3.80	1.345	8.804	220	<.001*

#### 4.2.4.4 Understanding the graduates' needs

Table 10 shows a similar satisfaction scoring pattern as that in Table 9. The mean scoring patterns range from a mean score of  $M = 3.52 \pm 1.289$  (the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance) to  $M = 3.65 \pm 1.228$  (the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace). Respondents indicated that they were significantly satisfied with the understanding that they perceived their respective employers had towards their graduate needs ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, the satisfaction scores do not vary and are show little deviation from the mean ranging from a standard deviation of 1.217 to 1.289.

**Table 10: Understanding Graduates Needs - One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
B5.1. the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences	224	3.54	1.234	6.551	223	<.001*
B5.2. the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace	223	3.65	1.228	7.850	222	<.001*
B5.3. the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance	222	3.52	1.289	5.986	221	<.001*
B5.4. the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings	221	3.57	1.236	6.857	220	<.001*
B5.5. the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests	221	3.55	1.237	6.579	220	<.001*
B5.6. there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during the placement process	223	3.56	1.217	6.877	222	<.001*
B5.7. there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement	222	3.62	1.262	7.337	221	<.001*

#### **4.2.4.5 Graduate preparedness**

The satisfaction scoring patterns indicate that two statements received the least mean scores, namely, “my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace” ( $M = 3.65 \pm 1.303$ ) and “there is a collaboration between my employer and my institution” ( $M = 3.72 \pm 1.27$ ), respectively (see Table 11). Respondents were least satisfied with the alignment between their academic training and the tasks allocated to them at the workplace. Moreover, respondents were least satisfied with the collaboration between their institution of learning and the workplace employer. This highlights a potential gap in the graduate placement programme that highlights the existence of a siloed manner of operating in the programme between the supply side and the demand side of the programme.

**Table 11: Graduate preparedness - One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p-value
B6.1. my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace.	227	3.65	1.303	7.487	226	<.001*
B6.2. my institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand p...	227	3.84	1.210	10.421	226	<.001*
B6.3. my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning	227	3.91	1.225	11.163	226	<.001*
B6.4. my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism	222	3.92	1.230	11.128	221	<.001*
B6.5. there is a collaboration between my employer and my institution.	225	3.72	1.270	8.503	224	<.001*

#### **4.2.5 Satisfaction Constructs: One sample t-test**

The one sample t-test was also used to ascertain the significance of the factors established in the factor analysis. As indicated in Table 12 all six factors received significant satisfaction scores ( $p < 0.001$ ). The mean scores for each factor range from a high of  $M = 3.8382 \pm 1.22635$  for the Employee Expertise (EE) to a low of  $M = 3.5637 \pm 1.18342$  for the employers/ organisations understanding of graduate need (NEED). The satisfaction scores did not vary much as all standard deviations around the mean do not vary much (standard deviation  $< 1.23$ ). The satisfaction scores for the resources/ facilities (RES\_FAC) factor, the graduate support (SUPP) factor as well as the graduate preparedness and institutional partnership received relatively similar scores ( $3.72 < M < 3.79$ ). Employer responsiveness/ interaction with graduates (RESP\_INT) and understanding the graduates' needs (NEED) received the lowest satisfaction scores, respectively. These findings suggest that the programme is generally well-resourced and well-supported. Moreover, graduates are generally satisfied with the expertise of the employers that they are placed with. However, the respondent experience in the programme could benefit from ensuring that greater effort is placed in trying to understand the needs of the graduates and improving interactions with graduates. This applied to both the educational institution as well as the respective employer.

**Table 12: One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
<b>Construct</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>RES_FAC</b>	231	3.7216	1.19116	9.208	230	<.001*
<b>SUPP</b>	229	3.7437	1.16508	9.659	228	<.001*
<b>RESP_INT</b>	228	3.5762	1.08937	7.986	227	<.001*
<b>EE</b>	228	3.8382	1.22635	10.321	227	<.001*
<b>NEED</b>	229	3.5637	1.18342	7.208	228	<.001*
<b>PP</b>	230	3.7833	1.15728	10.265	229	<.001*

### **4.3 IMPORTANCE**

The second aspect that was questioned by the research instrument was the importance of each of the elements that constitute the graduate placement programme. Respondents were required to provide an importance score for each of the 38 items (statements) that were asked in section B of the research instrument which dealt with ascertaining graduate satisfaction. The findings of the respondent's importance scores are provided in Table 13 which indicates the most important aspect to the least important aspect based on the mean (M) importance scores. Table 13 shows that respondents rated the employer's ability to handle sensitive and confidential information as the most important aspect of the programme (M = 4.00) followed by the added value to the graduate's professionalism provided by the work placement experience. It is of interest that the need for confidentiality is rated the most important. It should also be noted that all items were rated as significantly important ( $p < 0.001$ ) with not items scoring below M = 3.90 apart from the M = 3.89 (there is the readiness to provide additional assistance when needed) (see Table 13).

**Table 13: Importance Scores**

Item	Importance mean score (M)
there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality	4.00
my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism	3.99
on the job training	3.99
support from the employer	3.99
materials and resources to assist me	3.99
there is the speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview	3.99
mentorship from the employer	3.98
on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide me with clarity and relevance	3.97
my institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand possible reasons for dropout)	3.97
I will receive support during critical situations	3.97
guidance from the employer that is consistent	3.97
necessary tools and equipment	3.94
support team members are accessible via various communication channels	3.94
suitable work placements	3.94
my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning	3.93
adequate office space/ workstations	3.93
input on my performance	3.92
a good response to conflict between graduates and colleagues/line manager	3.92
my inquiries and concerns are addressed timelessly	3.92
there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team	3.92
the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace	3.91
there is support from the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities	3.91
regular feedback at mentorship sessions	3.91
opportunities to learn from senior managers	3.91
there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme	3.90
there is a collaboration between my employer and my institution	3.90
there is relevance to the advice and recommendations provided by the team	3.90
there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement	3.90
my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace	3.90
there is the readiness to provide additional assistance when needed	3.89
there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals	3.89

the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings	3.89
there is the ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively	3.88
there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges (e	3.87
the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance	3.87
there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during the placement process	3.86
the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests	3.85
the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences	3.83

#### 4.3.1 Importance: One sample t-test

A one sample t-test was also used to measure the significance of the importance scoring patterns for the six aspects identified in the factor analysis (see Table 14). Table 14 displays the results of the analysis conducted which illustrates that the importance scores for each six factors are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). There is no difference between the importance of all these constructs as all are significantly important. Therefore, the results of the sample used in this study may be used as an indicator of the importance scores of the entire graduate placement population. The findings indicate that the most important factor is the presence of resources/ facilities (RES\_FAC) where  $M = 3.9322 \pm 1.15004$  followed by employers' responsiveness and interaction with graduates ( $M = 3.9280 \pm 1.17621$ ). The least important aspect as indicated by the respondent's scoring patterns is an understanding of the graduate's needs (NEED) where  $M = 3.8716 \pm 1.20147$ . However, similar importance scores were observed for the student support offered by the employer (SUPP) and graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (PP) (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Subconstructs – One sample t-test**

One-Sample Statistics						
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
IMP_SUPP	209	3.9159	1.20321	11.005	208	<.001*
IMP_NEED	206	3.8716	1.20147	10.412	205	<.001*
IMP_EE	207	3.8991	1.17470	11.012	206	<.001*
IMP_RES_FAC	214	3.9322	1.15004	11.858	213	<.001*
IMP_PP	207	3.9297	1.16926	11.440	206	<.001*
IMP_RESP_INT	205	3.9280	1.17621	11.296	204	<.001*

#### 4.3.1.1 Physical resources and facilities - One sample t-test

The importance scoring pattern for the items that constitute the physical resources and facilities at the workplace (IMP\_RES\_FAC) are displayed in Table 15. In accordance with the scoring patterns, respondents significantly rated employer support items  $M = 3.99 \pm 1.228$  (the company provides on-the-job training) and  $M = 3.99 \pm 1.169$  (the company provides on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide clarity and relevance) as the most important.

**Table 15: Physical resources and facilities at the workplace (IMP\_RES\_FAC)**

One sample t-test						
	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
C2.1 the company provides adequate office space/ workstations	210	3.93	1.237	10.876	209	<.001*
C2.2 the company provides the necessary tools and equipment	207	3.94	1.217	11.133	206	<.001*
C2.3 the company provides on-the-job training	206	3.99	1.228	11.521	205	<.001*
C2.4 the company provides materials and resources to assist me	205	3.99	1.169	12.065	204	<.001*
C2.5 company provides on-the-job guidelines and instructions that provide clarity and relevance	206	3.97	1.139	12.237	205	<.001*



#### 4.3.1.2 Student Support

Concerning student support (for example, mentoring & coaching), Table 16 shows that all items were significantly important ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, the least important was receiving regular feedback from with mentorship performance. It should be noted that the mean importance score for all items was relatively similar ( $3.91 < M < 3.99$ ). Therefore, the scoring pattern did not show variance. This may be attributed to the similar nature of the statements or respondent fatigue.

**Table 16: Student Support (SUPP) – One sample t-test**

	n	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
C2.6 you receive support from the employer	206	3.99	1.236	11.447	205	<.001*
C2.7 you receive guidance from the employer that is consistent	203	3.97	1.232	11.163	202	<.001*
C2.8 you receive mentorship from the employer	204	3.98	1.234	11.295	203	<.001*
C2.9 you receive regular feedback at mentorship sessions	206	3.91	1.244	10.473	205	<.001*
C2.10 you receive input on my performance	203	3.92	1.228	10.686	202	<.001*
C2.11 you receive opportunities to learn from senior managers	205	3.91	1.255	10.352	204	<.001*
C2.12 you receive a suitable placement.	200	3.94	1.259	10.561	199	<.001*
C2.13 you receive a good response to the conflict between graduates and colleagues/line manager	205	3.92	1.200	10.945	204	<.001*

#### 4.3.1.3 Employer responsiveness/interaction with graduate (IMP\_RESP\_INT)

Respondents were also asked to respond to statements related to the importance of Employer responsiveness/interaction with graduates (IMP\_RESP\_INT). In this section of the research instrument, respondents showed that the importance scored also did not vary. Importance scores are also observed within a narrow range (see Table 17). Importance means (M) scores that respondents perceive it at important that the employer they are placed with displays responsiveness in their management of the

program, the provision of critical support, and the speed with which graduate applications are processed and feedback provided (see Table 17).

**Table 17: Employer responsiveness/interaction – One sample t-test**

	n	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
C2.14 my inquiries and concerns are addressed timelessly	205	3.92	1.220	10.763	204	<.001*
C2.15 you receive support during critical situations	205	3.97	1.210	11.427	204	<.001*
C2.16 there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges (e.g., lack of exposure to other tasks due to no rotation)	205	3.87	1.210	10.332	204	<.001*
C2.17 there is accessibility of support team members via various communication channels	205	3.94	1.203	11.204	204	<.001*
C2.18 there is the speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview	204	3.99	1.164	12.092	203	<.001*
C2.19 there is a readiness to provide additional assistance when needed	203	3.89	1.226	10.362	202	<.001*

#### 4.3.1.4 Employer Expertise (EE)

Overall, the factor, employer expertise was indicated as the second least most important aspect (see Table 18). As such, respondents highlighted that among the employer expertise items(statements) the handling of confidential information was the most important item overall (see Table 18). This finding seems to indicate the respect to privacy outweighs all other aspects that relate to the management of graduate in the work placement program.

**Table 18: Employer Expertise (EE) – One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
C2.20 there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team	205	3.92	1.220	10.763	204	<.001*
C2.21 there is support from the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities	203	3.91	1.236	10.508	202	<.001*
C2.22 there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme	202	3.90	1.226	10.447	201	<.001*
C2.23 there is relevance to the advice and recommendations provided by the team	205	3.90	1.210	10.618	204	<.001*
C2.24 there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals	202	3.89	1.221	10.373	201	<.001*
C2.25 there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality	203	4.00	1.194	11.932	202	<.001*
C2.26 there is the ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively	200	3.88	1.218	10.219	199	<.001*

#### **4.3.1.5 Understanding the graduates' needs**

The overall importance score for the aspect understanding of graduate needs received the lowest importance score from respondents that participated in the survey (see Table 19). However, individual aspects that constitute this factor were scored with the statement “the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace” receiving the most important score of  $M = 3.91 \pm 1.230$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). This was followed by the statement “there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement” where  $M = 3.90 \pm 1.213$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). It should be noted that the statement, “the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences”  $M = 3.83 \pm 1.268$ . This may be attributed to the understanding by graduates that their individual preferences may not be catered to by their respective employer, especially as temporary employee.

**Table 19: Understanding the graduates needs (IMP\_NEED) – One sample t-test**

<i>One sample t-test</i>						
	n	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
C2.27 the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences	206	3.83	1.268	9.340	205	<.001*
C2.28 the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace	205	3.91	1.230	10.622	204	<.001*
C2.29 the company makes an effort to provide me with personalised career guidance	203	3.87	1.254	9.854	202	<.001*
C2.30 the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings	203	3.89	1.219	10.360	202	<.001*
C2.31 the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests	203	3.85	1.263	9.558	202	<.001*
C2.32 there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during the placement process	204	3.86	1.252	9.843	203	<.001*
C2.33 there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement	204	3.90	1.213	10.560	203	<.001*

#### **4.3.1.6 Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership**

The findings of the study highlight that graduate preparedness is significantly important ( $p < 0.001$ ). Graduate preparedness is determined, largely, by the training provided by the academic institutions that respondents graduated from. Respondents indicated that it was important that their institutions provided them with adequate preparation. However, emphasis was placed on the following, “my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism” where the mean importance score  $M = 3.99 \pm 1.187$  (see Table 20). This showed that respondents were most concerned about the outcomes of their work placement experiences in preparing them to be professionals.

**Table 20: Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (IMP\_PP)**

	n	Mean (M)	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
C2.34 my academic training is aligned with my tasks at the workplace	203	3.90	1.224	10.433	202	<.001*
C2.35 my institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand p...	204	3.97	1.211	11.445	203	<.001*
C2.36 my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning	204	3.93	1.218	10.924	203	<.001*
C2.37 my experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism	201	3.99	1.187	11.821	200	<.001*

#### 4.4 RELIABILITY

As previously stated in section 4.2.3, the Cronbach alpha coefficient is used to test the reliability of the instrument in testing the importance of the factors established by factor analysis. The results show that the research measure produced a high score which supports the reliability of the findings (see Table 21).

**Table 21: Cronbach Alpha – Importance**

Factor	Construct	Items included	Cronbach's alpha
1	Student support offered by the employer (IMP_SUPP)	C2.6 – C2.13	.990
2	Understanding the graduates' needs (IMP_NEED)	C2.27 – C2.33	.989
3	Employer expertise in managing graduate placement programme (IMP_EE)	C2.20 – C2.26	.987
4	Physical resources and facilities at the workplace (IMP_RES_FAC)	C2.1 – C2.5	.972
5	Graduate preparedness and institutional partnership (IMP_PP)	C2.34 – C2.38	.984
6	Employer responsiveness/interaction with graduate (IMP_RESP_INT)	C2.14 – C2.19	.990

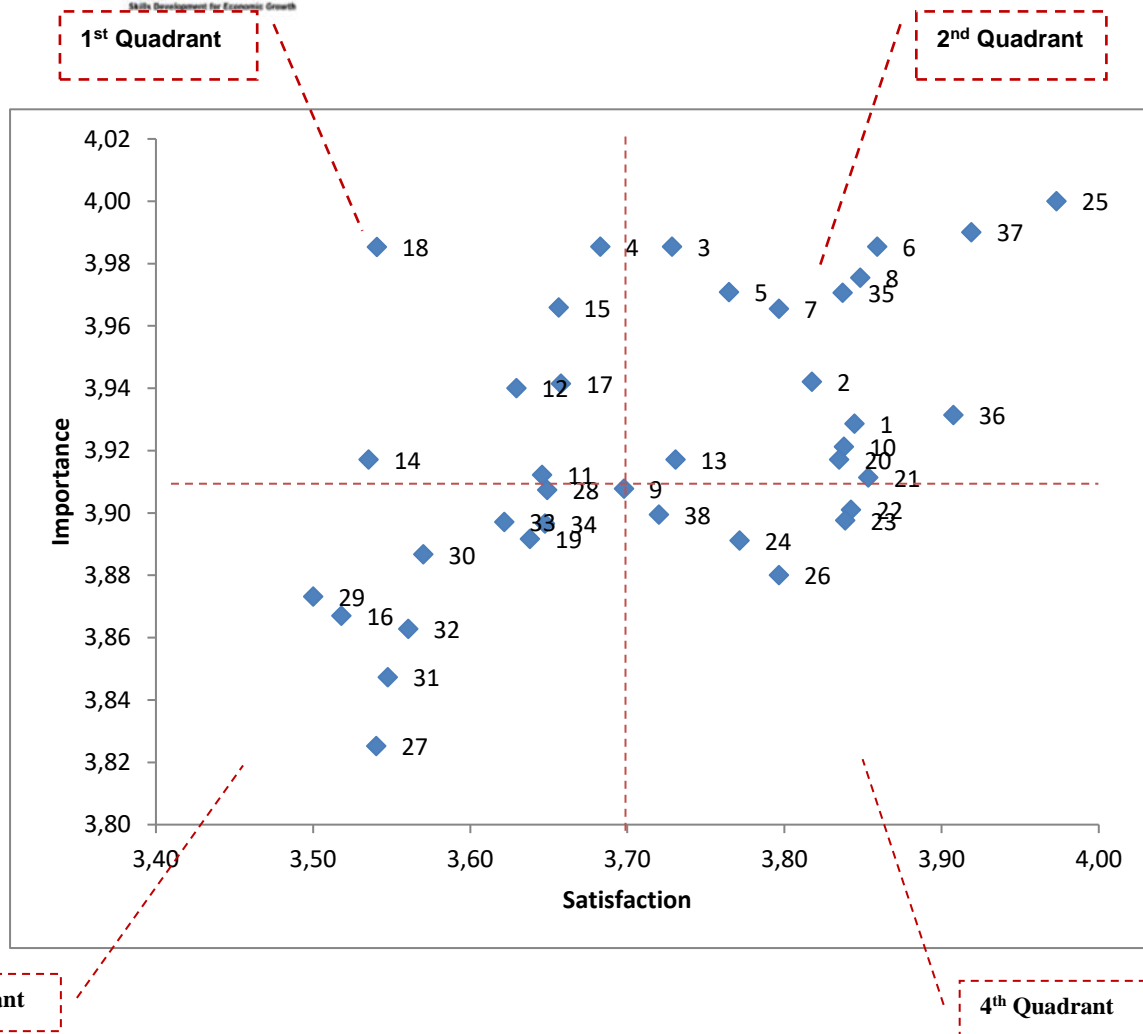
#### **4.5 IMPROTANCE AND SATISFACTION**

Using the satisfaction and importance scores, a graph was developed using the two constructs. With importance on the y-axis and satisfaction on the x-axis, a scatter plot diagram has been used to show the relationship between importance and satisfaction in the graduate placement program. The items further right (quadrants 2 and 4) the more satisfied while the items further left (quadrants 1 and 3) the more important they are. Figure 16 allowed the researchers to deduce the following:

- item 25 (there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality) is the most important and the most satisfactory.
- item 18 (there is speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview) has higher importance but not as high satisfaction, although 18 is both satisfactory and important.
- items 4 (the company provides materials and resources to assist me) and 3 (the company provides on the job training) are also high on importance but not as satisfactory.

Moreover, the following are indicated as lowest on the scale, namely:

- items 27 (the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences)
- item 31 (the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests)
- item 32 (there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during placement process)
- item 16 (there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges e.g., lack of exposure to other tasks due to no rotation) and
- item 29 (the company makes an effort to provide me with personalized career guidance)



**Figure 16: Importance and Satisfaction**

## **5 QUALITATIVE RESULTS**

The data collection process of this study also incorporated the use of qualitative methods to gather data that could help advance the researchers' understanding of the research phenomena. To provide a comprehensive analysis of the graduate placement programme funded by the W&RSETA, the researchers sought to gather data from the organisations that participate in this SETA-funded programme. The following objectives were established for the qualitative portion of the study:

- Graduate placement into HFTV employment within the wholesale and retail sector.
- Graduate enrolment vs graduate completion rates.
- support services and mentorship opportunities are provided to graduates.
- The program contribution to the development of relevant skills among graduates
- perceptions of employer's perceptions of students.
- The perceptions and experiences of higher education institutions regarding the effectiveness and value of the W&RSETA graduate placement program.

### **5.1 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data was gathered using focus group discussions that were held with representatives from retail companies that have actively participated in the graduate placement programme. Companies ranged from fuel retailers to clothing and food retailers. In addition, group discussions also included TVET colleges that have students who have participated in the graduate placement programme. It should be noted that clothing and food retailers were well represented compared to fuel retailers and TVET colleges. The analysis of the focus group transcripts resulted in the establishment of several themes, namely:

- Graduate Employment
- Types of graduates employed
- Graduate skills and relevancy of academic qualifications
- Graduate placement funding
- Graduate Absorption
- Factors affecting graduate absorption
- Graduate placement monitoring and evaluation



### **5.1.1 Graduate Employment**

One of the first question asked during the focus group was whether retailers employed graduates under the W&RSETA graduate placement programme. Some of the responses were as follows:

*“The first question was, has the institution received funding from the WRSETA to place interns at the workplace over the last three to five years. So, our answer was yes, we placed students of the last three to five years ...”*

*“So the first question asked was did we take on any graduates? And yes, we are in receipt of graduates, and we’ve always been asking for graduates if we have been in need of it”.*

The comments affirm the organisations engagement with graduates, stating a consistent practice of recruiting them when needed. This proactive approach to graduate recruitment underscores organizations recognition of the value that fresh talent brings to their workforce. By actively seeking out graduates, the organisation demonstrates a commitment to harnessing new ideas, skills, and perspectives (Clarke 2017). This strategy aligns with industry best practices that emphasise the importance of nurturing talent pipelines and investing in the development of emerging professionals (Pandita and Ray 2018). In addition, more comments seemed to indicate a similar pattern among the companies represented during the focus group.

*“So just takes the SDF manager right now and he also said that at head office level, we take on approximately 50 graduates annually”.* Similar to the previous comments made, most participants of the focus group discussion shared the same sentiment.

### **5.1.2 Types of graduates employed**

As part of the W&RSETAs range of programmes designed to aid skills development, several programmes have been established that companies have participated in. It is noted in some of the responses that employers have participated in the graduate placement programme along with another programme designed to assist matriculants.

*“I don't think someone answered that question whether you are only focusing to those who are coming from matric, just drop out and go to the industry or you just focus only to the ones that are coming from the from institutions like TVET or universities”.*

The response to the researcher's question was, *“it is mixed”*. Therefore, companies that have agreed to be part of the graduate placement programme have also agreed to participate in other programmes as well. Moreover, responses indicated that participants thought that their organisations employed graduates from various disciplines for example:

*“They're absorbing students coming from multiple disciplines whether it is HR, finance and the like. So, because of the fact that retailing has so many different facets to it they are absorbing students from different disciplines. And that seems to be across the board with Engen even saying that they took on, I think was an actor, an out of work actor into their organization. So, as a result, they're taking different skills”.*

The comment highlights the diverse range of disciplines from which graduates are employed, including HR, finance, and even unrelated fields like acting, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the retail industry. Employers recognise the value of varied skill sets and perspectives, demonstrating a willingness to recruit talent from various backgrounds. This inclusive approach not only enriches the workforce but also emphasises the importance of adaptability and transferable skills in the retail sector. By embracing diversity in expertise, organisations effectively leverage a broad spectrum of talents to address the complex demands of the retail landscape.

### **5.1.3 Graduate Skills and Relevancy of Academic programme**

To ascertain the impact of the graduate placement programme the researchers first, sought to establish whether the employers perceived the graduates as adequately skilled at the point of employment. Secondly, establish the perception of employers towards the relevancy of the academic programme that graduates completed before participating in the programme. The following response was provided to the first question:

*“It depends on which areas they are within the store”.*

In response to the second question the following response was provided:

*“The question two says that academic programs offered by institutions are relevant to the workplace. As table two we said yes some of the programs are relevant like programs also called report 191 which offered skills in civil engineering, mechanical engineering and so forth. But some programs are irrelevant and outdated. To make an example, there is oversupply of office, management assistant marketing and public management and so forth. Colleges are providing skills development courses like plumbing and all other skills that things are relevant and that make students open their businesses”.*

Based on the responses provided it seems that a gap exists the needs of industry and the needs education programmes taught by universities and TVET colleges. Responses seem to highlight trade skills such as plumbing and the relevancy of engineering programme. However, an oversupply of programmes within management sciences is mentioned. It is also important to note that responses did not make direct mention of the retailing programme. Furthermore, participants were reluctant to state whether the qualifications graduates completed helped them to address their skills shortages but rather qualified their responses stating that it would depend on the individual organisation.

#### **5.1.4 Graduate Placement Funding**

The study also sought to investigate the funding model employed by the SETA from the perspective of the retail employers. Several representatives indicated that they had received funding under the graduate placement programme.

*“We have been receiving the form of funding with stipends and bursaries for all the selected graduates and interns. And there's a data base for all received CVs that you normally send to the companies if they requested some graduates for a certain course that they want to place students on. And then the company interviewed all the students provided in the database and then select the students that suits their criteria”.*

Some participants provided positive reviews of the funding model:

*“The funding model is powerful one because from their side they actually have students even were placed in China and all those parts of the world”. This sentiment was expressed by participants within the TVET sector.*

However, some challenges have been experienced by retailers who have participated in the programme.

*“Was it there any delays in the receipt of stipends from the WR SETA? That is a huge question, so basically, yes there are delays in the stipend being paid in and there's no employer who wants to incur that cost”.*

The responses provided during the focus group indicate that the participants had some challenges with the funding model experiencing delays in payment from the SETA. Moreover, comments indicated that this has a knock-on effect on the organisations ability to employ more graduates.

*“Basically, yes, it does affect and then the next question after that it asks does it impact the organization when it comes to accepting students in the future? So, my answer would be yes it does affect organizations in the way they accept students, because no one wants to incur that cost. No boss wants to incur the loss”.*

A follow-up question related to the notation of graduate funding was asked during the focus group discussion about possible improvement that could be made to assist employers. The following comment was provided in response.

*“We you need to be paid on time. Just being on time and then the boss is happy and then we can keep on the learner”.*

The comment underscores the importance of timely payment for learners. Being punctual and satisfying the employer's expectations for payment ensures learner retention. This emphasizes the critical role of financial stability in sustaining learner participation. Timely payments not only fulfil contractual obligations but also foster a positive working relationship between learners and employers, contributing to a conducive learning environment. Thus, ensuring prompt compensation is essential for

maintaining learner motivation and commitment, ultimately benefiting both the learners and the organization.

### 5.1.5 Graduate Absorption

The study sought to determine the rate of absorption of graduates from the perspective of the employers that have received graduates as part of the graduate placement programme. Responses from the focus group interview indicated that the employers absorbed graduates upon completion of their graduate placement. Some indicated that they were unable to provide exact figures:

*“I don't think I can give you an exact number at this stage because the absorption is between us at the divisional levels and then at head office as well”.*

The general sentiment among employers was that *“we are comfortable to retain students, but I think it is a two-way process”*. Some alluded to the absorption figures stating that, *“we take on approximately 50 graduates annually and at it's at divisional level, it's way less than that probably under two or three”*. Based on these comments it is assumed that the rate of absorption is relatively low given the lack of vacancies for lower level or entry level positions and the rise of casualisation of retail jobs (Malgas et al 2020). Most companies also require three years of experience for most entry level positions (Koyana and Mason 2018). This notion is further supported by the comments provided by one of the employer representatives present during the focus group discussion. The percentage of absorption compared to the number of graduates received was fairly low, *“it was between 10 to 30% and they also explained why that percentage is so low”*.

However, some outliers were among the employers present indicated that their rate of absorption was higher than the other employers present. One of the representatives from a national food retailer indicated that their absorption rate was 95%:

*“So, it is a very high rate of absorption in terms of the number of students”.*

“But now the problem is the return on investment. After they've gone and they've done all these wonderful things and they are now international, they come back, and they are not absorbed by our industry”.

#### **5.1.6 Factors Affecting Absorption**

During our focus group discussion, a participant highlighted a significant challenge regarding the availability of vacancies at the time of course completion for graduates in our placement program. *“One of the challenges is to have the vacancies available at the time of the of the course completion”*. This issue is indeed noteworthy and warrants further examination. From the feedback, it is evident that there is timing misalignment between course completion and job vacancies within the employers' organisation poses a notable obstacle in seamlessly transitioning graduates into full-time positions. While the aspiration is to seamlessly transition graduates from placement programs into full-time roles, several external and internal factors contribute to the timing mismatch between course completion and job vacancies. Addressing this challenge may require collaborative efforts between educational institutions, employers, and policymakers to synchronize academic timelines with industry needs, enhance workforce planning strategies, and provide adequate support for graduate employment transitions.

Another participant emphasised the importance of gradually integrating graduates into the business over the duration of the program, rather than attempting to place all of them in one sitting at the end of the program. This comment continues to emphasise the importance of timing on the employer's side.

*“But if we could have them sort of migrated into the business over the course of the program, it will be a lot more helpful than trying to place all calling 80 of them in one sitting in the program”*.

This insight sheds light on a strategic approach that could significantly enhance the effectiveness of our graduate placement initiatives. Participants point out two critical factors contributing to graduates' difficulties in securing positions: insufficient retail experience and challenges in workplace behaviour. The absence of hands-on experience in retail environments limits graduates' attractiveness to employers within

this sector, necessitating tailored training programs to bridge this gap effectively. Additionally, concerns regarding workplace behaviour highlight the importance of instilling professional etiquette and interpersonal skills in graduates. By integrating modules addressing these specific areas into training initiatives, graduates can develop the competencies required for successful integration into the workforce. These insights underscore the significance of proactive measures in addressing skill deficiencies and behavioural expectations, ultimately enhancing graduates' employability, and facilitating smoother transitions into the professional realm. Responses from participants are indicated as follows:

*“That’s due to not being equipped to the work of retail experience” and “there are issues with how to behave in the workplace”.*

The interesting thing also that they mentioned was attitude and motivation. They mentioned that a lot of our graduates do lack motivation and also have the attitude of only working in that specific department that they had the qualifications from

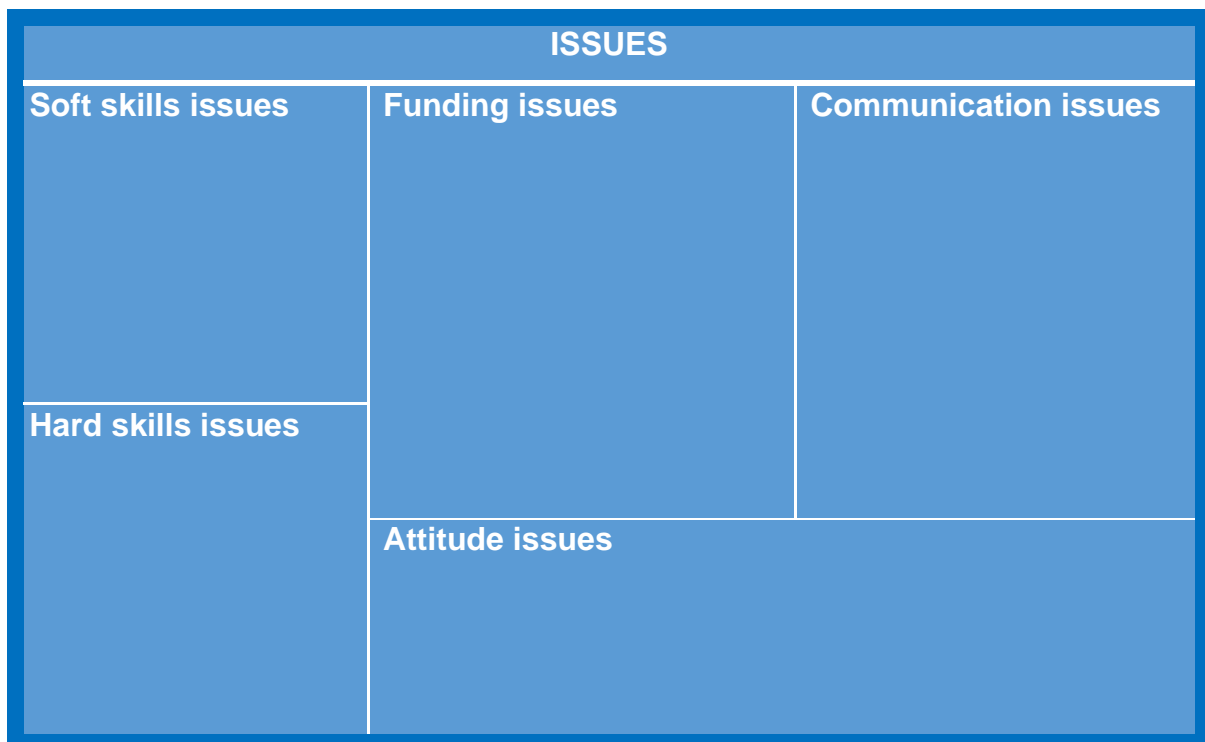
Another comment explaining the factors that affect graduate absorption included a comment from the TVETs. *“But as TVET colleges we do not have enough funding to absorb everyone”.*

The comment underscores the financial constraints faced by TVET colleges, limiting their capacity to absorb all graduates. This constraint highlights the need for increased funding or alternative support mechanisms to facilitate greater absorption of graduates into the workforce. Addressing this challenge is crucial for ensuring equitable access to employment opportunities and maximizing the potential of TVET graduates in contributing to economic growth.

The observation highlights employers' preference for graduates demonstrating initiative and capability. This emphasis underscores the importance of instilling proactive attitudes and practical skills in graduates during their training or education. By fostering a culture of initiative and competence, educational institutions can better align graduates with the expectations of employers, enhancing their employability and likelihood of successful integration into the workforce. This insight emphasizes the need for holistic approaches to education that prioritize not only theoretical knowledge but also practical competencies and soft skills essential for professional success.

*“So, what happens is at the end of it, we’ve noted is that our employers are only willing to take the ones that show initiative and are able to do that”.*

Overall, the comments provided during the focus group discussions seem to be supported by the finding of the auto-coding conducting in NVivo 12. Figure 17 shows the issues raised by participants during the focus group discussion. Figure 17 shows issues with soft skills and hard skills issues, funding issues, communications issues, and student attitude issues.



**Figure 17: Graduate Placement Issues**

### 5.1.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

The graduation programme structure was questioned as part of the researcher attempt to establish the effectiveness of the graduate placement programme. Responses from the TVET sector indicated that monitoring of placements funded by the W&RSETA is quite structured.

*“With regards to the monitoring of graduates that they take in, apparently, it is quite well structured. They have I think head of heads of departments and supervisors responsible for taking through the students who are absorbed into this graduate training, and they have quite structured in terms of the use of logbooks and they have”.*



Furthermore, responses indicated that, *“for the TVET sector If we have students placed on funded programs through the SETAS, most of the SETAS do allocate project management fee”*. The project management fees allocated by the SETA enable TVETs to employ staff to assist with the monitoring and evaluation of graduates who are participating in the programme.

*“But as you build up to from the project management fees, you're able to then look at getting the team to get it to do monitoring. So, I think the PM [project management] fees are there to administer and monitor and implement the project”*.

However, the employers seemed to indicate a lack of engagement with educational institutions. *“One thing that has come out is that they haven't seen much engagement with the institutions that ultimately these students or graduates are coming out of. So, the monitoring and performance management, as it were, is done solely by the provider, by the industry partner”*.

The comment suggests a lack of engagement between the institutions where students or graduates originate and the organizations hosting them for placements or internships. Several reasons could contribute to this observation. Therefore, a gap seems to exist in the monitoring and evaluation which may be observed more significantly of the part of universities and less on the part of the TVET colleges. Overall, employers seem to require additional support with managing graduates who are placed within their organisations.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION**

Focus on talent pipeline evidence by the willingness to participate in the graduate programme. The comments underscore the prevailing sentiment that employers see this programme as a positive initiative designed by the W&RSETA. However, the comments provided also showed that there are some challenges in implementation and administrative support provided to companies. As such, the positive aspects of the programme may be affected by the challenges experienced concerning the receipt of funding. Moreover, focus on the employment of graduates with a retail qualification seems lacking in a W&RSETA-funded programme.

## **6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **6.1.1 Perceived Value of the Program in Enhancing Skills in HFTVs According to Graduates**

The perceived value of the program in terms of enhancing skills in Hard to Fill Vacancies (HFTVs) according to graduates was assessed through various factors, including student support offered by the employer, understanding of graduates' needs, employer expertise in managing the graduate placement programme, physical resources and facilities at the workplace, graduate preparedness, institutional partnership, and employer responsiveness/interaction with graduates (Kumar, Trivedi, Dole, Singh and Yadav, 2023)

### **6.1.2 Student Support Offered by the Employer (SUPP)**

Graduates expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided during the placement process. Notably, graduates were most satisfied with support from the employer, in terms of consistent guidance, mentorship, regular feedback, and input on performance. Career development practices hold great importance for employees as they reflect an organisation's commitment to their growth (Antonacopoulou, 2000). Mentoring, for instance, serves as a valuable tool that enables employees to progress professionally, psychologically, and personally (van Vianen et al., 2018). It essentially provides on-the-job training aimed at honing critical skills necessary for job performance (van Vianen et al., 2018). Similarly, career support encompasses a range of initiatives such as skill preservation, skill development, and preparation for future roles (Paposa and Kumar, 2019). These programs not only aid employees in advancing within the organisation but also help them chart out their career trajectories and overcome obstacles along the way. However, opportunities to learn from senior managers and receiving suitable work placements received comparatively lower satisfaction scores, indicating areas for potential improvement.

### **6.1.3 Understanding the Graduates' Needs (NEED)**

Graduates expressed satisfaction with their employers' adeptness in comprehending their unique needs and preferences, coupled with their proactive support in surmounting workplace hurdles. Analysis of satisfaction scores revealed remarkable consistency across various statements, indicating a uniform level of contentment regarding employer understanding and responsiveness. This consistency underscores the organization's commitment to fostering a supportive environment wherein individual concerns are not only acknowledged but also addressed effectively. Such harmonized satisfaction levels signify a cohesive approach to employee support, indicative of an organizational culture prioritising employee well-being and growth.

### **6.1.4 Employer Expertise in Managing Graduate Placement Programme (EE)**

Graduates exhibited profound satisfaction with the proficiency exhibited by employers overseeing the graduate placement program. Notably, graduates lauded the adeptness and depth of knowledge demonstrated by the placement team, their instrumental role in skill enhancement, provision of transparent and precise program details, and the assurance conveyed in managing confidential information. However, a marginal dip in satisfaction was noted concerning the congruence of placements with individual career objectives, suggesting potential divergence in the professional aspirations of graduates. This nuanced observation underscores the need for tailored placement strategies accommodating the diverse career trajectories and aspirations of emerging talents within the workforce.

### **6.1.5 Physical Resources and Facilities at the Workplace (RES\_FAC)**

Graduates expressed overall contentment with the resources and amenities available throughout their work placements, encompassing spacious office accommodations, essential tools, equipment, and ample materials. However, satisfaction levels exhibited a minor decline concerning on-the-job training, suggesting a possible deficiency in structured training initiatives tailored to graduates' qualifications. This discrepancy underscores the importance of refining training protocols to align more closely with the educational backgrounds and professional competencies of

participants. Enhancing the efficacy and relevance of on-the-job training programs can optimize graduates' skill development and contribute to their seamless integration into the workforce.

#### **6.1.6 Graduate Preparedness and Institutional Partnership (PP)**

As universities evolve, there's a noticeable shift from simply imparting knowledge to offering curricula that directly prepare students for careers. This shift aims to better align with the needs of the professional world Martin have observed this trend globally (Moore and Morton, 2015; Milne-Home et al., 2000). It is crucial for tertiary education to equip students with skills and knowledge that match the demands of various industries, helping them navigate the complexities of today's job market (Harrison and Grant 2016). In essence, if the study programmes effectively bridge the gap between academia and the workforce, graduates are more likely to find acceptance in the industrial world. Graduates emphasised the importance of their academic training being aligned with workplace tasks and their overall preparedness for entering the workforce. They highly valued the professional development gained through work placement experiences, highlighting the significance of institutional partnerships in preparing graduates for the demands of the industry.

#### **6.1.7 Employer Responsiveness/Interaction with Graduate (RESP\_INT)**

Although graduates generally conveyed satisfaction with employer responsiveness, opportunities for enhancement were discerned, notably in navigating placement-related difficulties and ensuring timely follow-up actions. However, commendation was extended for the assistance rendered during pivotal moments and the accessibility of support team members across diverse communication platforms, fostering positive perceptions. These insights underscore the significance of refining strategies to expedite issue resolution and streamline communication pathways, thereby fortifying the support infrastructure for graduates throughout their professional journey. By addressing these areas of improvement, employers can further cultivate a nurturing environment conducive to the success and well-being of their graduate workforce.

## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 22 presents recommendations aligned to the objectives of the study, including aspects related to graduate placement into HTFVs within the wholesale and retail sector, graduate enrolment and completion rates, support services and mentorship opportunities, skills development (graduate programme contribution to the development of relevant skills among graduates), satisfaction (employer expertise in managing graduate placement programme), graduate preparedness and institutional partnership, physical resources and facilities at the workplace, and employer responsiveness/interaction with graduate.

**Table 22: Recommendations aligned to literature review.**

Recommendations aligned to the objectives of the study, based on the literature review
Graduate placement into HTFVs within the wholesale and retail sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should develop partnerships with local and international universities and colleges to create targeted recruiting programmes for graduates to study relevant fields such as business, marketing, logistics, or supply chain management.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should facilitate mechanism to speed up follow-up actions after placement application or interview have been completed by graduates.</li> <li>▪ Internships or co-op programmes should be well planned to give beneficiaries hands-on experience in the wholesale and retail sector, allowing them to gain valuable skills and make connections that could lead to full-time employment.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should consider offering opportunities for advancement and career growth, to attract and retain top talent in the competitive wholesale and retail sector.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should facilitate sustainable partnerships with industry associations and organizations to raise awareness of job opportunities within the wholesale and retail sector, and to connect with potential candidates who may not have considered this industry as a career option.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should strengthen partnerships with educational institutions to ensure alignment between academic curriculum and industry needs. Collaborate on designing and updating study programme to incorporate</li> </ul>

practical skills and knowledge that are relevant to the demands of various industries, as well as on the placement programme that effectively prepare graduates for the demands of the workforce.

- The W&R SETA should highlight the diverse range of roles and opportunities available for recent graduates to explore and excel in their careers.
- Employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should understand the specific needs and expectations of graduates entering HTFVs roles. Accordingly, they should tailor support and resources that can greatly enhance graduates' experience and effectiveness in these positions.
- Employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should demonstrate their expertise in managing graduate placement programmes by offering structured training, development opportunities, and mentorship programmes designed to address the unique challenges of HTFVs roles.
- Employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should provide adequate physical resources and facilities at the workplace that can significantly contribute to the effectiveness and satisfaction of graduates in HTFVs roles. This may include access to cutting-edge technology, well-equipped workspaces, and relevant tools or equipment.
- Employers within the Wholesale and retail sector should focus on ensuring that graduates are adequately prepared to excel in HTFVs roles. This could involve offering targeted training programmes, professional development opportunities, and ongoing support to bridge any skill gaps.
- Collaborating with educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders can help employers better align their programmes with the needs and expectations of graduates entering HTFVs roles. Building strong partnerships can facilitate knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and mutual support.

#### **GRADUATE ENROLMENT AND COMPLETION RATES**

- The W&R SETA should ensure that the admissions process to internship programmes is fair, transparent, and well-coordinated to assist and facilitate beneficiaries who can successfully complete their programmes.
- The W&R SETA should be aware and guard against graduate student interns being viewed as “free” and “subsidised” labour. Only companies which display acceptable absorption rates should be contracted. This data should be gathered within two months upon the closure of the programme. Companies which are taking a large number of interns/graduates annually should be monitored as not to abuse the programme as a labour cost saving benefit.
- The W&R SETA should create a supportive academic environment to foster a culture of collaboration, inclusivity, and academic excellence that motivates beneficiaries to engage with their internship programmes and complete their programmes.

- The W&R SETA should establish a selection and vetting process for both industries and students. Students and companies should be thoroughly interviewed and screened to ensure that the placement is 'fit for purpose' in terms of areas of study versus placement.
- Students should be placed in companies where the intent is on work exposure and route to the employment market in the sector. The placement of students at institutions like schools, TVET Colleges and universities do not guarantee sustainable employment opportunities.
- The W&R SETA should monitor progress regularly by implementing mechanisms to track beneficiaries' progress throughout their internship programmes, identifying and addressing potential issues that may hinder programmes completion.
- Company visit should be conducted by individuals who understand the graduate placement programme as opposed to 3<sup>rd</sup> party monitors who conduct head counts.
- Induction of graduates to workplace expectations and commitments should be conducted. This should be monitored by the W&R SETA to ensure each party is aware of their respective roles and responsibilities in the programme.
- Issues on student 'attitude' was raised as a serious concern amongst employers. Therefore, students should be prepared via a work readiness programme to enable transitioning from student life to expectations of the workplace, in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, legislated hours of work per sector and the preparing of psychological mindset to the employment environment.
- Students placed on internship programmes should be made aware that the graduate placement is an extension of the learning process. Moreover, stipend paid is to the place of learning and not a wage.
- Student should be enlightened that work learning commences from the bottom of an organization, to mitigate against high expectations about their field of study programme, namely retail manager, financial manager, etc. and expectations of having an office at a managerial level during the internship.
- The W&R SETA should implement strategies to prevent attrition and develop targeted interventions programmes that support mechanisms to address common causes for dropout, such as placement challenges, lack of social support, or personal difficulties.
- The W&R SETA should regularly evaluate and refine graduate programmes based on feedback from students to ensure they are relevant, rigorous, and supportive of graduate success.

#### **SUPPORT SERVICES AND MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

- The W&R SETA should establish mechanism that can facilitate mentorship, academic counselling and career services to help beneficiaries navigate their internship programmes successfully (provide adequate support services).



- The W&R SETA should facilitate graduates' connection with industry professionals who can serve as mentors and provide guidance on career development. This will help graduates gain valuable insights and practical advice from experienced professionals in the field.
- The W&R SETA should provide mentorship and professional development opportunities for recent graduates, particularly those who may not be actively seeking employment but are open to new opportunities.
- Participating companies should designate mentors who are able to professionally support graduates. Mentors should be rigorously trained on the role and responsibilities of a mentor with regard to guidance and support job rotation, fulfilling logbook requirements and transitioning from student life to the world of work.
- The W&R SETA should fund the training and development of industry mentors and coaches as a proactive initiative for a sustainable graduate placement programme.
- The W&R SETA should constantly facilitate graduates access to industry-specific training programmes or certifications to help them further develop their skills and knowledge.
- The W&R SETA should offer career guidance and support by providing career counselling and job placement assistance to help graduates transition successfully into the workforce. This will help ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities that await them in the wholesale and retail sector.
- The W&R SETA should create a feedback mechanism for graduates to provide input on the support services they receive and make improvements on internship programmes based on their feedback.
- The W&R SETA should continuously evaluate and update support services and mentorship programmes to ensure they are meeting the evolving needs of graduates and provide valuable support throughout their careers.
- Collaboration between the Wholesale and Retail industry should emphasise on academic training that must be aligned with graduates' tasks at the workplace.
- Employers within the Wholesale and retail sector should prioritise providing comprehensive support to students throughout their placement or employment period. This could include mentorship, guidance, and resources to help them succeed in their roles.
- Employers within the Wholesale and retail sector should prioritise regular communication and interaction with graduates to solicit feedback, address concerns, and foster a supportive work environment. Being responsive to the needs and feedback of graduates can enhance their sense of value and belonging within the organisation.
- The W&R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should invest in robust mentorship programmes that offer consistent guidance and support to graduates. Ensure



mentors are well-trained and committed to providing regular feedback to help graduates thrive in their roles.

- The W&R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should implement regular feedback mechanisms to gather input from graduates about their experiences during the placement process. This can help identify areas for improvement and ensure continuous enhancement of support services.
- The W&R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should foster open and transparent communication channels between employers and graduates. Encourage dialogue to address any concerns or challenges faced by graduates during their placement, and actively seek their input on ways to improve support services.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should offer personalised support to graduates based on their unique needs and preferences. This could involve tailored training programmes, mentorship opportunities, or flexible work arrangements to accommodate individual circumstances.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should continuously evaluate and improve support systems and policies based on feedback from graduates. Actively seek input on ways to enhance understanding and responsiveness to their needs and implement necessary changes to ensure a positive and supportive work environment.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide mentorship and coaching opportunities to supplement on-the-job training and support graduates in their professional development. Pair graduates with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and support throughout their placement experience.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should continuously evaluate and refine on-the-job training programmes based on feedback from graduates and supervisors. Monitor the effectiveness of training initiatives and make adjustments as needed to ensure that graduates receive the support they need to succeed in their roles.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should implement structured mentorship programmes to support graduates during their work placement experiences. Pair graduates with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and support as they transition into the workforce.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should improve communication channels to address placement-related challenges more effectively. Ensure that graduates have access to multiple communication channels, such as email, phone, and in-person meetings, to seek assistance and receive timely responses from the support team.
- The W&R SETA and Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should take a proactive approach to addressing critical situations faced by graduates during their placements. Anticipate potential challenges and provide proactive support and guidance to help graduates navigate difficult situations effectively.

- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide training and development opportunities for support team members to enhance their responsiveness and effectiveness in assisting graduates. Equip support team members with the necessary skills and knowledge to address placement-related challenges and provide appropriate guidance and support.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should establish regular feedback mechanisms to solicit input from graduates on their experiences with employer responsiveness and interaction. Use feedback to identify areas for improvement and implement changes to enhance the overall responsiveness of the support team.
- The W&R SETA and Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should continuously evaluate and improve the responsiveness and interaction of the support team with graduates. Monitor performance metrics, such as response times and satisfaction levels, and make adjustments as needed to ensure that graduates receive the support they need to succeed during their placements.
- Employers should actively seek input on ways to enhance understanding and responsiveness to their needs and implement necessary changes to ensure a positive and supportive work environment.

#### **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

#### **GRADUATE PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELEVANT SKILLS AMONG GRADUATES**

- The W&R SETA should continuously encourage practical training and work experience by implementing internships, job shadowing opportunities, and cooperative education programmes that provide graduates with hands-on experience in the wholesale and retail sector. This will help them develop industry-specific skills and knowledge.
- The W&R SETA as a custodian of skills development in retail should promote the placement of students in sector and graduates growing within the sector. Students placed in hospitals, police services and mining are a disservice to the student and the retail sector.
- The W&R SETA should promote partnership and collaboration between industry and academic institutions in order to design courses/curriculum that focus on specific aspects of the wholesale and retail sector, such as inventory management, merchandising, customer service, and sales techniques. This will help graduates acquire the specialized skills they need to succeed in the industry.
- The W&R SETA should facilitate collaboration within industry partners. Partnership with wholesalers, retailers, and trade associations is critical to ensure that curriculum programmes align with the needs of the industry. This will help ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge that are in demand in the wholesale and retail sector.
- The W&R SETA should emphasize about soft skills development in addition to technical skills. Emphasize the importance of developing soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. These skills are essential for success in the wholesale and retail sector and will help graduates stand out to potential employers.

- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should offer ongoing professional development opportunities to graduates to further enhance their skills and competencies. Provide access to workshops, training sessions, and networking events that enable graduates to continue learning and growing in their careers.
- The W&R SETA and Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should prioritise the development of industry-relevant skills and competencies in academic curricula and work placement experiences. Ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in their chosen fields upon entering the workforce.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should allocate resources towards enhancing on-the-job training resources, including training materials, software tools, and equipment. Ensure that graduates have access to the necessary resources to develop their skills and competencies effectively.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide meaningful work placement experiences that offer graduates opportunities for professional development and hands-on learning. Collaborate with educational institutions to facilitate internships, co-op programmes, and apprenticeships that align with the skills and competencies required in the industry.

**Recommendations based on employer perceptions on graduates who were absorbed, not absorbed, and those who did not complete graduate programmes.**

**For Graduates who were absorbed:**

- The W&R SETA should continue to invest in further professional development and skill-building for graduates to stay competitive in the workforce.
- Mechanism should be put in place for graduates to seek out opportunities for growth within the wholesale and retail sector, such as taking on leadership roles or participating in additional training programmes.
- Graduates who were absorbed should be encouraged and assisted to maintain strong relationships with supervisors and colleagues at the workplace to enhance career progression and job satisfaction.

**For Graduates who were not absorbed:**

- The W&R SETA should initiate further studies to evaluate the reasons for graduates not being absorbed and identify areas for improvement, such as technical skills, communication, or teamwork.
- The W&R SETA and organisations within the retail industry should develop a network with industry professionals and seek feedback on areas of weakness to address them effectively.

- Further training programmes will be encouraged to enhance marketability and competitiveness of graduates who were not absorbed.

**For Graduates who did not complete the graduate programmes:**

- More studies should be initiated to reflect on the reasons for graduates not completing the programme and assess if it aligns with their career goals and interests.
- Graduates who did not complete the internship programme should closely seek guidance from mentors, career counsellors, or academic advisors to explore alternative educational paths or career options.
- There should be mechanism to develop a plan for trained graduates who did not complete the programmes to re-enter the workforce or pursue further training that better aligns with their interests and strengths.

**SATISFACTION: EMPLOYER EXPERTISE IN MANAGING GRADUATE PLACEMENT PROGRAMME (EE)**

- It is indispensable that employers should constantly improve their approach about graduate programmes for them to gain satisfaction by demonstrating their commitment to helping graduates understand the potential career growth opportunities, training opportunities, and other benefits of working within the wholesale and retail sector. This transparency can lead to more informed and satisfied graduates, which ultimately can benefit both the employer and the organization as a whole.
- Graduates should be highly satisfied in receiving further insight into individual and social benefits based on the graduate programmes within the wholesale and retail sector. By gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of their work on both the company and the industry, graduates can feel more fulfilled in their roles and see the value they bring to the industry. Additionally, learning about the social benefits of their work can increase their motivation and job satisfaction, leading to a more fulfilling career in the wholesale and retail sector.

**GRADUATE PREPAREDNESS AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP (PP)**

- Communication should be constantly up-held with educational institutions to solicit feedback on the preparedness of graduates for the industry. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of work placement programmes and make adjustments as needed to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared for the demands of the workforce.
- The W&R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should develop tailored career development initiatives that address the specific needs and aspirations of graduates. This could include workshops, training sessions, and networking opportunities aimed at enhancing their skills and preparing them for future roles.

- The W&R SETA and employers within the wholesale and retail sector should allocate resources towards enhancing physical resources and facilities at the workplace to create an environment conducive to learning and professional development.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should offer a diverse range of placement opportunities that cater to the varying career aspirations among graduates. This could include internships, projects, and job rotations tailored to different career paths and industries, providing graduates with options that align more closely with their career goals.
- The W&R SETA and Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should maintain open and regular communication channels between employers and graduates to continuously understand their evolving needs and preferences. This could include regular check-ins, surveys, and feedback sessions to gather insights and address any concerns promptly.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide ample opportunities for professional development and growth to address graduates' career aspirations and goals. This could include access to workshops, seminars, and networking events to enhance their skills and expand their professional networks.
- The W&R SETA should foster strong partnerships with educational institutions to ensure that academic curricula are aligned with industry needs. Collaborate on designing and updating study programs to incorporate practical skills and knowledge that are relevant to the demands of various industries.
- Employers should provide meaningful work placement experiences that offer graduates opportunities for professional development and hands-on learning. Collaborate with educational institutions to facilitate internships, co-op programs, and apprenticeships that align with the skills and competencies required in the industry.
- Employers should implement structured mentorship programs to support graduates during their work placement experiences. Pair graduates with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and support as they transition into the workforce.
- The W&R SETA and employers should maintain open lines of communication with educational institutions to solicit feedback on the preparedness of graduates for the industry. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of work placement programs and make adjustments as needed to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared for the demands of the workforce.
- The W&R SETA and employers should offer ongoing professional development opportunities to graduates to further enhance their skills and competencies. Provide access to workshops, training sessions, and networking events that enable graduates to continue learning and growing in their careers.
- The W&R SETA and employers should prioritise the development of industry-relevant skills and competencies in academic curricula and work placement experiences. Ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in their chosen fields upon entering the workforce.

### **PHYSICAL RESOURCES AND FACILITIES AT THE WORKPLACE (RES\_FAC)**

Based on the satisfaction expressed by graduates regarding the physical resources and facilities at the workplace, along with the noted area of slightly lower satisfaction for on-the-job training, employers can consider the following recommendations:

- The W&R SETA and employers should develop structured on-the-job training programs tailored to the qualifications and needs of graduates. This could involve designing training modules, providing access to online resources, and assigning mentors to guide graduates through the training process.
- The W&R SETA and employers should conduct regular assessments of on-the-job training programs to identify areas for improvement and ensure alignment with graduates' qualifications and skill levels. Solicit feedback from graduates to understand their learning needs and preferences and adjust training programs accordingly.
- The W&R SETA should allocate resources towards enhancing on-the-job training resources, including training materials, software tools, and equipment. Ensure that graduates have access to the necessary resources to develop their skills and competencies effectively.
- The W&R SETA and employers should provide mentorship and coaching opportunities to supplement on-the-job training and support graduates in their professional development. Pair graduates with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and support throughout their placement experience.
- Employers should offer flexibility in the delivery of on-the-job training programs to accommodate the diverse learning styles and preferences of graduates. This could include blended learning approaches, such as a combination of in-person workshops, online courses, and hands-on training sessions.
- The W&R SETA and employers should continuously evaluate and refine on-the-job training programs based on feedback from graduates and supervisors. Monitor the effectiveness of training initiatives and make adjustments as needed to ensure that graduates receive the support they need to succeed in their roles.

### **EMPLOYER RESPONSIVENESS/INTERACTION WITH GRADUATE (RESP\_INT)**

- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should implement processes to ensure timely follow-up actions in response to graduate inquiries and concerns. Establish clear protocols for handling placement-related challenges and set expectations for response times to ensure that graduates receive prompt assistance when needed.
- The W&R SETA should encourage employer responsiveness and interaction with graduates by fostering a culture that values their input and contributions. Provide platforms for graduates to voice their feedback and suggestions for improving the placement experience.

- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should continuously evaluate and refine the graduate placement programme based on feedback from graduates. They should actively seek input on areas for improvement, including the alignment of placements with career goals, and implement necessary changes to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide flexibility in placement options to accommodate the diverse career goals and preferences of graduates. This could involve allowing graduates to express their preferences for specific roles or industries, and working collaboratively with them to find placements that align with their career aspirations.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should maintain transparent communication throughout the placement process, ensuring that graduates are provided with clear and accurate information about placement opportunities, expectations, and potential career paths. This transparency can help manage expectations and ensure that graduates make informed decisions about their placements.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should provide comprehensive career counselling services to graduates to better understand their individual career aspirations and goals. This could involve conducting career assessments, one-on-one consultations, and providing resources to help graduates align their placements with their long-term career objectives.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should evaluate, recognise and appreciate the contributions of graduates within the organisation to foster a sense of belonging and value. This could involve acknowledging their achievements, providing opportunities for advancement, and celebrating milestones.
- Employers within the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate a culture of empathy and empowerment within the organisation, where graduates feel comfortable expressing their challenges and concerns. Encourage managers and supervisors to actively listen to graduates' perspectives and provide support in overcoming obstacles.

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS ALIGNED TO THE STUDY' FINDINGS</b>	
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respondents were least satisfied with employer responsiveness. This may be attributed to the presence of red tape and bureaucracy found in some companies as well as the possibility that graduates are treated as temporary staff members and may receive less attention as a result.</li> <li>▪ Respondents indicated that they were significantly satisfied with the expertise of the employers that they were placed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Companies embracing graduate placements should be inclusive in their engagements with graduates as part of the team. Inclusivity would contribute to the professional growth of graduates.</li> <li>▪ Employers are required to improve the positioning of graduates where they can effectively develop their skills and become relevant for employability.</li> </ul>



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respondents indicated that they were significantly satisfied with the understanding that they perceived their respective employers had towards their graduate needs.</li> <li>▪ The absence of structured industry training aligned with the graduate's qualifications may lead graduates to perceive that they did not receive any training.</li> <li>▪ The study emphasised the notion of a career ecosystem from the perspective of two key players, namely, the employer and the graduate (see Figure 18). A disfunction in the operational aspects of the programme are highlighted. The study also highlights a psychological contract by evidencing the interconnectedness and interdependence that exists between graduates and graduate employers.</li> <li>▪ The conceptual model illustrates the graduate and the employer as separate actors on either side of the same coin who are in pursuit of sustainable careers that satisfy either party's individual needs.</li> <li>▪ Respondents indicated that the success in the transition between institutional learning and industry is a 'game-playing' benefit as employability skills are best learnt in the 'habitus of work'.</li> <li>▪ Findings showed that a period of work placement, in a landscape of practice is a requisite for entry into higher levels of employment where graduates can experience professional conduct and practice on the expected behavioural outcome.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There should be wider consultation and communication between institutions as a supplier of skills required and industry which demand fit for purpose graduates. The interdependency is critical and working together will enhance quality output from institutions meeting the demand of skills required.</li> <li>▪ Companies should be more prepared to receive graduates and have a well-defined and structured programme so that graduates are fully aligned to the company vision, mission, and needs.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should develop a career ecosystem from the perspective of two key players, namely, the employer and the graduate. There should be a psychological contract, which is evidencing the interconnectedness and interdependence that exists between graduates and graduate employers.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA and employers should develop a conceptual model that illustrates the graduate and the employer as separate actors on either side of the same coin who are in pursuit of sustainable careers that satisfy either party's individual needs.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should play a key role to ensure that graduates transition between institutional learning and industry is a 'game-playing' benefit as employability skills are best learnt in the 'habitus of work'.</li> <li>▪ Companies should ensure that a period of work placement in a landscape of practice is a requisite for entry into higher levels of employment where graduates can experience professional conduct and practice on the expected behavioural outcome.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|



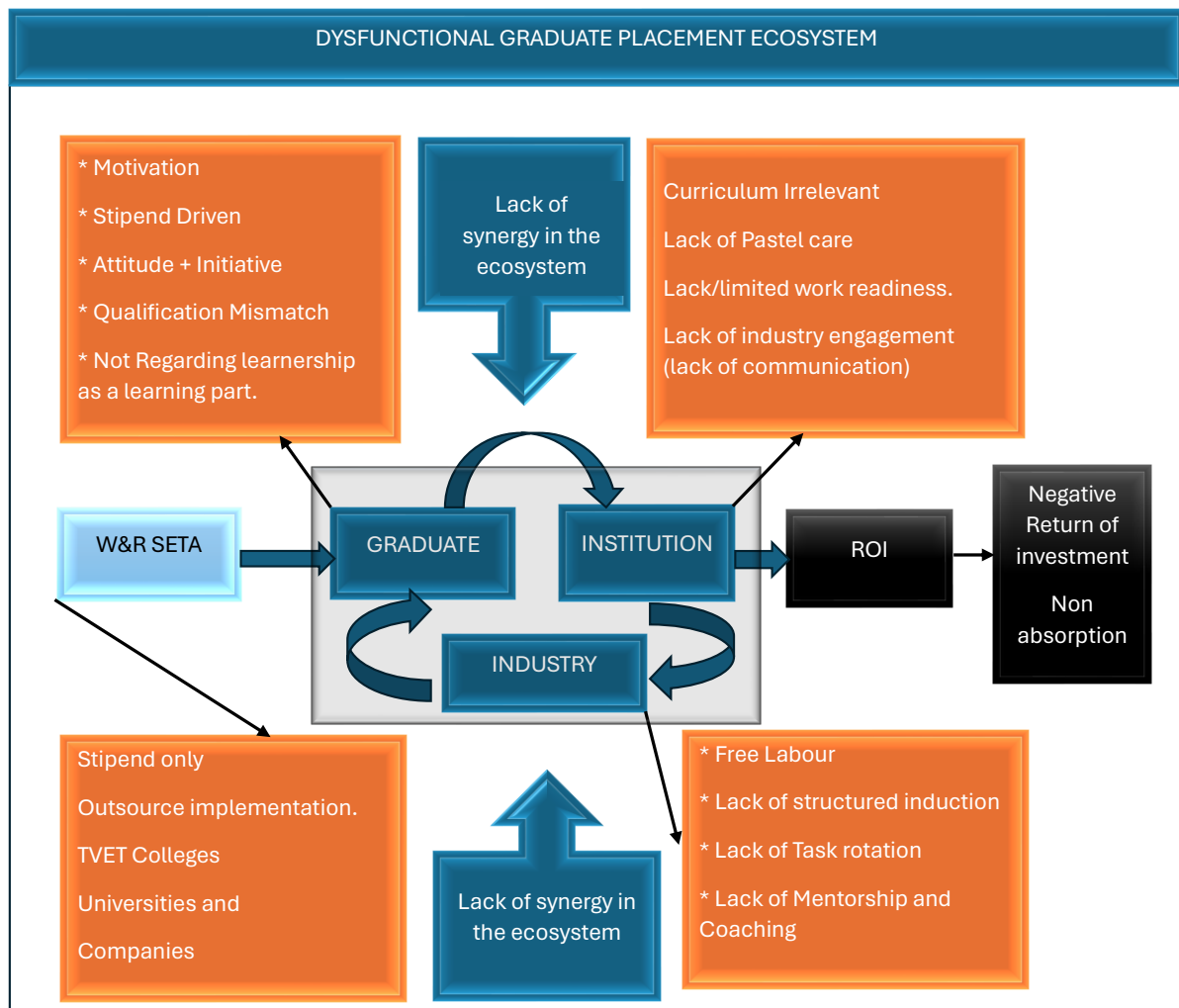
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Findings revealed that the payment of stipend to graduate, which articulate the value of paid and appropriate work experience cannot be negated in enhancing career outcomes amongst divergent student groups.</li> <li>▪ Findings indicated that the benchmark of success should be continued employment and vertical mobility in the graduates' career path.</li> <li>▪ The results showed that feedback and validation from others shape the newly developed identity, while role models and vicarious learning expand awareness of potential selves (Ngonda, Shaw and Kloot 2022). These social contexts contribute to the acquisition of social and socialization resources.</li> <li>▪ The study revealed that there is a poor perception of a career in the South African retail industry due to low payment, poor work-life balance, and advancement in career opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should ensure that the payment of stipend to graduate cannot be negated as it enhances career outcomes amongst divergent students' groups.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should ensure that the benchmark of success include continued employment and vertical mobility in the graduates' career path.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA should ensure that feedback and validation from others shape the newly developed identity, while role models and vicarious learning expand awareness of potential selves. These social contexts contribute to the acquisition of social and socialization resources.</li> <li>▪ The W&amp;R SETA and employers should ensure that positive social experiences during placements support identity transformations and lead graduates to more favourable attitudes.</li> </ul>
---	---

In addition to the recommendations presented in table 23, the following are to be considered by the W&R SETA:

- The W&RSETA's strategies should articulate a progressive and intertwined approach so that youth step up the educational value chain from basic education to tertiary level and the workplace focused on becoming employable and significantly contributing to the South African economy.
- The W&R SETA and employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should determine moderators of the effectiveness of the placement programme, such as departmental support, preplacement activities, and host company support. They should support student experiences in three skills categories, including academic skills, personal skills, and enterprise skills.

- The W&R SETA should energetically undertake and fund work readiness programme for graduates before being placed. This is the critical link to the transitioning and retention.
- The W&R SETA should fund host employer mentorship programmes so that employers have dedicated mentors who could assist and support graduates throughout their placement period.
- The W&R SETA should facilitate the development of technical skills that produce an acceptable quantity/quality of work, accept responsibility, and exhibits an interest in the job. Programmes and the need for both soft and hard skills development should be highly considered by the W&R SETA and employers within the Wholesale and retail sector.
- Employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector should adjust their human resource procedures and policies (e.g., recruitment, orientation, training, compensation) to focus on establishing parameters or expectations of professional maturity, soft skills, problem-solving, and continuous learning of those with higher educational attainment.
- Employers should not develop their perceptions based on the academic institutions graduate attended, when in position of offering employment opportunities. They should rather offer opportunities for graduates to be trained based on the appropriate skills required.
- The W&R SETA should create mechanism to develop soft skills, cultural fit, and management skills that would enable graduates to lead organizations competitively. Students should be encouraged to focus on careers with better employment opportunities. They should be adequately prepared to enter the labour market and investment in soft skills.
- The W&R SETA and employers within the Wholesale and Retail sector are required to improve or develop the practice of internships and graduate placement programmes given that student's success for employability is linked to internships and graduate placement programmes.

Considering the recommendations stated above, the issues of graduate placement and return of investment are complex as the key actors (graduate, industry, and institutions) in the implementation are not aligned. To unlock this, a greater involvement from the W & R SETA is required. The diagram below highlights the complexity.



**Figure 18: Graduate Placement Ecosystem (Disfunction)**

## 8 CONCLUSION

In summary, to optimise the transition of graduates into the workforce and address the multifaceted needs identified across various aspects of employer-graduate interaction, several key recommendations emerge. Firstly, fostering robust partnerships with educational institutions facilitates the alignment of academic curricula with industry demands, ensuring graduates possess relevant skills upon entry into the workforce. Offering structured mentorship programs and meaningful work placement experiences further enhances graduates' preparedness for professional roles. Additionally, implementing clear communication channels and timely follow-up actions can address placement-related challenges effectively, bolstering employer responsiveness. Proactive support during critical situations and ongoing professional development opportunities contribute to a supportive environment conducive to graduates' success. Finally, a commitment to continuous improvement, informed by regular feedback mechanisms, ensures that employer-graduate interactions remain responsive to evolving needs and expectations. By adhering to these recommendations, employers can foster an environment where graduates feel supported, valued, and equipped to thrive in their careers.

## REFERENCES

- Abd Aziz, N.N. and Yazid, Z.N.A. 2021. Exploratory factor analysis of technostress among university students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10 (3).
- Abelha, M., Fernandes, S., Mesquita, D., Seabra, F. and Ferreira-Oliveira, A.T. 2020. Graduate employability and competence development in higher education—A systematic literature review using PRISMA. *Sustainability*, 12(15): 5900.
- Aji, I. and Lukmandono, L. 2021. March. Integration of Servqual, KANO, and QFD Methods to Improve Service Quality (Case Study: UG Faculty of Engineering). *In Proceedings of SENASTITAN: National Seminar on Sustainable Industrial Technology*, 1(1): 8 – 16.
- Amirrudin, M., Nasution, K. and Supahar, S., 2021. Effect of variability on Cronbach alpha reliability in research practice. *Jurnal Matematika, Statistika dan Komputasi*, 17(2), pp.223-230.
- Anjum, S. 2020. Impact of internship programs on professional and personal development of business students: a case study from Pakistan. *Future Business Journal*, 6 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-019-0007-3> (Accessed 21 July 2023)
- Antonacopoulou, E. 2000. Employee development through self-development in three retail banks. *Personnel Review*, 29(4): 491 – 508.
- APA Dictionary of Psychology., 2023. Biographical data. Available <https://dictionary.apa.org/biographical-data>. (Accessed 6 October 2023)
- Ball, C. 2023. Graduate Labour Market Update: 20 February, Luminate Prospectus, <https://luminate.prospects.ac.uk/graduate-labour-market-update-20-february>. (Accessed 17 November 2023)

BizTrends. 2017. #BizTrends2017: SA's graduate labour market - trends and issues.

Bizzcommunity <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/722/157320.html>

(Accessed 12 September 2023)

Donald, W.E., Baruch, Y. and Ashleigh, M.J. 2019. Conceptualization via career ecosystems and the new psychological contract. *Career Development International*, 25(2). 2020: 90-110 © Emerald Publishing Limited 1362-0436 DOI 10.1108/CDI-03-2019-0079

Baruch, Y. 2015. Organizational and labour markets as career ecosystem. In *Handbook of research on sustainable careers* (pp. 364-380). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bond, G.R., Drake, R.E. and Becker, D.R. 2020. An update on individual placement and support. *World Psychiatry*, 19(3): 390.

Brooks, R. and Youngson, P.L. 2016. Undergraduate work placements: an analysis of the effects on career progression. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(9):1563-1578. DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2014.988702](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.988702)

Burke, C., Scurry, T. and Blenkinsopp, J. 2020. Navigating the graduate labour market: the impact of social class on student understandings of graduate careers and the graduate labour market. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(8): 1711 – 1722.

Bursary and graduate placement strategy 2022/23-2026/2027. 2022. Version 5.1: 03 June 2022

Chhinzer, N. and Russo, A.M. 2017. An exploration of employer perceptions of graduate student employability. *Education+ Training*, 60(1): 104 – 120.

Clarke, M. 2017. Building employability through graduate development programmes: A case study in an Australian public sector organisation. *Personnel Review*, 46(4): 792-808.

- Creswell, J.W., Clark, V.L.P. 2018. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. 2011. Controversies in mixed methods research. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4(1): 269 – 284.
- Creswell, J.W. 2015. *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. California: Sage.
- Creswell, J., and Pablo-Clark, V. 2011. *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). California: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, Inc
- Demir, S.B. and Pismek, N. 2018. A Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Study of Controversial Issues in Social Studies Classes: A Clash of Ideologies. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 18(1): 119 – 149.
- Department of Higher Education and Training, 2022. Skills Supply and Demand in South Africa: Labour Market Intelligence research programme. Available <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Planning%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Coordination/Report%20on%20Skills%20Supply%20and%20Demand%20in%20South%20Africa%20-%202022%20-%281%29.pdf>. (17 November 2023)
- Donald, W.E., Baruch, Y. and Ashleigh, M., 2019. The undergraduate self-perception of employability: Human capital, careers advice, and career ownership. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(4): 599 – 614.

- Donald, W.E., Baruch, Y. and Ashleigh, M.J. 2020. Striving for sustainable graduate careers: Conceptualization via career ecosystems and the new psychological contract. *Career Development International*, 25(2): 90 – 110.
- Erasmus, E., Pretorius, J.H.C. and Pretorius, L. 2010. *Using virtual team project communication as a means of predicting virtual team effectiveness* (pp. 1-9). IEEE.
- Fook, C.Y; and Sidhu, G.K. 2015. Investigating Learning Challenges faced by Students in Higher Education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 186 (2015): 604 – 612.
- Gbadamosi, G., Evans, C., Richardson, M. and Chanthana, Y. 2019. Understanding self-efficacy and the dynamics of part-time work and career aspiration. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 9(3): 468 – 484.
- Glickman, K., Katherine Shear, M. and Wall, M.M. 2018. Therapeutic alliance and outcome in complicated grief treatment. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 11: 222 – 233.
- Goretzko, D., Pham, T.T.H. and Bühner, M. 2021. Exploratory factor analysis: Current use, methodological developments and recommendations for good practice. *Current psychology*, 40: 3510 – 3521.
- Harry, T., Chinyamurindi, W.T. and Mjoli, T. 2018. Perceptions of factors that affect employability amongst a sample of final-year students at a rural South African university. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44(1): 1 – 10.
- Harrison, S. and Grant, C. 2016. Chasing a moving target: Perceptions of work readiness and graduate capabilities in music higher research degree students. *British Journal of Music Education*, 33(2): 205 – 218.



- Heale, R. 2013. Understanding triangulation in research. Available: <https://ebn.bmj.com/content/16/4/98>. (Accessed 8 November 2023)
- Herbert, I.P., Rothwell, A.T., Glover, J.L. and Lambert, S.A. 2020. Graduate employability, employment prospects and work-readiness in the changing field of professional work. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 18(2): 100378.
- Hirschi A. 2012. The career resources model: An integrative framework for career counsellors. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 40: 369–383. DOI:10.1080/03069885.2012.700506
- Hordósy, R., Clark, T. and Vickers, D. 2018. Lower income students and the ‘double deficit’ of part-time work: undergraduate experiences of finance, studying and employability. *Journal of Education and Work*, 31(4): 353 – 365.
- Hussien, F.M. and La Lopa, M. 2018. The determinants of student satisfaction with internship programs in the hospitality industry: A case study in the USA. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, 17(4): 502 – 527.
- Iansiti, M. and Levien, R. 2004. Strategy as ecology. *Harvard business review*, 82(3): 68 – 78.
- ILO, 2018. Approaches to anticipating skills for the future of work. Available [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms\\_646143.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_646143.pdf). (Accessed 18 November 2023)
- ILO and OECD, 2018. Global Skills Trends, Training Needs and Lifelong Learning Strategies for the Future of Work. Available: <https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--->

[inst/documents/publication/wcms\\_qualifications\\_646038.pdf](#). (Accessed 18 November 2023)

Inceoglu, I., Selenko, E., McDowall, A. and Schlachter, S. 2019. (How) Do work placements work? Scrutinizing the quantitative evidence for a theory-driven future research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110: 317 – 337.

IOA. 2017. How can graduates better their chances of employment in the South African job market? On Africa (IOA). Available:  
<https://www.inonafrica.com/2017/07/20/can-graduates-better-chances-employment-south-african-job-market-2/> (Accessed 12 October 2023)

Jackson, D. and Bridgstock, R. 2021. What actually works to enhance graduate employability? The relative value of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular learning and paid work. *Higher Education*, 81(4): 723 – 739.

Jackson, D. and Tomlinson, M. 2020. Investigating the relationship between career planning, proactivity and employability perceptions among higher education students in uncertain labour market conditions. *Higher education*, 80(3): 435 – 455.

Jackson, D., Riebe, L. and Macau, F. 2022. Determining factors in graduate recruitment and preparing students for success. *Education+ Training*, 64(5): 681 – 699.

Jawabri, A. 2017. Exploration of internship experience and satisfaction leading to better career prospects among business students in UAE. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 5(10): 1065 – 1079.

Kapareliotis, I., Voutsina, K. and Patsiotis, A. 2019. Internship and employability prospects: assessing student's work readiness. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 9(4): 538 – 549.

- Karunaratne, K. and Perera, N. 2019. Students' perception on the effectiveness of industrial internship programme. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(4).
- Koyana, S. and Mason, R. 2018. Transformation in the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa: the role of internships. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research (JBRMR)*, 12(4): 187 – 199.
- Kumar, R. 2014. *Research Methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kumar, A., Trivedi, A., Dole, V. S., Singh, K., and Yadav, A. 2023. Human resource management in the retail sector: challenges and trends. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 4(6), 2086 – 2093. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.06.31> (Accessed 15 March 2024).
- Laguador, J.M., Chavez-Prinsipe, N.H. and De Castro, E.L. 2020. Employability skill development needs of engineering students and employers' feedback on their internship performance. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(7): 3097 – 3108.
- Lo, S.M., Shen, H.P. and Chen, J.C. 2017. An integrated approach to project management using the Kano model and QFD: an empirical case study. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 28(13-14): 1584 – 1608.
- Lucen, A. 2015. Use of Indicators for Managing Performance in Government: Course 2. Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy.
- Makhathini, T.P. 2016. Work integrated learning competencies: Industrial supervisors' perspectives.
- Martin, A. J., Milne-Home, J., Barrett, J., Spalding, E. and Jones, G. 2000. Graduate satisfaction with university and perceived employment preparation. *Journal*

of *Education and Work*, 13(2): 199–213. Available:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/713676986> (Accessed 15 March 2024).

- McArthur, E., Kubacki, K., Pang, B. and Alcaraz, C. 2017. The employers' view of 'work-ready' graduates: A study of advertisements for marketing jobs in Australia. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 39(2): 82 – 93.
- Melink, M. and Pavlin, S. 2012. Employability of graduates and higher education management systems. *Ljubljana: FDV*, 151: 133 – 153.
- Mishra, P., Pandey, C.M., Singh, U., Gupta, A., Sahu, C. and Keshri, A. 2019. Descriptive statistics and normality tests for statistical data. *Annals of cardiac anaesthesia*, 22(1): 67 – 72.
- Modise, J.M., Taylor, D. and Raga, K., 2022. Monitoring and Evaluation of Training Programmes in the South African Police Service: Case Study of the Northern Cape Province. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 12(7): 299 – 316.
- Moore, T. and Morton, J. 2017. The myth of job readiness? Written communication, employability, and the 'skills gap' in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(3): 591–609. Available:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1067602> (Accessed 15 March 2024).
- Mortimer, J.T., Kim, M., Staff, J. and Vuolo, M. 2016. Unemployment, parental help, and self-efficacy during the transition to adulthood. *Work and occupations*, 43(4): 434 – 465.
- Muhammed Al-Kassab, M. 2022. The use of one sample t-test in the real data. *Journal of Advances in Mathematics*, 21.
- Ndebele, N.C. and Ndlovu, J. 2020. Employability in KwaZulu-Natal: perceptions of post graduate students on work readiness in the labour market. *Journal of Public Administration*, 55(2): 226 – 238.

- Neyt, B., Omei, E., Verhaest, D. and Baert, S. 2019. Does student work really affect educational outcomes? A review of the literature. *Journal of economic surveys*, 33(3): 896 – 921.
- Nelij, S. 2010. Sage research methods-Triangulation. Available: <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-research-design/n469.xml>.
- Ngonda, T., Shaw, C. and Kloot, B. 2022. Mechanical engineering students' contribution to their work placement learning trajectories. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*.
- Noble, H. and Heale, R. 2019. *Triangulation in research, with example*. Available: <https://ebn.bmj.com/content/22/3/67>. (Accessed 15 July 2023)
- OECD, 2022. Economic and Social outcomes – Education GPS. Available: [https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!/node=41761&filter=al\\_\\_\\_l](https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!/node=41761&filter=al___l). (Accessed 17 November 2023)
- Okolie, U.C. 2022. Work placement learning and students' readiness for school-to-work transition: Do perceived employability and faculty supervisor support matter?. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 139: 103805.
- Okolie, U.C., Nwajiuba, C.A., Eneje, B., Binuomote, M.O., Ehiobuche, C., Polay, D.H. 2021. A critical perspective on industry involvement in higher education learning: Enhancing graduates' knowledge and skills for job creation in Nigeria, Sage: *Industry and Higher Education*, 35 (1): 61–72
- Pandita, D. and Ray, S. 2018. Talent management and employee engagement—a meta-analysis of their impact on talent retention. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 50(4):185 – 199.

- Paposa, K. & Kumar, Y. 2019. Impact of training and development practices on job satisfaction: A study on faculty members of technical education institutes. *Management and Labour Studies*, 44(3): 248 – 262.
- Paul, A., Abdullah, H., & Liaw, J. O. H. (2022). Students Service-Learning Experience and Perception of Graduate Preparedness for The Workplace. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(11), 1 – 21.
- Phoebe, W.K. 2010. Determinants of internship effectiveness for university students in Hong Kong. *Unpublished bachelor's thesis) Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong.*
- Pietersen, C., 2014. Implementation of Batho Pele principles in an educational district office. *Mediterranean journal of social sciences*, 5(3): 253 – 261.
- Pilar Arnaiz Sánchez, P.A., Rodríguez, R.H., Martínez, R.M.M. 2019. Barriers to Student Learning and Participation in an Inclusive School as Perceived by Future Education Professionals. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 8(1):1 – 14.
- Punch, J.P. and Oancea, A. 2014. Punch. *Introduction to Research Methods in Education.*
- Preradovic, N. M. 2016. Service-learning, Springer Science and Business Media Singapore 2015
- Renganathan, S., Karim, Z.A.B.A. and Li, C.S. 2012. Students' perception of industrial internship programme. *Education+ Training*, 54(2/3): 180 – 191.
- Rahmana, A., Kamil, M., Soemantri, E. and Olim, A. 2014. Integration of SERVQUAL and Kano model into QFD to improve quality of simulation-based training on

project management. *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science*, 2(3): 59 – 72.

Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. 1995. White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, Notice 1227 of 1995. *South African Government Gazette No. 16838*, Pretoria.

Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration (1996-), 1995. *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service*. Government Printer, South Africa.

Republic of South Africa. 1997. White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery. Government Gazette 388 (18340): 1-40.

Republic of South African Government Gazette, 2017. Government Gazette, Vol 621 of 29 March 2017, No. 40730. Available: <https://opengazettes.org.za/gazettes/ZA/2017>. (Accessed 7 February 2022)

Rosenberg, E. and Ward, M. 2020. SETA performance management & standards.

Rostron, M.T. 2022. Skills supply and skills demand in the South African economy. Available: [https://www.nexford.org/insights/skills-supply-and-skills-demand-in-](https://www.nexford.org/insights/skills-supply-and-skills-demand-in-the-south-african-economy) the-south-african-economy. (17 November 2023)

Rowe, A.D and Zegwaard, K.E. 2017. Developing graduate employability skills and attributes: Curriculum enhancement through work-integrated learning, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 18 (2): 87-99

Savickas, M.L. 1997. Career adaptability: An integrative construct for life-span, life-space theory. *The career development quarterly*, 45(3): 247 – 259.

- Schlossberg, N.K., 1981. A model for analysing human adaptation to transition. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 9(2): 2 – 18.
- Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. 2009. *Research Method for Business, a Skill Building Approach*. Wiley, Singapore.
- Simon O'Leary (2013) Collaborations in Higher Education with Employers and Their Influence on Graduate Employability: An Institutional Project, Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences, 5:1: 37 – 50. DOI: 10.11120/elss.2013.05010037.
- Smith, S., Taylor-Smith, E., Smith, C. and Webster, G. 2018. The impact of work placement on graduate employment in computing: Outcomes from a UK-based study. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 19(4).
- Stighfarrinata, R. and Ashari, F. 2022. Integration of Servqual, Kano and QFD for Analysis of Service Quality Improvement to Achieve Customer Satisfaction PT. Kharisma Sejahtera Daihatsu Branch. *Jurnal Manajemen dan Inovasi (MANOVA)*, 5(1): 65 – 79.
- SurveyMonkey. 2024. What is the difference between a response rate and a completion rate? Available: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/what-is-the-difference-between-a-response-rate-and-a-completion-rate/>. (Accessed 11 February 2024)
- Sutiman, S., Sofyan, H., Arifin, Z., Nurtanto, M. and Mutohhari, F. 2022. Industry and Education Practitioners' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of Work-Based Learning through Industrial Internship (WBL-II). *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 12(10):1090 – 1097.
- Turner, D.W. 2010. *Qualitative interview design*. Available: <http://www.nova.edu/ssw/QR15-3/qid.pdf>. (Accessed 22 March 2023)



- Tholen, G. 2017a. Symbolic Closure: Towards a Renewed Sociological Perspective on the Relationship between Higher Education, Credentials and the Graduate Labour Market. *Sociology*, 51 (5): 1067–1083.  
DOI:10.1177/0038038516641857.
- Tholen, G. 2017b. *Skills, Credentials and Jobs in the Graduate Labour Market*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- The W&RSETA skills development for economic growth Report, 2022. Bursary and graduate placement strategy 2022/23-2026/2027. Available:  
<https://www.wrseta.org.za/downloads/Bursaries%20and%20Placements%20Strategy.pdf>. (Accessed 13 June 2023)
- Tsotsotso, K., Montshiwa, E., Tirivanhu, P., Fish, T., Sibiya, S., Mlangeni, T., Moloi, M. and Mahlangu, N. 2017. Determinants of skills demand in a state-intervening labour market: The case of South African transport sector. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 7(4): 408 – 422.
- van Vianen, A. E., Rosenauer, D., Homan, A. C., Horstmeier, C. A. and Voelpel, S. C. 2018. Career mentoring in context: A multilevel study on differentiated career mentoring and career mentoring climate. *Human Resource Management*, 57(2): 583 – 599.
- Vaaland, T.I. and Ishengoma, E. 2016. University-industry linkages in developing countries: perceived effect on innovation. *Education + Training*, 58(9): 1014 – 1040.
- Wiid, J and Diggins, C. 2022. *Market Research*. 4th Ed. Juta Ltd: Cape Town.
- Wu, M.J., Zhao, K., Aime, F.F. 2022. Response rates of online surveys in published research: A meta-analysis. *Computers in Human Behaviour Reports*, 7 (1): 1-11.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Student Information letter and questionnaire



Faculty of Management Sciences  
Department of Wholesale & Retail Chair  
P.O Box 1334  
Durban,  
4000.

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Good day, Dear valued participant,

The Wholesale and Retail Leadership Chair department is conducting a research study on graduate placement on behalf of the Wholesale and Retail SETA. Therefore, you are honourably invited to complete our quick survey that may take you 10 to 15 minutes. Your insights on how we can enhance and promote graduate placement program and encourage the efforts of the W&RSETA sponsorship will be very helpful. We want to hear from you. As a valued and esteemed participant in this study, you are required to provide honest and accurate responses as this information will help identify the placement program effectiveness, the effectiveness of skill development aligned to graduate placement, employer and graduate satisfaction based on the graduate placement program, career opportunities for graduates, as well as barriers and challenges facing students in accessing and participating in the placement program.

We are thankful for your willingness and time for participating in this study.

## APPENDIX 2: W&RSETA Research Questionnaire



### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC

1. State your Age.

18-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	3
45-54	4
55-64	5
65+	6

2. State your Gender.

Male	1
Female	2
Prefer not to say	3

3. Ethnicity

African	1
Coloured	2
Indian	3
White	4
Other	5

4. Nationality

South African	1
Non-South African	2
If Non-South African, please specify.	3

5. Highest level of Education

Grade 12 NSC	1
Higher Certificate	2
Diploma	3

Bachelor's Degree	4
Master's Degree	5
Doctorate/PhD	6
Professional Degree (MBA)	7
Other, please specify.	8

#### 6. Position in the company

Entry Level	
Controller	
Supervisor	
Manager	
Senior Manager	
Executive	

## SECTION B: SERVICE QUALITY

### SECTION 1: PHYSICAL RESOURCES AND FACILITIES AT THE WORKPLACE

Please rate the following aspects of the work placement programme's physical resources and facilities on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 is "Strongly Satisfied":

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, I have .....	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
1.1	... adequate office space/ workstations					
1.2	... necessary tools and equipment are available to me					
1.3	... on the job training					
1.4.	materials and resources to <b>assist</b> me					
1.5	.. on the job guidelines and instructions that provide me with clarity and relevance					

## SECTION 2: STUDENT SUPPORT (e.g., MENTORING & COACHING) OFFERED BY THE EMPLOYER

Please rate the reliability of the work placement programme's services on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 is "Strongly Satisfied":

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, I receive .....	Strongly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Strongly Satisfied
2.1	... support from the employer					
2.2	... guidance from the employer that is consistent					
2.3	... mentorship from the employer					
2.3.	Regular feedback at mentorship sessions					
2.4.	Input on my performance					
2.5.	Opportunities to learn from senior managers					
2.6.	Ongoing guidance about what is expected from me					
2..7	... accurate information about the graduate placement/internship programme					
2.8.	... communication regarding work placement opportunities					
2.9	... the programme is reliable in delivering promised services					
2.10	... there is consistency in matching trainees with suitable work placements					
1.12	A good response to conflict between					

	graduates and colleagues/line manager					
2.12.	I am satisfied with the support and mentorship at the workplace					

### SECTION 3: EMPLOYER RESPONSES TO AND INTERACTION WITH GRADUATE

Please rate the responsiveness of the work placement programme's support team on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 is "Strongly Satisfied":

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, I know that .....	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
3.1	... my <b>inquiries</b> and concerns are addressed timelessly					
3.2	... I will receive support during critical situations					
3.4	... there is responsiveness in assisting with placement-related challenges (e.g., lack of exposure to other tasks due to no rotation)					
3.5	... there is accessibility of support team members via various communication channels					
3.6	... there is speed of follow-up actions after placement application or interview					
3.7	... there is readiness to provide additional assistance when needed					

#### SECTION 4: EMPLOYER EXPERTISE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE GRADUATE PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

Please rate your confidence in the work placement programme's team on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 is "Strongly Satisfied":

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, I know that .....	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
4.1	... there is competence and knowledge in the Retail organisation's placement team					
4.2	... there is support by the team in enhancing my skills and capabilities					
4.3	... there is clear and accurate information provided about the programme					
4.4	... there is relevance of advice and recommendations provided by the team					
4.5	... there is expertise in aligning placements with your career goals					
4.6	... there is assurance in handling sensitive information with confidentiality					
4.7	... there is ability to address your concerns or doubts effectively					

## SECTION 5: UNDERSTANDING THE GRADUATES NEEDS

Please rate the level of empathy and understanding shown by the work placement programme's team on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Strongly Dissatisfied" and 5 is "Strongly Satisfied":

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, I know that .....	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
5.1	... the company has an understanding of my individual needs and preferences					
5.2	... the company provides me with support in overcoming challenges and obstacles I face in the workplace					
5.3	... the company makes an effort to provide me with personalized career guidance					
5.4	... the company shows me empathy by acknowledging my concerns and feelings					
5.5	... the company makes an effort to align placements with your personal interests					
5.6	... there is responsiveness to your specific requirements during placement process					
5.7	... there is consideration of your feedback for program improvement					



## SECTION 6: GRADUATE INSTITUTIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND PARTNERSHIP

#	As a worker in the retail organisation, .....	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
6.1	My academic training is aligned to my tasks at the workplace.					
6.2	My institution has prepared me to enter the work environment with regard to hours of work, working days, sick leave and working in shifts (each could be on its own – helps us to understand possible reasons for dropout)					
6.3	My experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my learning					
6.4	My experience as a graduate in the workplace has added value to my professionalism					
6.5	There is collaboration between my employer and my institution.					

## APPENDIX 3: Questionnaire for Internship Evaluation Higher Institutions of Education



### Biographic data

1. Gender M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_
2. Department: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Position \_\_\_\_\_
4. Can you provide a brief overview of your role and responsibilities within the higher education institution?
5. How many years are you in the employment of the institution? \_\_\_\_\_

### Internship program Management

1. What is the primary objective of the graduate internship program at your institution?
2. How does your institution identify industry needs and trends to design relevant internship programs?
3. Could you describe the process of developing and maintaining relationships with potential internship providers or employers?
4. What criteria or guidelines does your institution use to select and approve internship opportunities for students?

### Internship Program Development and Management

1. How are students prepared for internships in terms of skills, resumes, and interviews before they start their internships?
2. What support services does your institution offer to students during their internships, such as mentoring, counseling, feedback mechanisms, technical or financial support.

### Internship Evaluation and Assessment

1. How does your institution assess the effectiveness and quality of the internship experiences for students?
2. Are there mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from students about their internship experiences? If so, how is this feedback used to improve the program?
3. Can you share examples of successful outcomes or stories from the internship program?

### Collaboration with Employer

1. How does your institution engage and collaborate with employers to ensure a mutually beneficial internship experience?
2. What types of resources or incentives are offered to employers to encourage their participation in the program?

### **Challenges and Improvements**

1. What are the major challenges or obstacles your institution faces in managing graduate internships, and how are these challenges being addressed?
2. Are there any ongoing initiatives or plans for improving the internship program at your institution?

### **Future of Graduate Internships**

1. How do you envision the future role of higher education institutions in graduate internship management, given the evolving landscape of education and work?
2. Are there any emerging trends or innovations that your institution is considering incorporating into the internship program?

### **Closing Thoughts**

1. Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the role of higher education institutions in graduate internship management?

Thank you for participating in the interview!

Internship evaluation higher institutions of education

### **Biographic data**

6. Gender M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_
7. Department: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Position \_\_\_\_\_
9. Can you provide a brief overview of your role and responsibilities within the higher education institution?
10. How many years are you in the employment of the institution? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Internship program Management**

5. What is the primary objective of the graduate internship program at your institution?
6. How does your institution identify industry needs and trends to design relevant internship programs?
7. Could you describe the process of developing and maintaining relationships with potential internship providers or employers?
8. What criteria or guidelines does your institution use to select and approve internship opportunities for students?

## **Internship Program Development and Management**

3. How are students prepared for internships in terms of skills, resumes, and interviews before they start their internships?
4. What support services does your institution offer to students during their internships, such as mentoring, counseling, feedback mechanisms, technical or financial support.

## **Internship Evaluation and Assessment**

4. How does your institution assess the effectiveness and quality of the internship experiences for students?
5. Are there mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from students about their internship experiences? If so, how is this feedback used to improve the program?
6. Can you share examples of successful outcomes or stories from the internship program?

## **Collaboration with Employer**

1. How does your institution engage and collaborate with employers to ensure a mutually beneficial internship experience?
2. What types of resources or incentives are offered to employers to encourage their participation in the program?

## **Challenges and Improvements**

1. What are the major challenges or obstacles your institution faces in managing graduate internships, and how are these challenges being addressed?
2. Are there any ongoing initiatives or plans for improving the internship program at your institution?

## **Future of Graduate Internships**

1. How do you envision the future role of higher education institutions in graduate internship management, given the evolving landscape of education and work?
2. Are there any emerging trends or innovations that your institution is considering incorporating into the internship program?

## **Closing Thoughts**

2. Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the role of higher education institutions in graduate internship management?

Thank you for participating in the interview!

## APPENDIX 4: Interview Guide (Employers)



No	Questions
1	Does your company take in new graduates on internship programmes?
2	How many graduates are taken in a year?
3	Do graduates receive a stipend?
4	Is the stipend funded by the company or a SETA?
5	Will you say that graduates are adequately prepared when they enter the workplace?
6	Do you offer a graduate work/action plan within the workplace?
7	When the internship period is over; are graduates employed? 7.1 If employed, what attributes must graduate students satisfy to be employed? 7.2 If the graduate is not employed; what factors disqualifies a candidate?
8	Will you say that graduates add value to your organisation?
9	If yes; in what way do they add value?
10	Did any graduate get promoted in your company?
11	How are graduates recruited?
12	Are any induction programmes for graduates?
13	Who should be responsible for the induction of graduates?
14	How are graduates monitored by your organisation?
15	How are graduate monitored by the SETA?
16	How are graduates monitored by the university or College?
16	Is there a database of students available? For future recruitment purposes.
17	Do you seek feedback from graduates after their internship is completed?