



WORKPLACE BASED LEARNING (WBL): TRACER STUDY- LEARNERSHIPS

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WORKPLACE BASED LEARNING (WBL): TRACER STUDY-LEARNERSHIPS

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

Contact Persons: Mr Mxolisi Maphakela

Contact:

Submitted by: Quest Research Services (Pty) Ltd (QRS)
Unit 17b, Wildfig Business Park,
1494 Cranberry Street, Honeydew,
Johannesburg

Contact person: Mr Reginald Dlamini

Contact: Tel: 011 795 2379 Fax 011 795 1445

Email: rndlamini@qrs.co.za

Tracer Team Members (QRS): Dr Mluleki Ncube
Mr Reginald Dlamini
Mr Nikita T Moyo
Mr Henry Semwayo
Mr Thabani Ncube
Mr Mthandazo Dube

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

Ms Tshepiso Mnisi (Centurion)

Ms Maria Mahlangu (Centurion)
Ms Lieza Blom (Western Cape)
Mr George Mushaike (GPN, LMP& MP)
Ms Bridgette Zwane (Centurion)
Mr Mushtaq Wajoodeen (Centurion)
Ms Deborah Machard (Centurion)
Ms Lebo Mphake (Centurion)
Mr Thozamile Thusani (Centurion)
Ms Pearl Makhudu (Centurion)
Ms Tsakani Mabasa (Centurion)
Mr NaziaRafir-Munsaur (Centurion)
Ms Aphia Serumula (Centurion)
Mr Nathanael Govender (Centurion)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) partnered with Quest Research Services (Pty) Ltd (QRS) to conduct a Workplace Based Learning (WBL): Tracer Study-Learnerships for a period of 2 years. The survey aimed at exploring the educational paths of beneficiaries, with the aim of deriving recommendations that will assist W&RSETA in implementing responsive interventions and programmes for the learnership.

Beneficiaries (Learners) that completed the learnerships as well as Employers were engaged for the survey by means of a quantitative approach in the form of Computer Aided Telephonic Interviews (CATI). This approach was not only effective but also in-line with the government's Covid-19 regulations that encouraged the limiting of face to face interactions in order to help contain the spread on Covid-19.

The WBL tracer study focused on W&RSETA funded Learnerships between the years 2015 – 2018. However, due to the advent of Covid-19 pandemic, QRS found it necessary to also look at how the global pandemic had affected the destinations of the learners, as a result the scope included funded learnerships in years 2019 to 2021.

A total of 3526 successful learner interviews were conducted, while 100 companies comprising mainly of Gauteng, Limpopo, and Western Cape provinces were engaged. These were companies that vary in size, national footprint, ownership, and trade categories.

i. Secondary Research Findings

In order to effectively understand the SETA landscape, with special focus on the W&RSETA and the WBL while also gathering insights that can be utilised in the research and questionnaire design, QRS engaged on comprehensive secondary research in the form of literature and document review from both national and international sources.

The 2017/2018 W&RSETA report states that the sector employed 3161 million people, or 20.4% of the total active labour force, with 87 790 active Wholesale and Retail enterprises. These consist of 77 196 small (88%), 2370 medium (3%) and 919 (1%) large enterprises. There are 7305 (8%) unclassified enterprises, with Gauteng having the largest concentration of enterprises (37%), showing that the sector contributes quite significantly to the labour force.

Billiett, (2009) documents that the development of partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and employers is seen as a critical factor in identifying learning requirements to improve the relevance of education, and facilitating access to education and learning. However, even though it is clear that WBL enhanced employment chances, exposure to work experience, and helping with employment contacts, among others (Cedefop, 2013), literature also revealed that implementation of WBL was a challenge by the higher education systems. Moreover, benefits for organizations and society are were deemed to be not as obvious in the short term.

Employers, students, and W&RSETA are viewed as key players in the success of work-based learning. Hence, the Workplace Based Learning Programme Agreement (WBLPA) Regulations came into effect on 01 April 2019 and repealed the Learnership Regulations of 2007 to harmonise the keys players in SETAs.

Most students use this training as a stepping stone towards attaining skills and qualifications to go and use in other sectors. The working conditions for Wholesale and Retail Sector staff were deemed to be not attractive enough when comparing to other sectors to retain staff. In many highly developed economies, WBL arrangements are associated with relatively low-skilled occupations (Marsh, 2011).

Employers are looking for graduates who are proactive, and can use higher level skills including 'analysis, critique, synthesis and multi layered communication to facilitate innovative teamwork in catalysing the transformation of their organization (Harvey et al, 2002 cited in Holden and Jameson, (2002)).

The literature also indicated that employers want graduates who have technical and discipline competences from their degrees and can adapt to the workplace culture, use

their abilities and skills to evolve the organisation and participate in innovative teamwork. Employers also value critical thinking as this is required for innovation and anticipating and leading change (Harvey et al, 1997; Little 2001 in Lees 2002).

Furthermore, finding by Pegg et al. (2012) indicate that career management, labour market awareness, networking and applying for positions, is increasingly acknowledged as important to graduate employability.

However, even with training happening, there is a noticeable qualification mismatch, which includes the job mismatch which has three dimensions that are education-job mismatch, qualification-job mismatch or skill-job mismatch and the field of study-job mismatch.

Overall, literature revealed that students believe that the WBL can help them attain high quality career services and provide career advice, employers can offer them relevant work placements to provide valuable experience to pick up additional skills and awareness of that type of work (Misko, Chew and Korbel, 2020).

On the other end, Employers were in concensus about what were considered to be the most important skills that they look for in graduates. Archer and Davison (2008) found that regardless of the size of the company, 'soft skills' (e.g., communication skills and team-working) were perceived to have more weight than technical or 'hard skills' (e.g., a good degree qualification, IT skills).

ii. Primary Research Findings (Learners)

Out of the 3526 learners interviewed, about 61% of the research participants were female while 39% were male, with the majority of them being of the 25 – 34 years age group, followed by the 18 – 24 years age group. Africans had the majority representation at 94%, with Whites being the least represented at 1%. The majority, 64% of the learner participants, indicated their highest education level as Matric or Grade 12

About 51% of the learners completed their learnerships in 2020, with Covid-19 playing a role as to the reason for not completing learnership for 1% of the learners. Although the

3526 participants are completers of WBL learnerships, more than half had not received their qualification certificates, at 56%, by the survey period.

Nevertheless, findings revealed that there has been a considerable incline in employment for both full-time and part-time and a substantial decrease in unemployment, with 7,8 % rise in beneficiaries that are employed full-time. Unemployment fell by 12,8% after completion of the learnership. The number of self-employed also rose from 0.8% to 1.8%.

The Food sector had the highest representation at 47%, followed by the Specialty sub-sector at 28 percent. The CFTA was represented at 18% while Furniture showed 5% and Fuel was least represented at 2%, while on remuneration, most of the employed beneficiaries earned up to R12 800, that is 61%.

A total of 64 beneficiaries indicated that they were self-employed when completing the survey, with 50% of them residing in Mpumalanga and Western Cape. 23% cited Gauteng as their current province of residence while 11% mentioned Eastern Cape. Wholesale and Retail at 39%, Wholesale and Retail Operations Management with 13% and Wholesale and Retail Concepts at 9%, were mentioned as the top three learnerships.

About 16 of the learners mentioned that they went on to volunteer after their learnership, with the peak of volunteering indicated to be in October and December, both months recording volunteering percentages of 19%. NGO/NPOs had the highest volunteers at 44%, with training providers having the least volunteers at 6%. Stipend was also received on a monthly basis by 44% of the respondents. However, amounts varied from one participant to another, with 50% of them were getting less than R3150 while 20% received between R3151 - R3900 and 10% receiving between R3901 - R4300.

iii. Primary Research Findings (Employers)

About 58% of the employers were in the Retail and 28% were in the Wholesale sector whilst 14% couldn't be classified as either retail or wholesale, with sizes varying from 60% small businesses to 26% medium business and 14% large businesses. The size of the business was determined according to the number of employees the business employs, with 0-49 classified as small, 50-149 as medium and 150+ as large businesses.

Many of the businesses, which were part of this study, were from the Gauteng Province with 68%, followed by Limpopo Province with 10%, with 18% of them having between 16 and 20 years of existence. About 75% of the companies indicated that they had participated in the W&RSETA programme, implying that the majority of the industries that participated in this study had direct experience in the learnership programme.

It was worth noting that 26.7% of the companies recruit through referrals from current staff, with 40% of the staff recruited having studied in private training institutions. The majority (66%) of companies who took part in this study indicated that the learnership programme takes more than 9 months.

About 29% of the employers indicated that they use the learners in field work more than any other place in the company. There were 31 other responses (22%) that could not be classified as either office or fieldwork. From those other responses, 45% of them stated that they rotate the learners in various departments. About 21.4% of employers indicated that learners work in one department for the duration of the learnership programme.

Almost all the employers (99%) were of the view that the learnership programme equips learners with skills, knowledge and qualities required within the industry and 94% also indicated the learners were prepared for the workplace environment. People skills (communication and leadership skills) are top of the employers' expectations followed by self-reliance (proactiveness and organisational skills). Furthermore, general employment skills (professionalism, numeracy, and business acumen) were also rated as an important skill for the employers

About 89% of the employers were of the view that most learners possessed people skills (communication and leadership skills) at commencement of the learnership. Employers showed a high satisfaction with learners' general employment skills (proactiveness and organisational skills).

Employers suggested several reasons on how the learnership programme can be improved, with 14% mentioning that there was room for improvement in professionalism. Employers (15%) also indicated that learners fail to complete the programme because

they leave in search of the greener pastures, whilst 20.2% indicated that learners completed the programme.

iv. Conclusions

Largely, the W&RSETA WBL learnership programs were effective in providing beneficiaries with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to gain access to job opportunities.

Through the learnerships, WBL completers were provided with learning-rich environments that resulted in the development of specific skills required in the workplace.

WBL learnerships promoted career development, particularly in terms of broadening knowledge of available career paths.

While beneficiaries have relevant skills for entering the labour market, a lack of employment opportunities prevents them from effectively applying their knowledge and skills. This indicates that, while the learnerships were successful in providing skills, their ultimate goal of reducing unemployment wasn't fully met.

The increase in both full-time and part-time employment demonstrates that WBL learnerships are not only effective in achieving the W&RSETA mandate, but also contribute to the reduction of unemployment, if job opportunities are consistently available.

Less than 1% of learnership graduates were able to start their own businesses after completing the program. This statistic reflects a lack of entrepreneurial development. Establishing and maintaining businesses after completion is important in the sector because it can be a vehicle for job creation and alleviate the high unemployment rates, even if one does not find work. Especially, at this critical juncture with the Covid -19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on unemployment as well as the slow issuance of certificates.

The Literature review and general perceptions from employer participants indicated that the WBL programs appear to be used as a stepping stone for other prospects because they are deemed insufficiently lucrative.

- *One identified gap is that digital transformation is moving faster than the industry can keep up with technological advances. As a result, there is a skills shortage, which WBL does not address.*

This finding complements a PwC study in 2018 of global manufacturing companies whose key findings showed that there were no Digital Champions among the South African companies that participated in the survey. And South Africa was lagging on path towards digitisation

- *When it comes to soft skills, such as communication and leadership, the WBL curriculum falls short.*

Furthermore, the employers' survey findings revealed that:

- *Employers are attempting to foster robust partnerships with training providers to facilitate a better curriculum within the WBL programs.*

According to the findings, the age group 25-34 years has the highest number of WBL participants. It is worth noting, however, that according to Statista.com, (2020), the age group under 25 has the highest unemployment rate in South Africa, at around 63.2 percent. The study also reveals that the majority of WBL participants had a matric or grade 12 education. Over 75% of the 18-24 age group had completed matriculation / grade 12; however, their participation in the program is very low at this age, only to increase when they reach the age of 25-34 years.

v. Research Gaps

The following were identified as research gaps not covered by the survey or emanating from the findings.

Disability – The scope of the questionnaire on WBL completers did not include learners with disabilities. As a result, the findings do not shed light on how WBL impacts disability and inclusion within the sector.

Entrepreneurship – Based on the findings, the low number of self-employed graduates following completion of the WBL program identifies a potential area for development. Entrepreneurship is an opportunity worth exploring if the W&RSETA is to reduce the high number of unemployed graduates, albeit so minimally represented. The most important question is how to ensure successful entrepreneurship. In line with the W&RSETA Skills Development plan of 2019-20 there is a need for a revised focus on entrepreneurship skills development.

Digital transformation - The world over is fast embracing the fourth industrial revolution and South Africa is no exception. Part of the 4IR is digitally transforming the industries just like the cell phone did in the 1990s. However, within the South African context, certain prerequisites must be met to ensure an all-inclusive approach that minimises loss of employment, alleviates discrimination and eradicates monopolies amongst others. This global paradigm shift has created a competitive gap for the country and resultantly, the sector. To assist in creating opportunities for participation in this new era, QRS suggest incorporating the basics of Industry 4.0 must-have skills into the WBL curriculum.

vi. Recommendations

In order to improve the value of W&RSETA's funded learnership programmes, the measures below are recommended:

- ***Manage and share a database of WBL graduates with companies in the Wholesale and Retail sectors to encourage graduate uptake and ensure the relevance of skill development.***

- **Incentivize or encourage WBL graduates to volunteer** at training providers. This will help to bridge the gap between qualification and employment as well as enable the ability to apply new knowledge in the workplace.
- Enforce and improve the W&RSETA certification policy and procedures to **expedite the issuance of certificates** by the W&RSETA QQA so as to avoid delays in job applications.
- **Establish a system for conducting bi-annual tracer studies** to assess the success rate and efficacy of the learnerships. As a result, impact evaluation and planning should be addressed beyond NSDS III.
- There is a critical need to **expand access to skill development beyond specialized skills** in order to ensure comprehensive skill development for participants. Industry 4.0 digital economy skills need be integrated into the curriculum and to enhance employability, both entrepreneurial and soft skills may be developed. Conflict resolution, effective communication, and Customer Service Training are just a few examples of soft skills for the retail industry.
- **Bolster the co-operatives and community partnerships; specifically, the Community Retail Development Programme (CRDP)** to include more low-income urban communities and **extend the training curriculum** to include entrepreneurship. This will help increase the positive outcomes of the WBL programmes as entrepreneurship in urban communities will promote competitiveness and further grow the local 'Township' economy.
- **Implement an aggressive WBL Awareness strategy** to increase the visibility of the W&RSETA in communities while also targeting the 18-24 age group. According to Zetlin (2018), those in their early twenties have a better chance of finding work than those in other age groups. This strategy will address the possibility of low visibility, as evidenced by the fact that most of the programme recruitment is through referrals, and will target the 18–24-year age group so that they are engaged early on and do not waste 4-5 years attempting to establish themselves only to pitch up when they are 25 and above for the WBL program.
- According to the evidence gathered in section 8.2.1, only 14 percent of the companies that participated in this study were large companies. QRS recommends

that W&RSETA engage with larger companies more because they have the potential to employ many learners. According to the company's website, Shoprite employs over 140 000 people. As a result, QRS recommends that such large corporations and SMEs be involved in and encouraged to participate in W&RSETA WBL programs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CATI	Computer Aided Telephone Interviews
CFTA	Clothing, footwear, textiles and accessories
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DP	Data Processing
QRS	Quest Research Services
ToR	Terms of Reference
VFM	Value For Money
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SLA	Service Level Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
SA	South Africa
EC	Eastern Cape
FS	Free State
GP	Gauteng
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LIM	Limpopo
MP	Mpumalanga
NC	Northern Cape
NW	North West
WC	Western Cape
W&R	Wholesale and Retail
W&RSETA	Wholesale and Retail SETA

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The skills development landscape of South Africa is one that requires constant innovative thinking on the part of Sector Education Training Authorities so as to keep up with the training needs of the labour market. In order to ensure that the Wholesale and Retail sector also develops and contributes to the labour market, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) was established in 2000 in terms of the Skills Development Act (as amended).

The mandate of the W&RSETA is to facilitate skills development within its sub-sectors, through the disbursement of grants for learning programmes and monitoring of education and training as outlined in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).

The W&RSETA is one of the twenty-six Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) established in terms of the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998), as amended. The aim of this act was to improve the skills of workers by promoting education and training in the workplace. The act governs the National Skills Authority and Fund, the skills development levy-grant scheme, the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs), labour centres and the Skills Development Planning Unit¹.

The Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999 was thereafter developed as a follow-up to the Skills Development Act. This act was developed to encourage companies to promote training and learning in the workplace. The act indicated that if a company pays their Skills Development Levy every month, they are entitled to the following benefits: Skills development grants and Substantial tax allowances when they implement Learnerships in their respective companies.

W&RSETA also carries a responsibility of evaluating the outcome of the education, training, and skills development intervention. This is done through tracker and tracer studies. Tracer studies are designed to determine whether or not a programme is

¹<http://www.gov.za> > documents > skills-development-act

achieving its mission and assist in demonstrating the programme's outcomes. This includes:

- *Employment status (i.e., employed, self-employed and unemployed)*
- *Employment rates*
- *Match between qualifications attained and occupations*
- *Nature of employment, in terms of employment sector or types of employment. (e.g., formal, or informal); tenure (part time or full time, contract or permanent); salary level; benefits (UIF, pension, medical aid, allowances); and*
- *Identifying a need for any further studies.*

Such tracker and tracer studies are in line with the SETA Grant Regulations of December 2012² and the White paper on Post School Education and Training³. The White Paper also recognises the importance of partnerships between educational institutions and employers. Most students are preparing for careers in the labour market, and practical experience in the world of work is an invaluable part of their training. Even those students who do not find jobs in the formal labour market benefit from practical workplace experience through initiatives such as Work-based learning (WBL), as they seek alternative ways of earning sustainable livelihoods. Employers must be drawn closer to the education and training process; they are among its major beneficiaries and must contribute to its success.

WBL is an educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop their employability. It is a series of educational courses which integrate the school or university curriculum with the workplace to create a different learning paradigm.

Work-based learning deliberately merges theory with practice and acknowledges the intersection of explicit and tacit forms of knowing. All these acts, ultimately, feed into the

²www.dhet.gov.za › DHET 2012 SETA Grant Regulations Gazette 35940

³www.dhet.gov.za › DHET 2012 SETA Grant Regulations Gazette 35940 (Minister's Preface)

National Development Plan (NDP) which has a core aim of eliminating poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.

- *QRS provided W&RSETA with data collection and reporting services aimed at tracking and tracing learners who participated in and completed Workplace Based Learning (WBL).*

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) was established in 2000 in terms of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (as amended). This public entity is responsible for supporting skills development in the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector of South Africa through the implementation of learning programmes, disbursement of grants and monitoring of education and training as outlined in the Act. The W&RSETA is governed by a number of legislative frameworks which include: Skills Development Act, 1998; Skills Development Levies Act, 1999; Public Finance Management Act, 1999; Regulations regarding the Establishment of Sector; the National Treasury Regulations and others.

The W&RSETA has two wings, the Wholesale trade, and the Retail trade. Wholesale trade deals with the bulk buying of goods from various manufacturers and the breaking down of this bulk into smaller quantities which is then sold to the retailer. Retail trade deals with the buying of goods from the wholesaler and selling of such goods to the consumer. The actual activities that fall within the scope of the wholesale and retail sector are demarcated according to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes.

Key Role Players

Key role players within the sector include individual retailers and wholesalers that due to their size have a significant impact on the sector. This influence may be exerted directly, for instance through contribution to total sales, or indirectly, through buying power, or through participation in industry organisations. Associations that play a role in the Wholesale and Retail Sector include the stakeholders outlined in the following table.

Table 1: Role Players in the Wholesale and Retail Sector

Role Player	Description
Business Unity South Africa (BUSA)	BUSA is a confederation of South African chambers of commerce and industry, professional and corporate associations, and unisectoral employers' organizations. BUSA's key role in the Wholesale and Retail Sector is supporting and developing the role of small and medium Wholesale and Retail Sector business enterprises
Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA)	CGCSA is a member organisation that acts as the representative body of the entire consumer goods industry. The CGCSA facilitates engagement between stakeholders in the industry, and they represent the interests of the industry to the government and other relevant parties
The FET Committee	The committee includes representatives from the FET sector. The FET Committee has an important role to play in accommodating scarce and critical skills within the sector
FRA	FRA is an association of fuel service station owners. The Association monitors and becomes involved wherever necessary with retail fuel governance, distribution and sales in South Africa in order to protect and enhance fuel retailers' interest.
The HET Committee	The committee includes representatives from the higher education and training sector. The HET Committee has an important role to play in accommodating scarce and critical skills within the sector.

Labour	Organised labour is a key component of the sector, and as such has a critical role to play with regards to skills development.
Association of Private Providers of Education Training and Development (APPETD)	APPETD is as an alliance of the Association of Private Colleges of South Africa (APCSA), Association of Private Distance Colleges (APDEC), Association of Technical Providers (ATP), and INPROV. APPETD renders services that are specifically aimed at the needs and interests of its members and private providers as a whole
South African Petroleum Retailers Association (SAPRA)	The South African Petroleum Retailers Association (SAPRA) represents and promotes the interests of Petroleum Retailers in South Africa. SAPRA is a constituent association of RMI
Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI)	The RMI is the retail and associated motor industry organisation focused on enabling motor traders to deliver high end service to motoring customers in South Africa.
SMMEs (Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises)	Small retail enterprises constitute 78% of the sector's employers, and as such represent a key stakeholder group in the sector ⁴

Billiett, (2009) document that the development of partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and employers is seen as a critical factor in identifying learning requirements to improve the relevance of education, and facilitating access to education and learning. In this context, curricula should involve employers and labour institutions, and must respond quickly to the changing needs of the economy (Cedefop, 2010). However, the

⁴Source: W&RSETA 2017

problem is with implementation of the Work-Based Learning (WBL) by the higher education systems (Nowotny et al. 2001).

In addition, there are some cases of strong resistance to changing the traditional university curricula based on mystification and “pure contents” into more flexible and individual curricula based on labour experience should be implemented. The benefits of WBL for students are clearly enhancing employment chances, exposure to work experience, and helping with employment contacts, among others (Cedefop, 2013). However, Cedefop, (2013) assert that the benefits for organizations and society are not as obvious in the short term as they may become in the medium to long term. Moreover, WBL is only possible if the world of work and academia work together OECD (2002).

2.2 Background of the Work-Based Learning

Work Based Learning which is also known as Work-Integrated Learning or Experiential Learning has been widely accepted by a number of employers for student’s vocational skills development and employability (Musset, 2019; SETA, 2018; Brennan & Little, 1996 and Confederation of British Industry, 2014). An important starting point in looking at WBL is the contribution that it can make to the productivity of firms and to innovation in enterprises. The internal organization of firms, the structure and organization of work, employee relations and wage structures can all interact to promote learning-rich work, and hence to raise productivity and innovation.

According to Cedefop, (2016) WBL is a career-focussed learning which integrates theoretical knowledge with workplace practical application, within a vocationally designed curriculum; this is in line with Patrick et al, (2008) which also brings together theory and practise in learning. Queensland University of Technology, (2011) document that WBL is the process that occurs in the curriculum where students learn through engagement with industry and community partners in authentic activities that are planned for and assessed in order to develop and integrate their knowledge, skills and dispositions through creative problem solving in real world contexts (Taylor and Govender, 2013). In the light of the above, WBL is a component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of theory in an authentic, work-based context. The various definitions given addresses

specific competences identified for the acquisition of a qualification, which relates to the development of skills that would make the learner employable, and would assist in developing their personal and professional skills.

The student has to acquire knowledge in a particular field of study, and then applying it in practice. Thus, work based learning focuses on theory and practice, it is aimed at developing specific competence that forms part of the overall curriculum; and it relates to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in an integrated way; it is achieved through the placement and hosting of students by employer organisations; it is facilitated by workplace mentoring, aimed at helping the student recognise their strengths and development needs; and it is dependent upon a structured training relationship between the university, the host employer organisation and the student (Cedetop, 2016).

Harvey (2002) is of the view that work experience hugely enriches the learning experience and reduces the mismatch of educational outcomes and workplace requirements. In South Africa, a key aspect of South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision 2030 (2011) is sustainable development, with business, government and civil society playing inter-related roles, in order to improve the lives of all South Africans (Taylor & Govender, 2013). The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) is one of a range of recent skills development and human resource draft legislation that highlights the responsibility of higher and further education and training institutions to ensure that the education and training they deliver meets the needs of the economy.

WBL is used in vocational education and training to develop basic work habits, occupational identity, and specific occupational competences. However, due to its attractiveness as a powerful form of learning, it can also be used for a wider range of educational purposes. For example, it can be used as a way to motivate disadvantaged, disengaged and failing students by giving them the opportunity to experience success through applied learning in practical settings and the opportunity to come in contact with adult mentors and role models (Marsh, 2011).

The career development literature shows that experience of and in work can be a valuable way for young people to sharpen and clarify their career plans. Good career education

programmes incorporate systematic experience of learning from work, using techniques such as work shadowing, research projects about the nature of work, work visits, and carrying out real work tasks. The benefits of this type of WBL for career decision-making are improved when participants have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and share it with others (OECD, 2018; Guile & Griffiths, 2001). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019) refers to widespread opportunities for young people to combine learning and work as one of the key features of successful transition systems. Work and formal study can be combined in a number of ways: through formal work-study programmes such as apprenticeships, cooperative education and through students having part-time jobs after school and at weekends that do not have a formal connection to their programme of study, and where the learning that takes place is incidental to the students' formal education

Additional Wilton, (2012); arguments in favour of WBL within vocational education and training that it can be a way of more closely involving employers in vocational education and training, thus increasing their confidence in the system, and of increasing the link between learners and the labour market in order to improve their opportunities of employment after they complete their training. There is also an economic argument for the use of WBL within vocational education and training, in that transferring the cost of achieving learning outcomes from publicly funded educational institutions to enterprises results in a reduction in public expenditure and a capacity to use a given level of funds more effectively to achieve wider participation in education and training. Learning that uses plant and equipment on employer premises not only results in it being more up to date with current industry practices, thus leading to skills with greater relevance, but also reduces the cost to the public purse that would result if educational institutions had to purchase the equipment.

The Higher Education Qualifications Framework, promulgated by the South African Department of Education in 2007, supporting effective learning in the workplace suggested that employers be involved by:

- Offering financial support for items such as essential work clothes (overalls, uniform) and lunches taken on employer premises.
- Providing a supportive atmosphere, based on well-established policies and procedures to deal with equal opportunities, health and safety, bullying, etc.
- Ensuring that supervisors understand their support roles.
- As far as possible, allowing trainees access to the same support services as employees.
- Supporting learners if they feel their on-the-job experience does not suit them; if possible, help them to find alternative learning opportunities within the company.
- Providing the support of a mentor (in addition to the support provided by a workplace supervisor).
- Spotting learners who are losing motivation or seem discontented and discuss with them the reasons why. It could be because the tasks assigned to them are too complex or, on the other hand, insufficiently challenging.
- Adopting a strategic approach to employer involvement: make sure that steps to involve employers are recognised as an important element in the training provider's business plan and culture.
- Maintaining and use good records of employer contacts that are shared within the organisation. Involve employers in monitoring/evaluating learning programmes and making a strategic input to planning the content of programmes.
- Seeking to widen the base of employer support by using existing employer contacts and by networking with other agencies.
- Not losing patience when contacts fail to produce results, be persistent and try other avenues.
- Synchronising on- and off-the-job learning, so that learners readily appreciate the relevance of theory to practical applications.
- Identifying real and challenging opportunities for learning and problem solving on the job.
- Enabling learners to reflect on the tasks they undertake in the workplace and the problems they encounter, in such a way that they build up their knowledge base and draw on it when needed.

- Enlisting the active involvement of supervisors, mentors and peers (where appropriate) in the learning process.
- Where possible, involving trade union learning representatives in providing additional learning support.
- Ensuring that a full and timely response is made and that managers are involved if a placement runs into serious difficulty and breaks down.

The reasons mentioned above gives the point of view by Higher Education Qualifications Framework of 2007. From the reasons above, the employers, students, and W&RSETA are viewed as key players in the success of work-based learning. Hence, the Workplace Based Learning Programme Agreement (WBLPA) Regulations came into effect on 01 April 2019 and repealed the Learnership Regulations of 2007 to harmonise the keys players in SETAs. The WBLPA Regulations regulate the preparation, submission, registration, and management of workplace-based learning programmes. The regulations were implemented for the first time in the 2019/20 period. The successful implementation requires strong partnerships with various stakeholders from the supply and demand component of skills development. This calls for the WBLPA to be tested overtime to see its effectiveness (W&RSETA 2019/2020).

2.3 The Current Status of the W&RSETA

According to the year 2017/2018 W&RSETA report, the Wholesale and Retail Sector employed 3.161 million people, or 20.4% of the total active labour force. There are 87 790 active Wholesale and Retail enterprises. These consist of 77 196 small (88%), 2370 medium (3%) and 919 (1%) large enterprises. There are 7305 (8%) unclassified enterprises. Annual Performance Plan report for 2019/2020 documents that during the 2019/2020 period about 19005 companies paid levies. Gauteng has the largest concentration of enterprises (37%); Western Cape has 18% and KwaZulu-Natal 15%. In top management, 6.3% of Africans compared to 73.6% of Whites are represented. Female representation is 20.8% across the board with 2.2% Africans, 1.4% Coloureds and 2.8% Indians. The corresponding figure for White females is 1.8%. A similar picture

emerges for senior management and professionals. In the unskilled category, Africans make up 85.9%, Whites 1.5%, Coloureds 9.7%, and Indians 1.4%. In 2016/17 the skills levies received from small enterprises was R94 627 million and the grant disbursement was R32 398 million indicating a 34% pay-out. However, in 2015/16 the skills levies received from small enterprises was R255 851 million and the grant disbursement was R12 948 million indicating a 5% pay-out. A similar picture emerges for medium and large enterprises.

Key drivers of change within the W&RSETA include: technology advancements, mobile applications, internet usage, power shift to consumers, online shopping, social media, cyber-crime, mobile phones, social networking, ethical issues, eco-friendliness, and greening. The wholesale and retail industry is rapidly changing as a result of these key drivers mentioned above. Additionally, multinational companies are expanding rapidly into Africa and increasing their presence, some more aggressively than others. This has brought changes that include: growing economy, population growth, supply chain efficiencies, human resources, managing risk/reward trade-off. The SMME sector in South Africa is relatively large and source products from wholesale companies (Billet, 2009).

2.4 The destinations of students after work-based learning

The perceptions by stakeholders with respect to patterns and students' trends that take place after the WBL in the Wholesale and Retail sector indicate that there is significant attrition in the sector. Most students use this training as a stepping stone towards attaining skills and qualifications to go and use in other sectors. The working conditions for Wholesale and Retail Sector staff are not attractive enough compared to other sectors to retain staff. According to Wilton (2012), employees are likely to resign for a better proposition elsewhere once they have obtained the training or experience. Furthermore, Australian Government, (2020) documents that the technological changes in the sector have made some people find themselves occupying positions that they are not comfortable with as a result some opt to resign and move out of the system. Finding by

Krug and Wilton, (2012) assert that some students after completing the WBL opt to start their own enterprises and use the knowledge and skills gained during their WBL.

In many highly developed economies, WBL arrangements are associated with relatively low-skilled occupations. In the countries like United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany all WBL students in 2009–10 were only at Level 2 of the national qualifications framework (NQF), and were in relatively low-skilled occupations and in industries such as customer service, retailing and hospitality (Marsh, 2011). In Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt there is a long tradition of WBL, with legislature that stems from the 1970s and well-developed systems for financing WBL through taxes and national apprenticeship development funds (Chesters and Haynes, 2016). WBL is available in over 300 classifications and at five levels of qualification, ranging from semi-skilled to advanced technician. WBL forages over 40% of the human resource to the economies of the above-mentioned African countries (Marsh, 2011). Most students after WBL in these African countries find themselves back in the sector permanently employed. In some instances, these students migrate to countries in Europe to find better opportunities (Marsh, 2011).

2.5 Factors influencing graduate employment and unemployment

The concept of employability has been discussed for a number of years but there has been a growing interest in graduate employability over the last decade. As the interest in promoting graduate employability has increased, Sila, and Hemmings, (2019) assert that numerous studies have produced detailed breakdowns and nomenclatures of particular skills and attributes required to promote graduate employability such as core skills; key skills; common skills; transferable skills; essential skills; functional skills; skills for life; generic skills and enterprise skills. According to Harvey et al, 2002 cited in Holden and Jameson, (2002), most employers are looking for graduates who are proactive, and can use higher level skills including ‘analysis, critique, synthesis and multi layered communication to facilitate innovative teamwork in catalysing the transformation of their organization.

The literature indicates that employers want graduates who can adapt to the workplace culture, use their abilities and skills to evolve the organisation and participate in innovative teamwork. Employers also value critical thinking as this is required for innovation and anticipating and leading change (Harvey et al, 1997; Little 2001 in Lees 2002). Additionally, according to (Mason et al, 2003), the concept of employability is centred on the development of communication, numeracy, information technology, and learning how to learn. Moreover, authors like Rothwell and Arnold (2007) have moved towards a more complex understanding of graduate employability and proposed a number of inter-related attributes, skills and competencies that help individuals to both secure and perform well in employment. Rothwell and & Arnold (2007) proposed an approach for understanding employability that was based on interrelated components which included wider contextual factors like the student academic performance, ambitions, confidence, skills, abilities, strength of the University brand or reputation field of study and the student awareness of the opportunities and external labour markets.

While there are variations in the classification of employability, there is a broad understanding of what qualities, characteristics, skills, and knowledge constitute employability both in general, and specifically for graduates. Employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities. However, the extent to which these factors are embedded across the Higher Education sector is unknown but seems highly variable. This is despite key developments in government policy to encourage institutions of higher learning and employers to work together to develop approaches that contribute to graduate employability. Further, Allison et al, (2002), documents that there are still issues and barriers between employers and many of those responsible for policy in Institutions of higher learning, particularly in terms of differences in mind set, expectations and priorities concerning employability.

In general, employers consistently highlight generic skills as being of foremost importance when selecting graduates (Marsh, 2011), implying a highly skilled graduate is therefore more likely to attain full-time employment upon graduation. Wilton (2011), however,

argues that there is no empirical evidence of high-quality skill delivery in undergraduate programs, from the graduate perspective, resulting in better post-graduation employment outcomes, this lack of evidence echoed by others (Coates & Edwards 2011; and Mason et al. 2006).

According to Wilton, (2011) age determines employment outcomes, mature graduates experiencing more difficulties in accessing suitable employment than their younger counterparts. Wilton also notes that the younger graduates may benefit more from employability interventions at university, such as skill development. Wilton found variations in employment trends by gender, supporting previous studies which indicate salary differentials (Webster, Castano and Palmen 2011) and better long-term employment prospects for male graduates (Coates and Edwards 2011). Coates and Edwards (2009) found those from non-English speaking backgrounds were less likely to be in full-time employment in their first year of graduation. There is also evidence of ethnic minorities reporting inferior job attainment outcomes to majority groups (Wilton 2011) and those with disabilities relative to those without (Riddell et al. 2010).

Furthermore, findings by Pegg et al. (2012) indicate that career management, labour market awareness, networking and applying for positions, is increasingly acknowledged as important to graduate employability. Bridgstock, (2009) agrees with Pegg et al (2012) that the skills mentioned above will positively impact on employment outcomes and that actively seeking work will result in more employment success (Krug and Rebien 2011). Students may search for jobs via centralised or Faculty-level university-based career services (Mayston 2002). Taylor and Govender, (2013) found no empirical link between take-up of university careers advice and graduate employment outcomes although there was evidence of a positive relationship between perceived quality of advice and job attainment. Strategic networking enhances employment prospects (Archer and Davison 2008) and having access to a social network, which is able to provide constructive and helpful careers advice, is also important (Taylor, 2013). The traditional job searches strategies, such as responding to newspaper advertisements, online job searches and circulating resumes, also remain popular methods of seeking employment (McKeown and Lindorff 2011).

2.6 The mismatch between qualifications and occupation of students after work-based learning

According to Cedetop, (2016), qualification mismatch refers to a situation in which a person in employment, during the reference period, occupied a job whose qualification requirements did not correspond to the level or type of qualification they possessed.

The qualification mismatch includes the job mismatch which has three dimensions that are education-job mismatch, qualification-job mismatch or skill Job mismatch and the field of study job mismatch. In this approach, the qualification mismatch is measured by measuring the various specific attained skills that are possessed by the workers and the required skills in their current job (Laurdes et al., 2005; and Archer & Davison 2008).

The mismatch by level of education arises when the level of education of the person in employment does not correspond with the level of education required to perform their job. These can be classified as over education in which the level of education and training of the person in employment is higher than that required to perform their job, under education occurs when the level of education and training of the person in employment is lower than that required to perform their job (Cedetop, 2010).

Furthermore, Hodge et al. (2017), document that there is mismatch by field of study. This occurs when the field of study of the person in employment does not correspond to the field of study required to perform their job. Persons in employment working in a job unrelated to their field of study) are treated as persons in employment with a mismatched job. Skill mismatch refers to a situation in which a person in employment, during the reference period, occupied a job whose skills requirements did not correspond to the skills they possessed. Skill mismatch may refer to mismatch of overall skills or a mismatch of type of skills. A mismatch of type of skills includes: Mismatch of job-specific or technical skills; mismatch of basic skills; mismatch of portable skills (McGuinness et al 2017).

A person in employment may experience over skilling, which arises when the level and/or types of skills of the person in employment exceeds those required to perform their job. Under skilling, is where the level and or type of skills of the person in employment are

lower than those required to perform their job. Most academic and policy analyses on mismatch have focused on education mismatches, mainly because the data needed to estimate such mismatches, such as data on occupation, level of educational attainment and or field of study, are widely available from existing household-based surveys and establishment-based surveys (Riddell et al 2010).

Skills development is extremely important for building the “virtuous circle” in which the quality of education and training stimulates innovation, investment, technological change, enterprise development, economic diversification and competitiveness needed for economies to accelerate the creation of additional and more productive jobs. However, the rapid changes occurring in the global economy and society such as increasing global competition, the skill-biased technological change, or the ageing of population in European countries make it sometimes difficult to find the right people for the right jobs. Although some studies support the idea of a temporary or individual phenomenon, empirical evidence shows that education and skill mismatch in Europe and world over is universal (Cedefop 2010). A better matching between the potential of workers (qualifications and/or skills) and actual jobs is essential for combating unemployment and boosting competitiveness. Furthermore, a good job matching may improve the welfare of individuals and, as already mentioned, bring positive effects on the productivity and growth of the economy (Marsh, 2011 and Riddell et al 2010).

The prior studies by (Marsh, 2011 and Riddell et al 2010) show that the mismatch between qualification and occupation maybe as a result from both labour demand and supply factors. Supply factors include the transferability of skills acquired in formal training in the particular field (with those degrees that have a higher emphasis on the provision of general skills as opposed to job, field or occupation specific skills being more likely to promote out-field employment). Pay and promotion, career interests, working conditions, job location, family-related reasons, and other preferences a worker has for different job characteristics are other supply-side factors predicting the mismatch between qualification and job. Demand factors driving qualification and job mismatch refer to the fact that a job in the related occupational group is not available (Glass et al, 2008).

2.7 Perceptions of student about Work-Based Learning

Misko, Chew and Korbel, (2020) documents that students believe that the WBL can help them attain high quality careers services and provide careers advice; employers can offer them relevant work placements to provide valuable experience to pick up additional skills and awareness of that type of work.

In the previous studies by (Laurdes et al., 2005; and Archer & Davison 2008), students and graduates saw placements or internships and work experience as particularly effective modes to enhance graduate employability. This was apparent across all sectors and sizes of employers. However, a key factor in the usefulness of work experience and placements was the duration of the experience. For the students and employers to acquire the full benefits of this type of experience, it had to be at least six months or preferably longer (NCVER (2019), Lourdes et al, 2005). The findings by Laurdes et al, (2005) corresponds to the findings of the Pay and Progression for Graduates survey conducted in 2005, involving 96 employers from the Incomes Data Services (IDS 2005), which found that year-long sandwich placements and vacation work were valued by employers and students were an important factor in gaining skills and experience.

Student believes work-based learning allows them to get some practical skills that they wouldn't be able to have if they were just in a university environment. The students tended to value the extra-curricular experiences at university and work experience more highly than their degree's content (except in specialist areas), seeing these as adding to their CVs and helping to secure employment (Krug and Rebien 2011).

However, learners do not want to study what they have already learned, they want to have content that directly relates to their work, and assessments that involve applied projects (Neyt, et al, 2018, Avis 2010; and Manjuand & Mampilly 2012). Furthermore, some students value theory over WBL as they belief that employers prefer people with qualifications over those with experience. Hence some students prefer to do theory and letter on start looking for a job (Archer and Davison 2008).

2.8 Employer perceptions about student who completed WBL

A study by Archer and Davison (2008), considering the perspectives of employers on graduate employability, provides a contrast between what some universities are promoting and what is required by industry. Employers were in agreement about what were considered to be the most important skills that they look for in graduates. Archer and Davison (2008) found that regardless of the size of the company, 'soft skills' (e.g., communication skills and team-working) were perceived to have more weight than technical or 'hard skills' (e.g., a good degree qualification, IT skills). Indeed, Glass et al (2008) found that a minority of employers in their case studies recruit individuals from universities specifically for the technical skills that they hope they will bring to the organisation. Rather, most employers see a degree as a proxy for achieving a certain level of competence that represents the minimum standard that they are seeking in a new recruit. Archer and Davison (2008) stress that such findings convey a strong message to institutions of higher learning. The findings here illustrate that universities need to equip graduates with 'deep' intellectual capabilities and applied practical skills which will make them more 'work-ready' (Archer & Davison (2008)).

OECD, (2018)'s view is that different employers need graduates who have different capabilities. All value the analytical and reflective qualities that lie at the heart of a quality learning experience. But there is a growing emphasis by employers on the need for graduates to demonstrate a range of competences which will equip them to work in a global environment, in different countries, in multi-cultural teams, be innovative and enterprising and have strong language skills. Additionally, the employers assert that the design of degree courses and student experience in general should articulate with the needs of business and emerge from a strong working partnership with employer organisations. At the same time academic quality, content, focus and the integrity of courses should not be compromised (Glass et al, 2008).

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

The purpose was to determine whether the Workplace-Based Learning program is reaching its goals and to aid in the demonstration of the program's outcomes by conducting a Workplace Based Learning (WBL) tracer study, with a focus on W&RSETA funded Learnerships between the years 2015 – 2018. However, due to the advent of Covid-19 pandemic it was found necessary to also look at how the global pandemic had affected the destinations of the learners and, as a result, the scope included funded learnerships in years 2019 to 2021. The evaluation questions were;

- *What are destinations of students who have completed WBL?*
- *What factors influence graduate employment and unemployment?*
- *What is the extent of mismatch between the qualifications and occupations of employed learners who completed WBL programmes?*
- *What are student perceptions of whether they are well prepared for the world of work?*
- *What are employer perceptions of learners who have completed WBL programmes, particularly in terms of their knowledge, skills and attributes?*

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodology in the form of Computer Aided Telephone Interviews (CATI) was used to collect data from respondents. CATI is an electronic data collection method of interviewing in which researchers use a telephone and a computer to conduct interviews. In this method, the interviewer reads questions over the phone to the respondent and enters the respondent's answers directly into the computer.

Additionally, for those participants who were not available to complete the survey over the telephone, a survey link was sent to them via email for self-completion. The latter method was not fruitful as none of the respondents that requested emailed surveys successfully completed and submitted surveys.

A social media campaign was enlisted and flighted on the W&RSETA Facebook page with the purpose of soliciting learner participation. Even though media hype was created in the first week of the launch, a total of 10 responses were received over four weeks and those were of prospective learners that were interested in applying for a learnership.

For the learners' survey, provincial databases were received from W&RSETA. These were cleansed of duplication using ID numbers and contact numbers. A cleaned database of over 35200 learners remained; of this database over 18 700 attempts were made which resulted in 3526 successful interviews, inferring an 18% response rate. The majority of the attempts were voicemail, ringing without answer, and numbers that no longer existed.

With the employers' survey, contact details of stakeholders were obtained from the W&RSETA's head office. Three thousand employers in various provinces were then contacted and some were sent introductory emails to solicit participation. Ultimately, 100 companies comprising mainly of Gauteng, Limpopo, and Western Cape provinces participated, implying a 3% response rate. These were companies that vary in size, national footprint, ownership, and trade categories.

SAMPLING

A total of 3626 interviews were completed comprising of 3526 learners and 100 employers. Below highlights the achieved sample per province for both sample cohorts.

Table 2: Sample distribution of Learners

Province	Population	Total respondents contacted	Successfully completed Interviews	% Of total achieved sample
Eastern Cape	2 094	1 096	209	6%
Free State	2 195	1 250	223	6%
Gauteng North	7 088	3 974	709	20%
Gauteng South	4 195	2 746	492	14%
KwaZulu-Natal	7 418	4 156	742	21%
Limpopo	2 216	1 126	223	6%
Mpumalanga	3 651	2 018	366	10%
North West	1 682	524	168	5%
Northern Cape	494	340	49	1%
Uncategorised	46	12	0	0%
Western Cape	3 447	1 552	345	10%
Total	35 246	18 794	3 526	100%

Table 3: Sample distribution of Employers

Province	Population	Total respondents contacted	Successfully completed Interviews	% Of total achieved sample
Eastern Cape	163		1	1%
Free State	79	8	3	3%
Gauteng North	3 025		68	68%
KwaZulu-Natal	43	1	1	1%
Limpopo	15		10	10%
Mpumalanga	22		3	3%
North West	16	1	3	1%
Northern Cape	11		1	3%
Uncategorised	16 392	2990	2	8%
Western Cape	1 531		8	2%
Total	21 297	3 000	100	100%

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involves gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Hox & Boeijs, 2005). The tracer study on W&RSETA learning programmes was administered to beneficiaries who completed the programme in the form of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). The questionnaire sought to track and keep record of the activities of candidates who completed the WBL learnerships which were funded by W&RSETA from the financial years 2015 to 2018

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS was used to analyse the collected data. A frequency analysis was then run on the descriptive statistics of the sample, and the responses were analysed for suitability for further data analysis. The open-ended responses were vetted if they correctly answered questionnaires, were coded, and the returns entered into Excel files that were later processed using SPSS.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

8.1 Learners

This section presents results from the survey of WBL learners who completed the learnership.

8.1.1 Provincial distribution of learners

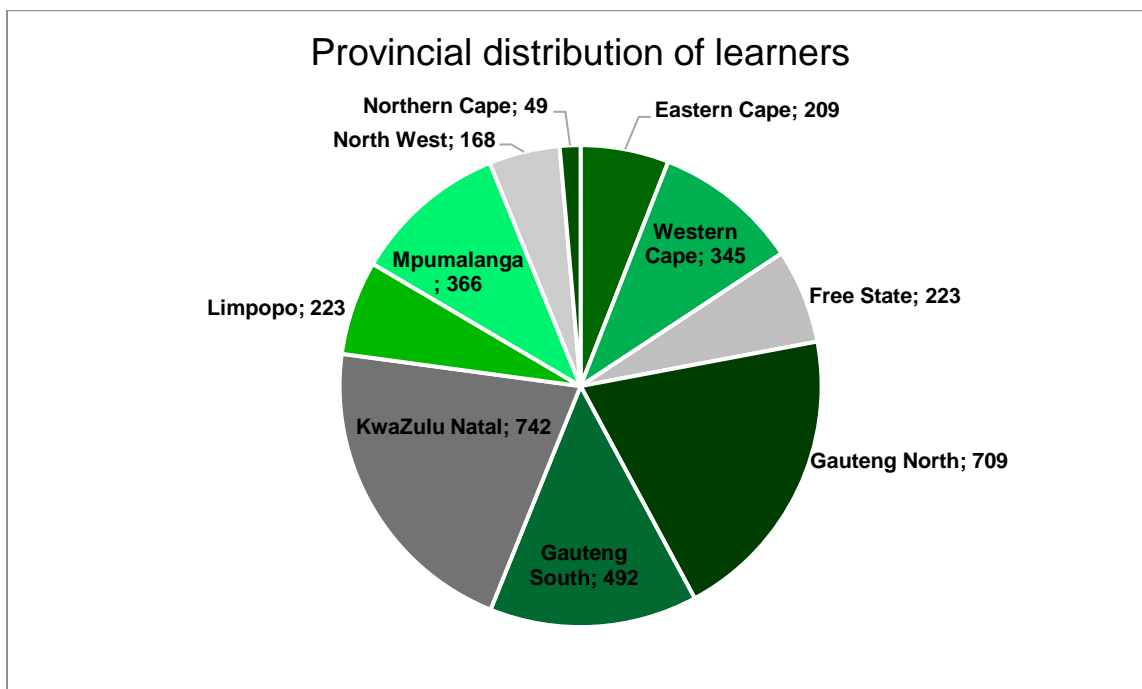


Figure 1: Provincial distribution of learners

Overall, the highest numbers of WBL tracer survey participants were recorded in Gauteng with a combined total of 1201, KwaZulu Natal with 742 participants, followed by Mpumalanga with 366 and Western Cape with 345 participants. Northern Cape registered the lowest number of survey participants with 49 participants. This breakdown is by the learner region indicated in the W&RSETA WBL learner database.

8.1.2 Profile of WBL tracer participants

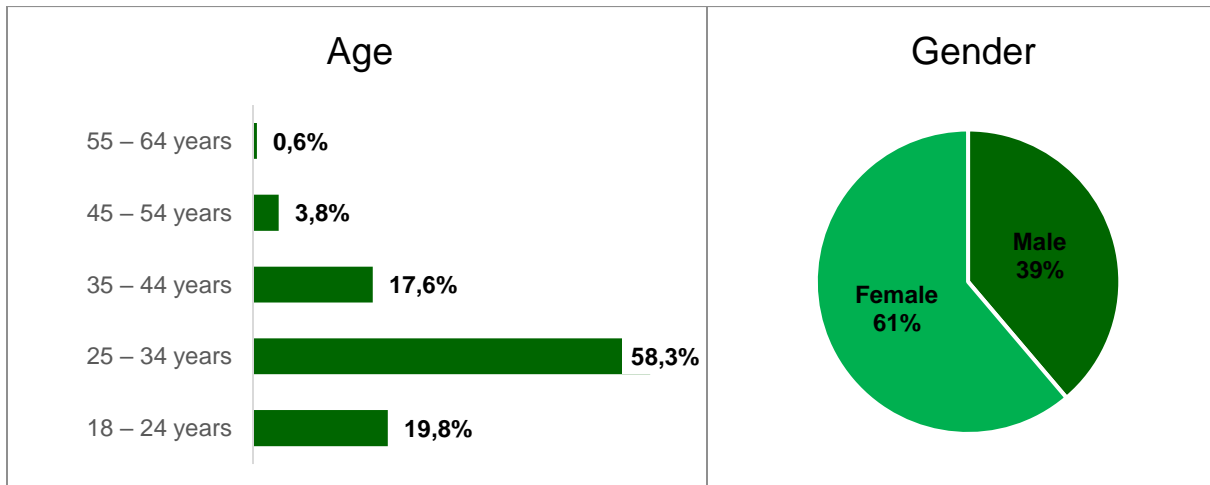


Figure 3: Age profile of WBL tracer participants

Figure 2: Gender profile of WBL tracer participants

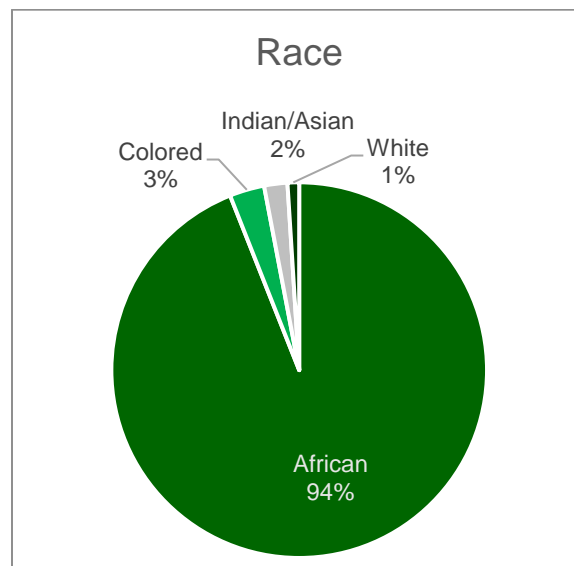


Figure 4: Race Distribution of WBL tracer participants

About 61% of the research participants were female and 39% male, with the majority of them being of the 25–34 years age range, followed by the 18–24 years age group. More than 20% of the participants were 35 years and over. This is interesting to note as it suggests an openness of the W&RSETA to fund older beneficiaries in the interest of lifelong learning. Most of the population group were Africans at 94%.

8.1.3 Education profile of WBL tracer participants

With respect to the education profile, the majority, 64% of the learner participants, indicated their highest education level as Matric or Grade 12 as presented below.

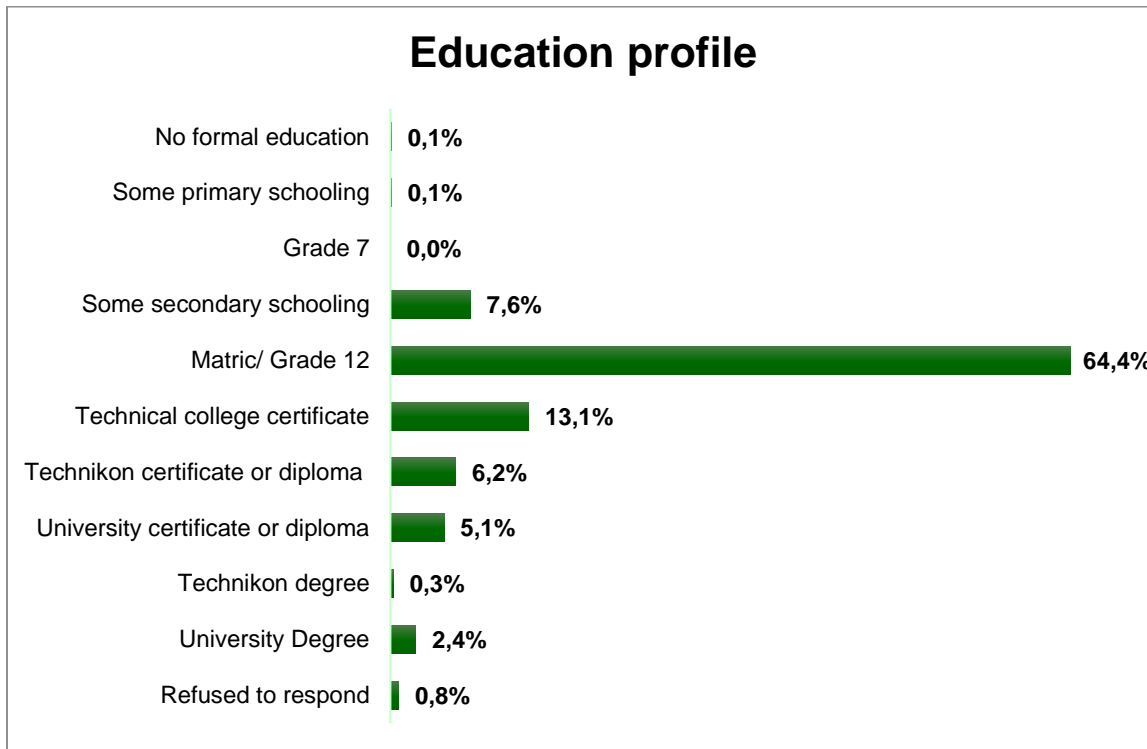


Figure 5: Education profile of WBL tracer participants

Some 13 percent of the participants indicated a technical college certificate as their highest level of education acquired whereas a Technikon certificate and a university certificate were indicated at 6% and 5% respectively.

8.1.4 Year of completion

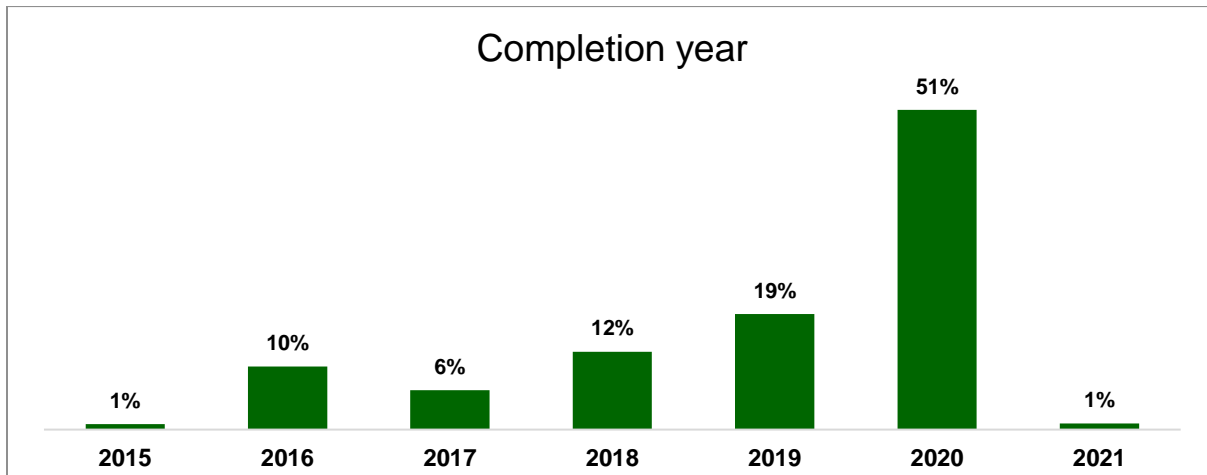


Figure 6: Year of completion

Half of the learnerships were completed in 2020 at 51%. The original scope of 2015 to 2018 makes up 29% of the interviewed WBL completers. In line with the revised scope due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 70% of the learnerships were completed in 2019 and 2020. 1% of the participants completed the learnership in the year of data collection. What was interesting to note was that 1% cited Covid-19 as the reason for the delayed completion.

8.1.5 Receipt of certificate upon completion of WBL learnership

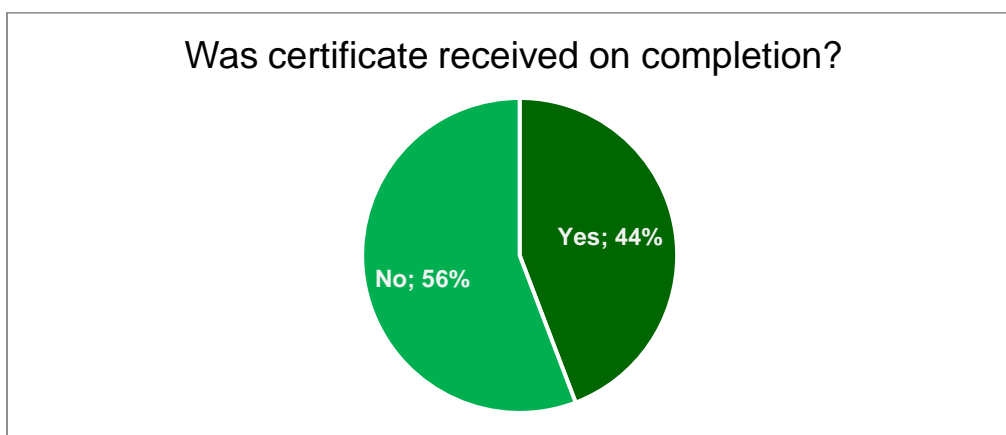


Figure 7: Receipt of certificate upon completion of WBL learnership

Although the 3526 participants were completers of WBL learnerships, more than half, at 56 percent, had not received their qualification certificates at the time of completing the tracer survey.

8.1.6 Employment status



Figure 8: Employment status before and after the WBL learnership

Half of the respondents (1762/3526) of the survey indicated they were employed after completing the learnership. Those employed full-time made up 41.2 percent and the rest 8.7 percent were employed part-time.

The findings show an increase in employment, both full time and part time and a substantial decrease in unemployment. Those employed full-time showed a rise of 7,8%, whereas unemployment fell by 12,8% after completion of the learnership. The numbers of self-employed beneficiaries also rose from 0.8% (28/3526) to 1.8% (64/3526) following graduating from the WBL learnership. 53% (34/64) of the businesses started post completion.

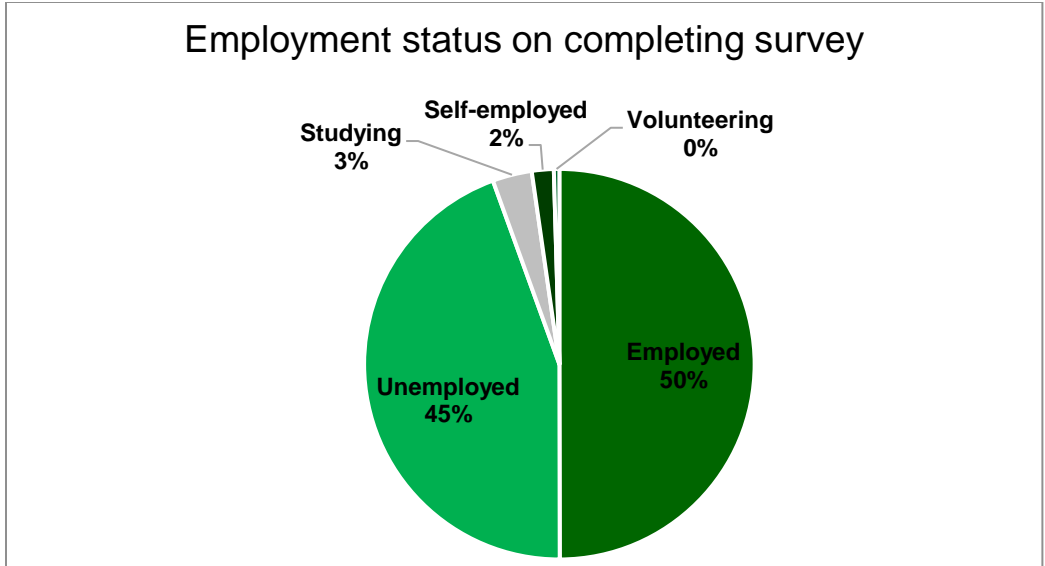


Figure 9: Employment status on completing the tracer survey

Figure 9 illustrates that at the time of completion of the survey, about 50% of the WBL completers indicated that they were currently employed while almost 45% cited being currently unemployment. An additional 3% said that they were studying and nearly 2% at the time were self-employed. Under 1% of the completers revealed that they were volunteering.

8.1.6.1 Currently employed beneficiaries

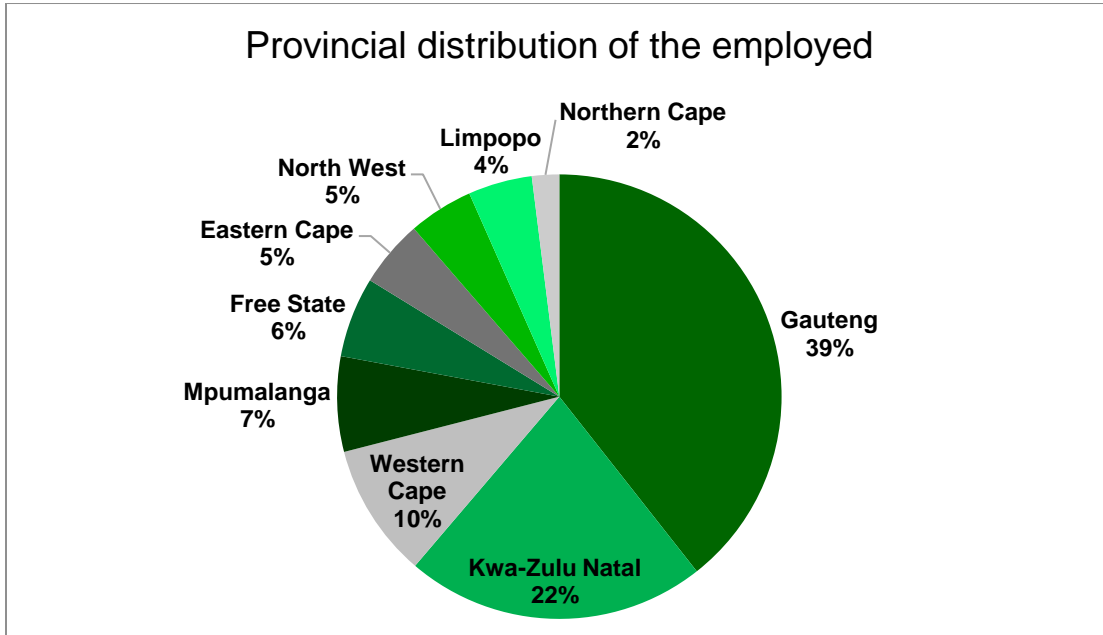


Figure 10: Provincial distribution of employed beneficiaries

Learner participants that were currently employed when completing the tracer survey showed that Gauteng had the highest employment figures at 39 percent followed by Kwa-Zulu Natal and Western Cape at 22 percent and 10 percent respectively.

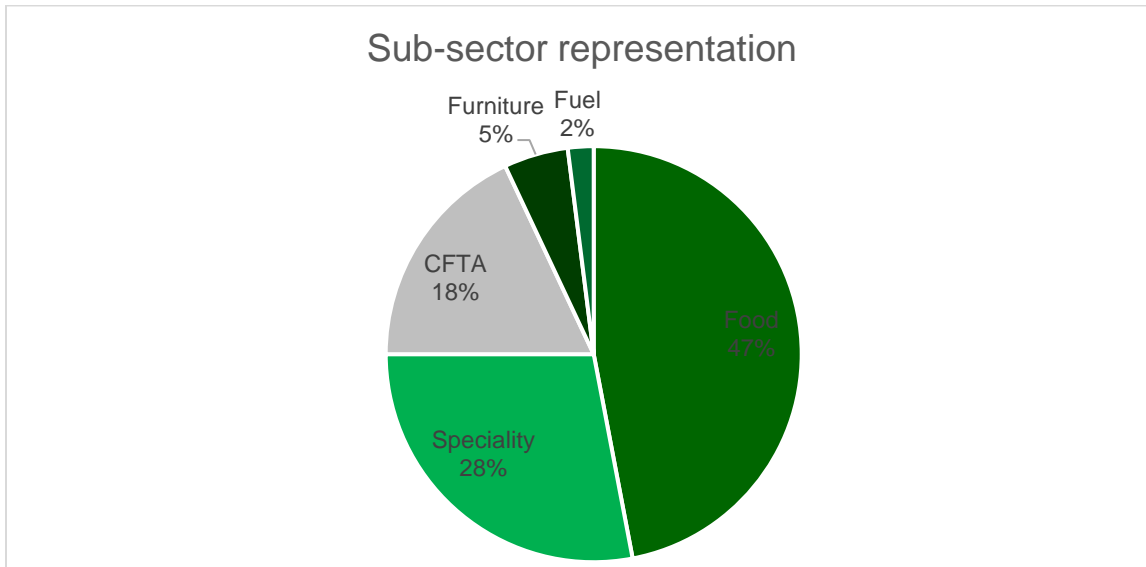


Figure 11: Sub-sector representation of currently employed

In terms of W&R subsector representation of the currently employed, Food had the highest representation at 47 percent followed by the Specialty sub-sector at 28 percent. The CFTA was represented at 18% while Furniture showed 5% and Fuel was least represented at 2%.

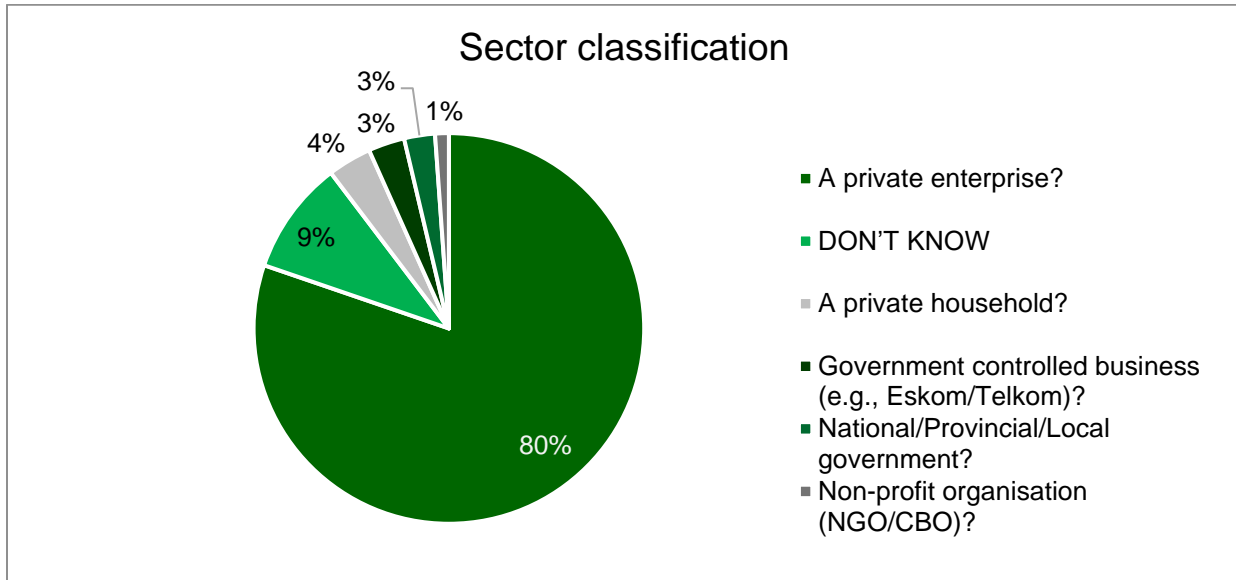


Figure 12: Sector classification

80% of the currently employed WBL completers showed that they are in the private sector, while 3% indicated that they are employed in State owned businesses. Another 3% were in government and 1 percent in Non-profit organisations. Interestingly, 9% didn't know how to classify their organisations by sector and 4 percent indicated being employed in a private household.

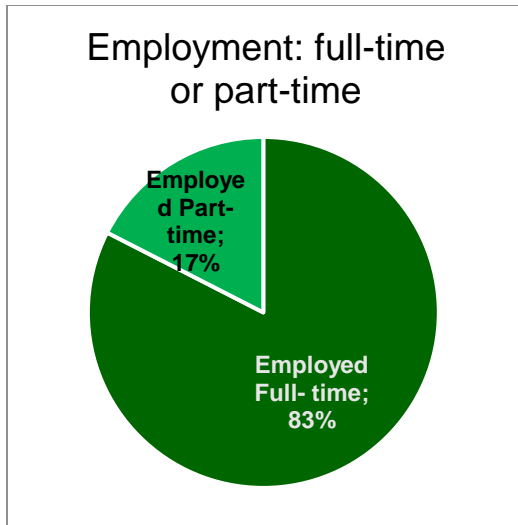


Figure 13: Employment tenure

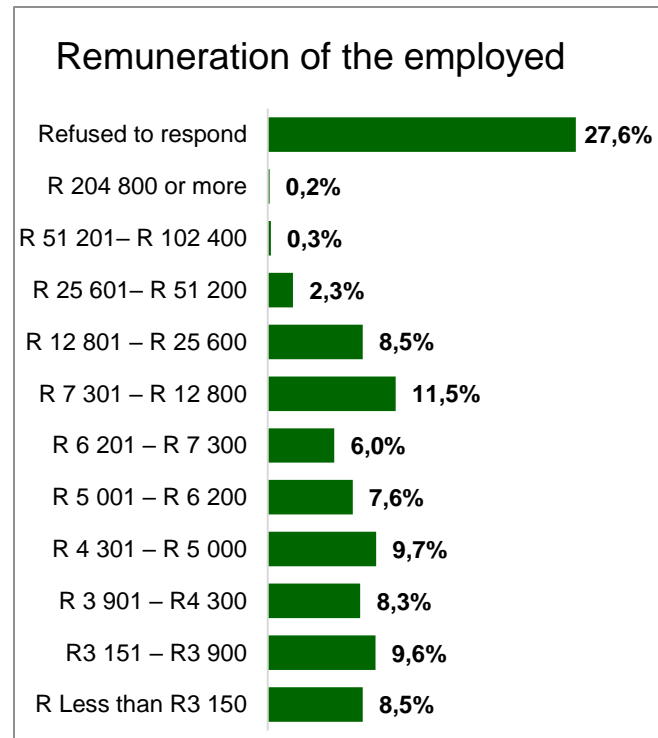


Figure 14: Employee remuneration

Regarding employment, 83% of the 1762 WBL tracer participants were employed in full time positions, while 17% were in part time positions.

The majority of the employed beneficiaries earned up to R12 800, that is 61 percent. And although over 27% of the participants refused to disclose their salaries, a combined 11% of the 1762 beneficiaries earned above R12 800. Interesting to note was the balanced distribution of beneficiaries across the 61%.

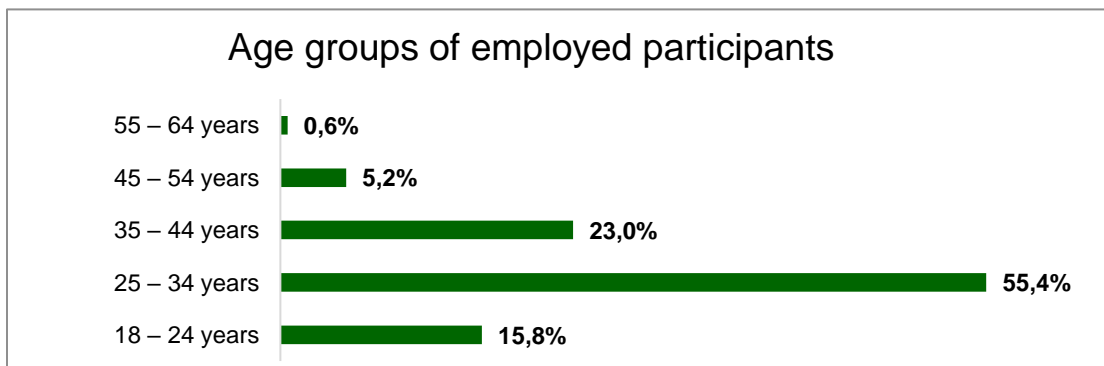


Figure 15: Age groups of currently employed WBL tracer participants

Most of the learner participants, who indicated that they are currently employed, were between the 25 to 34 years age group at 55.4%, followed by the 35-44 years age group at 23%. The younger youth age group of 18 to 24 years had a representation of almost 16%. Of those learners that indicated that they are employed, over 94 percent (1661/1762) were under the age of 45 years.



Figure 16: Completed WBL learnership of the currently employed

Six WBL learnerships account for 80 percent of the beneficiaries who indicated that they were employed at the time of completing the survey. 35 percent said their completed learnership was in Wholesale and Retail, while 16 percent mentioned it was in Wholesale and Retail Operations Management. A further 15% revealed Wholesale and Retail Concepts, with a further 6% indicating Wholesale and Retail Operations. Wholesale and

Retail Management accounted for 5%, with Wholesale and Retail Operations Supervision recording 4%.

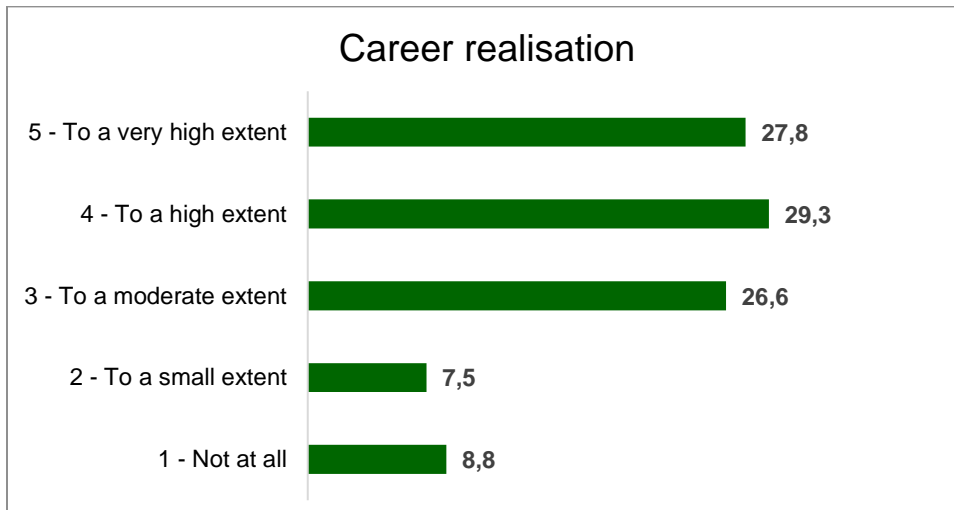


Figure 17: Career realisation

Over 93 percent felt the programme had provided a positive guidance in a career path. This sentiment harmonises with that of the 84 percent that believe that they have been able to realise the careers they expected at the time of completion. And particularly 57 percent (1006/1762) that indicated a high to a very high extent of career realisation. It was also interesting to find that 87,5 percent (1542/1762) of the employed learners stated that their work was related to what was learnt in the learnership.

There was a fair balance of position change with 42 percent stating that their positions had changed for the better.

8.1.6.2 Self-employed

A total of 64 beneficiaries indicated that they were self-employed when completing the survey. Whilst offering real-world learning opportunities, the learnership further helped them to harness their career progression. Whilst some waited in the unemployment band wagon, others, albeit a few, took matters to their own hands and set up enterprises utilising the skills and knowledge acquired during the learnership.

The following charts demonstrate the profiling of the self-employed WBL participants. We start off with the provincial distribution of the self-employed beneficiaries and the gender profile.

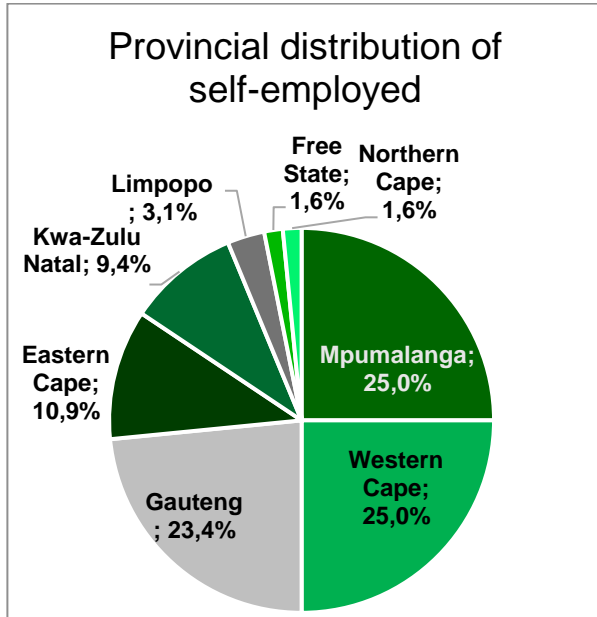


Figure 18: Provincial distribution of self employed

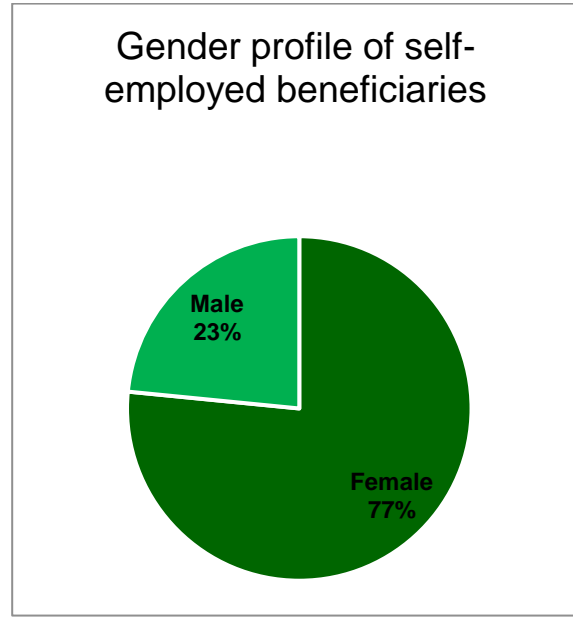


Figure 19: Gender profile of self-employed beneficiaries

Some 25 percent of the 64 self-employed WBL tracer participants indicated that they were resident in Mpumalanga and another 25 percent in the Western Cape. 23% cited Gauteng as their current province of residence while 11% mentioned Eastern Cape. There were no respondents from the North West province among those who took part in this survey. In terms of gender distribution, 77 percent of participants were female, while 23 percent were male. Thirty-five (35) beneficiaries indicated that they had not yet received their W&RSETA certificates.

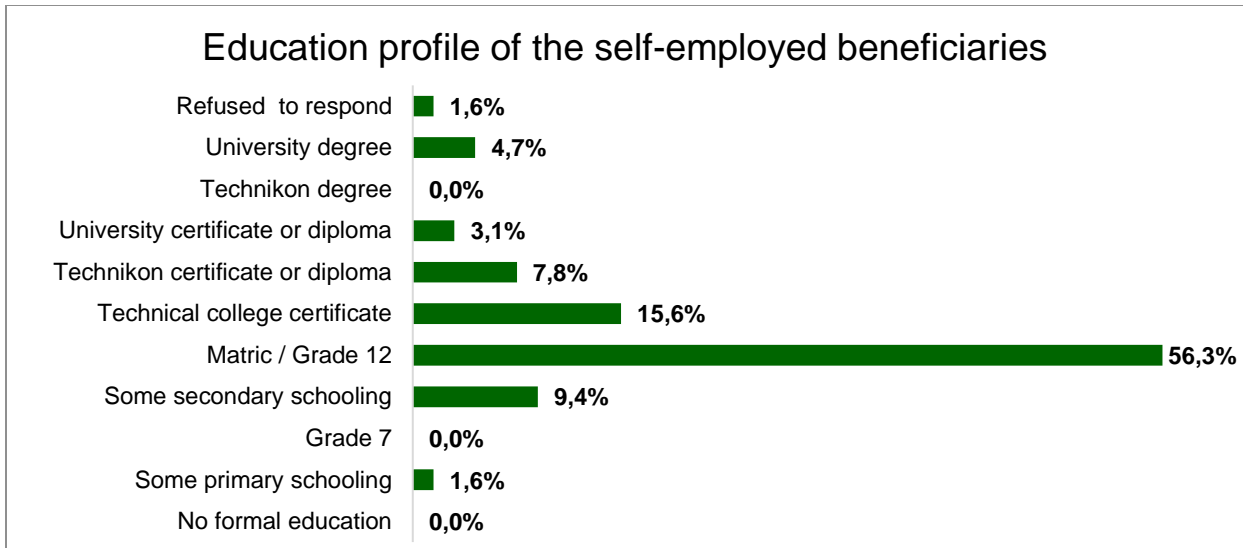


Figure 20: Education profile of the self-employed beneficiaries

In terms of the education profile, the majority of the WBL tracer participants’ highest level of education was Matric /Grade 12 at 56 percent while a further 15.6 percent indicated that they held a Technical College certificate.

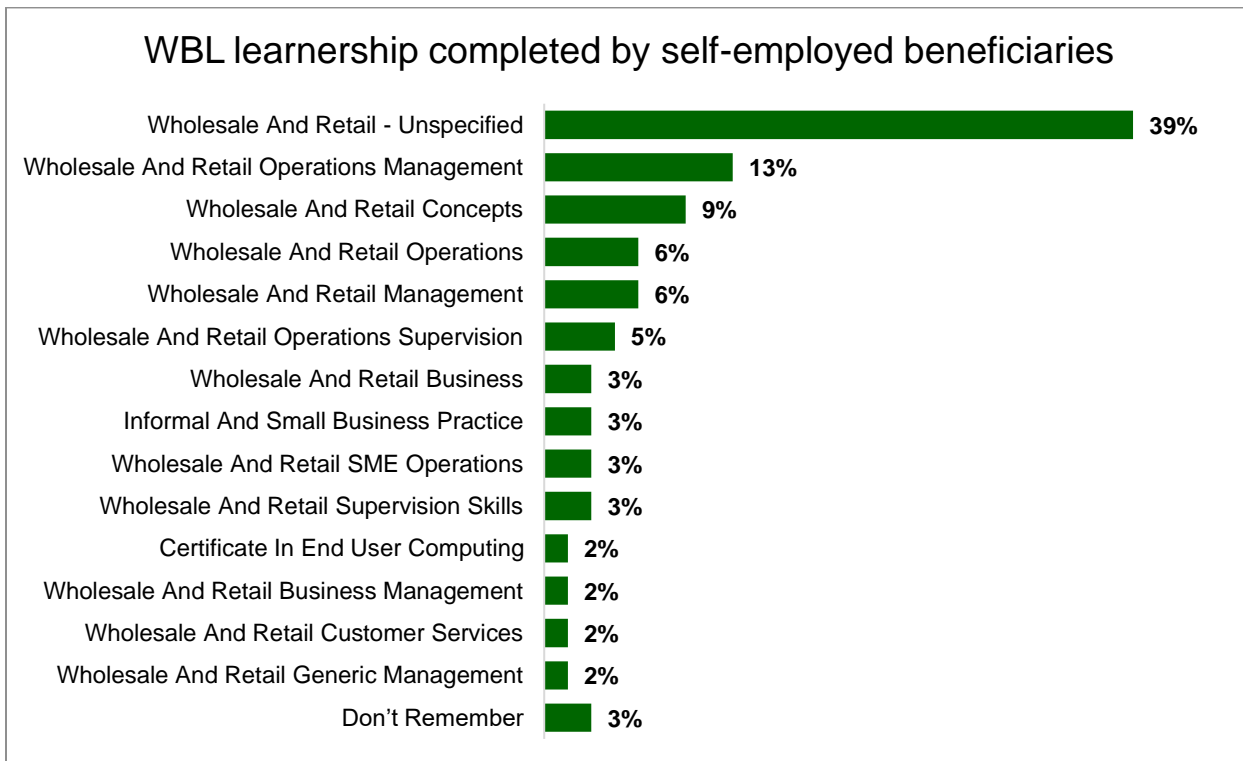


Figure 21: WBL learnership completed by self-employed beneficiaries

With respect to the WBL learnership completed, eighty-one percent of the beneficiaries mentioned seven (7) titles. The top three mentioned learnerships are Wholesale and Retail at 39%; Wholesale and Retail Operations Management with 13%; and Wholesale and Retail Concepts indicated at 9%. Two beneficiaries did not remember the title of their W&RSETA funded learnership.

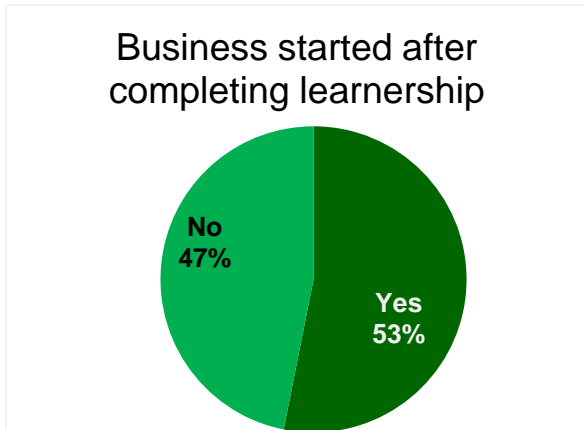


Figure 22: Business started after completing learnership

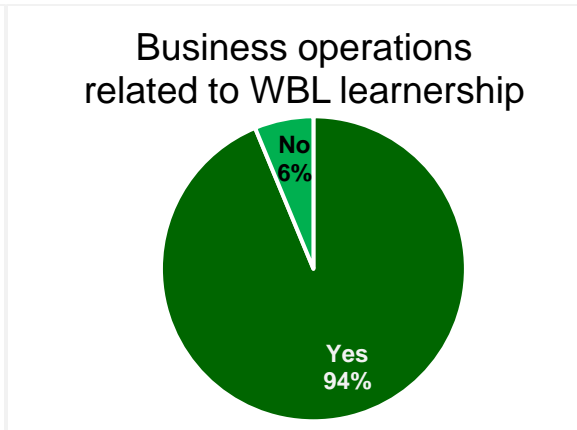


Figure 23: Business operations related to WBL learnership?

A total of 34 beneficiaries that participated in the WBL tracer study started their businesses after completion of the learnership. All participants indicated that they employ between 1 to 9 employees.

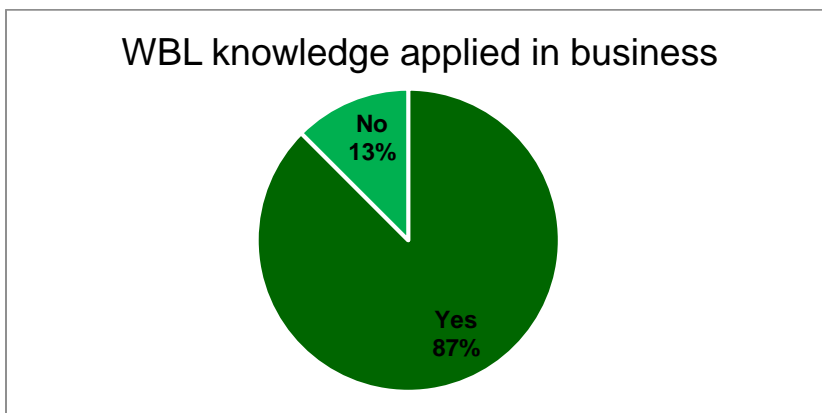


Figure 24: WBL knowledge applied in business

In terms of established businesses, 94 percent indicated that their enterprises were related to what they learned in the WBL learnership and 87 percent mentioned that they were applying the knowledge acquired during the learnership in their businesses.

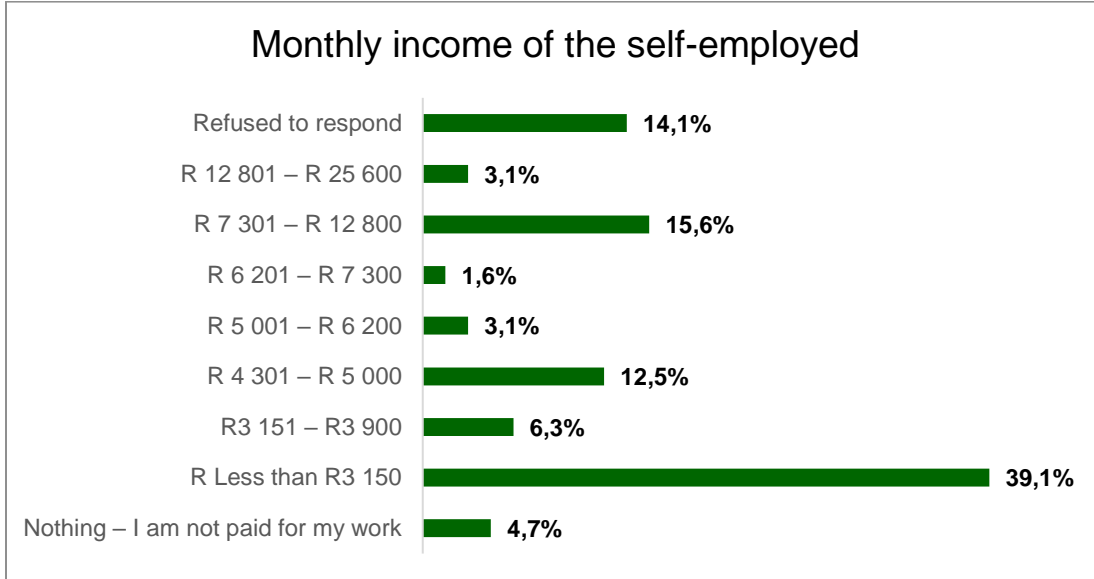


Figure 25: Monthly income of the self-employed

The findings show that remuneration of the self-employed is largely below R3150 at 39 percent. While 15.6% indicated that they earn between R7 301 and R12 800, 14.1% chose not to disclose their income. This may suggest the level of discomfort associated with new business income since the over half the businesses were started after completing the learnership.

8.1.6.3 Unemployed

There was a total of 1569 WBL learnership completers that indicated that they were currently unemployed at the time of completing the tracer survey. The following charts reveal the profiling of these WBL participants. We commence with the provincial distribution and the age profile of these unemployed beneficiaries.

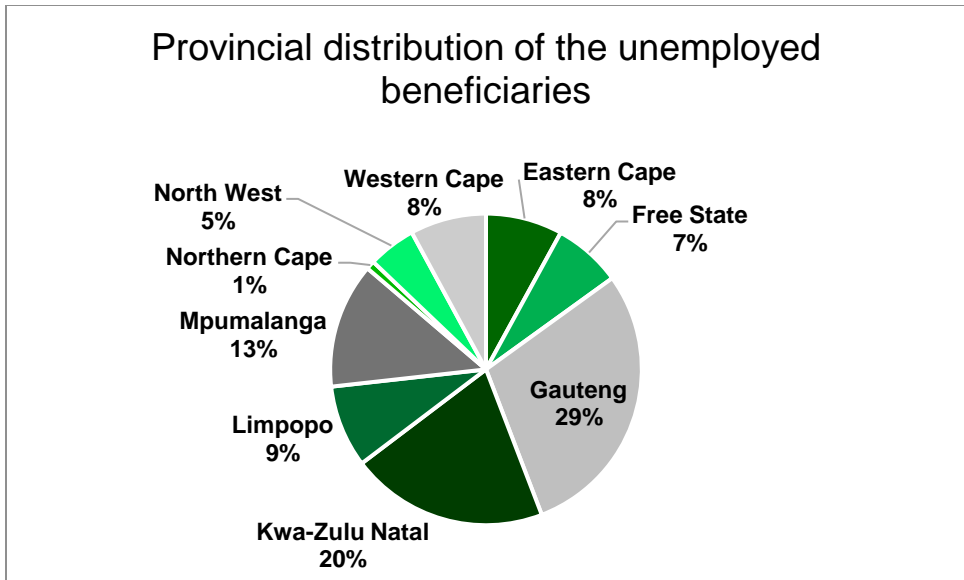


Figure 26: Provincial distribution of the unemployed beneficiaries

The provincial distribution chart displays how almost half of the unemployed beneficiaries reside in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal. Gauteng showed the highest residency at 29 percent, followed by Kwa-Zulu Natal at 20 percent. A further 13 percent highlighted Mpumalanga. The province with the least representation of unemployed WBL completers was Northern Cape at one (1) percent.

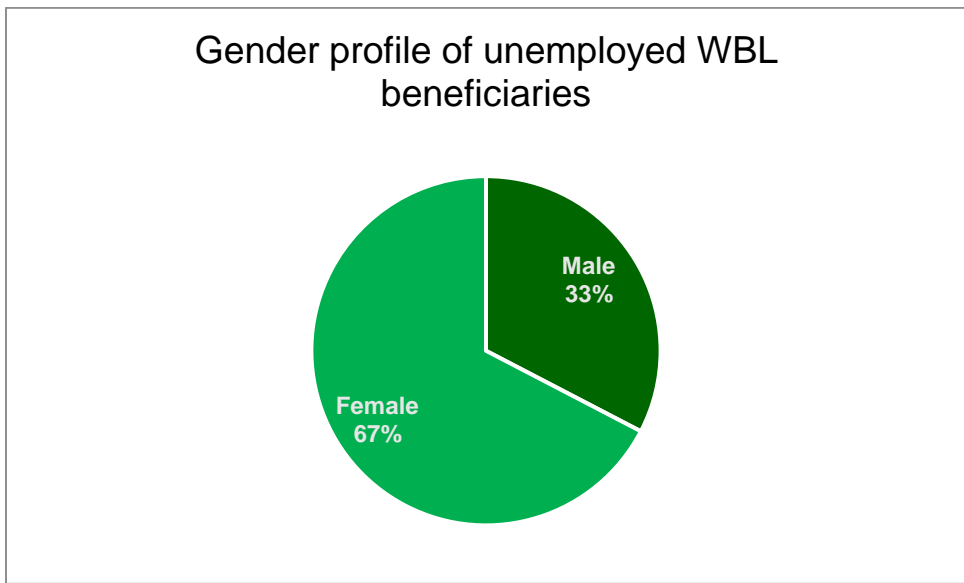


Figure 27: Gender distribution of the unemployed beneficiaries

The gender profile exposed that the unemployed female beneficiaries were twice the number of the unemployed male beneficiaries. This was represented by sixty-seven percent (67%) and thirty-three percent (33%) respectively.

Of the 1569 unemployed beneficiaries, 218 mentioned that they had never been employed.

A total of 1538 beneficiaries – which is 98 percent of the unemployed beneficiaries at survey completion – indicated that they were looking for a job while 24 participants mentioned that they had given up looking for a job. There were seven (7) beneficiaries that stated that they did not need to work despite being unemployed at survey completion.

The chart below seeks to illustrate the reasons not having a job.

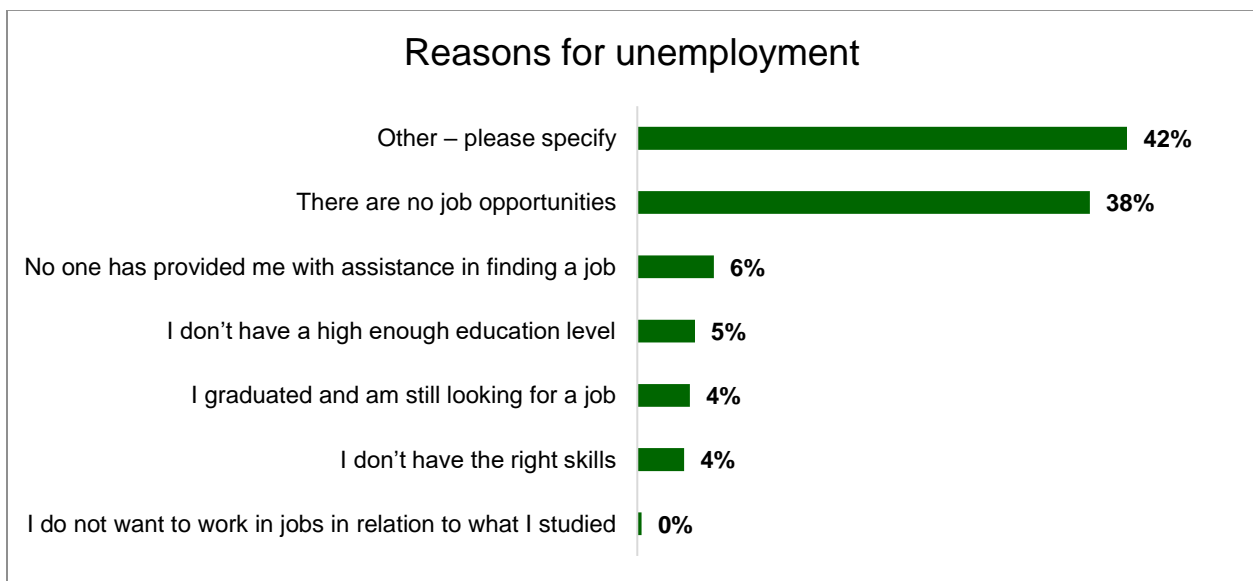


Figure 28: Reasons for unemployment

Thirty-eight (38) percent of the reasons for unemployment that were mentioned was that there are no job opportunities. Six (6) percent cited that there was no one to assist in finding a job and another five (5) percent indicated that not having a high enough education level.

The top four other reasons mentioned were; Covid-19 implications, waiting for my certificate, I don't know and employers do not hire me. These make up over 80 percent of the other reasons.

Table 4: Ways to look for work

Ways to look for work – (top 5 mentions)	Frequency	Percent
Mailed / faxed / e-mailed my CV to companies / organisations	1297	45%
Gone from door to door looking for work	583	20%
Used social media	295	10%
Asked family or friends	163	6%
Asked friends / relatives for assistance	100	3%

The above table indicates the top five ways to look for a job as mentioned by the learners. These five mentions made up 84% of the channels utilised. The most mention was mailing of CVs to prospective companies at 45% followed by going from door to door looking for work representing 20 percent. Ten percent mentioned using social media to look for work. Soliciting family and friends / relatives were bottom of the top mentions.

Interesting to mention is that 59% of the unemployed participants did not receive their qualification certificates. And of those that received their certificates only 55% received them on time.

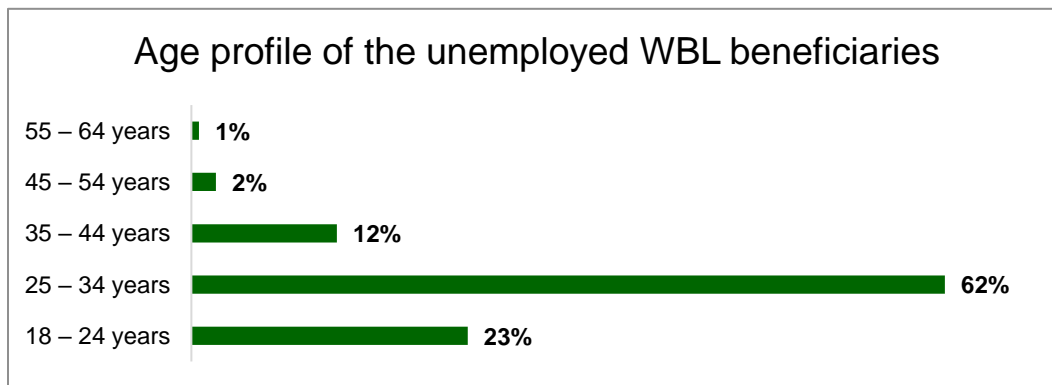


Figure 29: Age profile of the unemployed WBL beneficiaries

The majority of the unemployed beneficiaries were youth. Those under 35 years made up 85 percent of the unemployed with the 25 to 34 years age group at 62 percent.

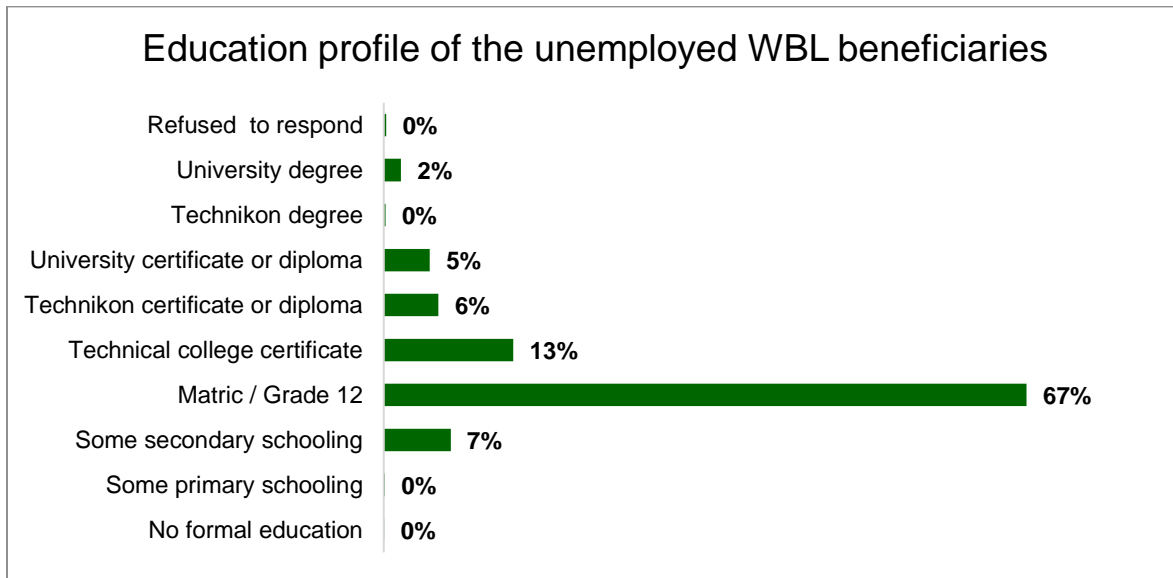


Figure 30: Education profile of the unemployed WBL beneficiaries

Looking at the education profile of the unemployed beneficiaries, eighty (80) percent of them held a Matric / Grade 12 or a Technical college certificate as the highest qualification. A Matric / Grade 12 qualification was highest represented at 67 percent, while a Technical college certificate registered 13 percent, followed by some secondary schooling at 7 percent.

8.1.6.4 Studying

A total of 115 WBL learnership completers indicated that they were studying further at the time of completing the survey.

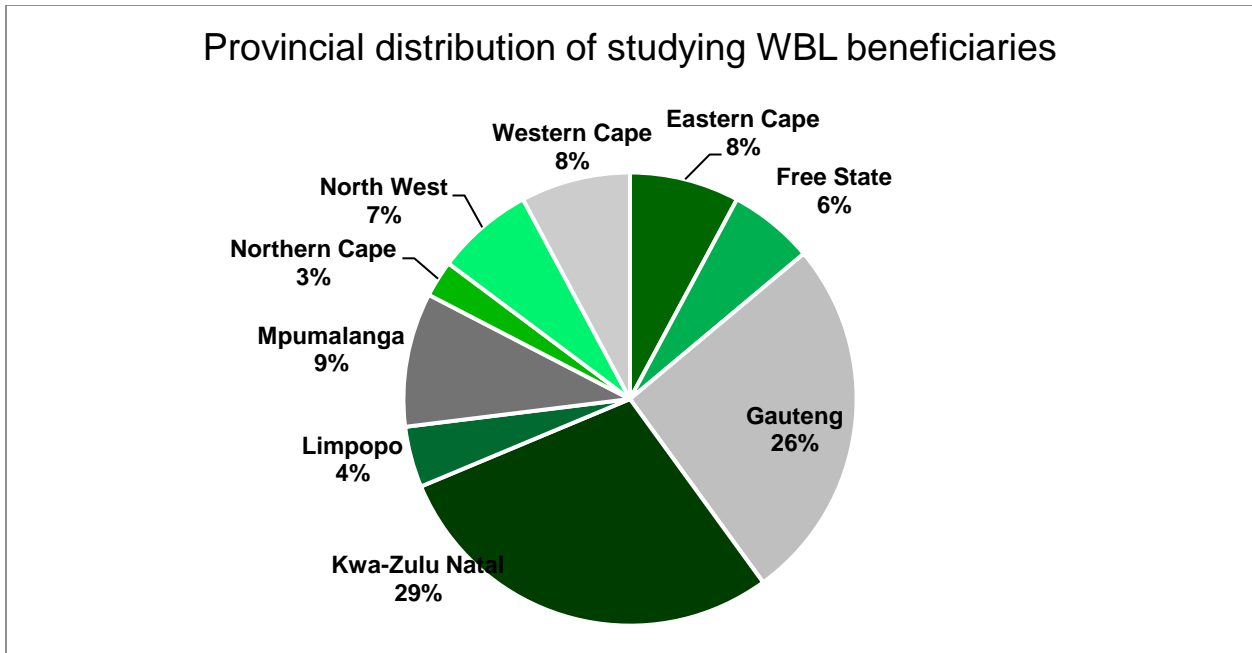


Figure 31: Provincial distribution of studying WBL beneficiaries

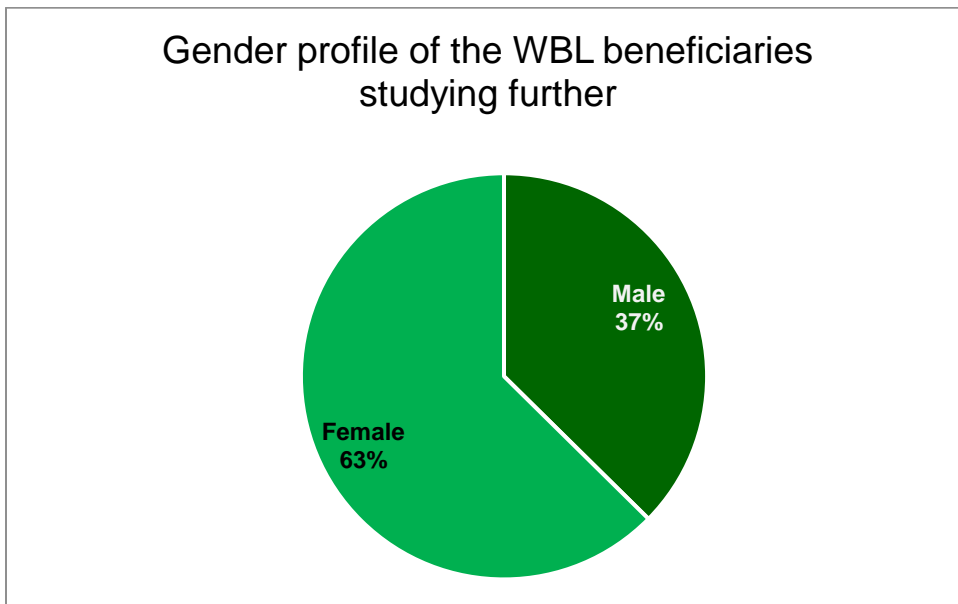


Figure 32: Gender profile of the WBL beneficiaries studying further

In the context of provincial distribution, 55 percent of the 115 WBL beneficiaries that claimed to be studying further indicated that they reside in Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng. The provinces represented 29 percent and 26% respectively. Followed by Mpumalanga

at 9% while Western Cape and Eastern Cape registered the same current residency at 8% each. The gender profile indicated that sixty-three (63) percent of the continuing learners were female and thirty-seven (37) percent male.

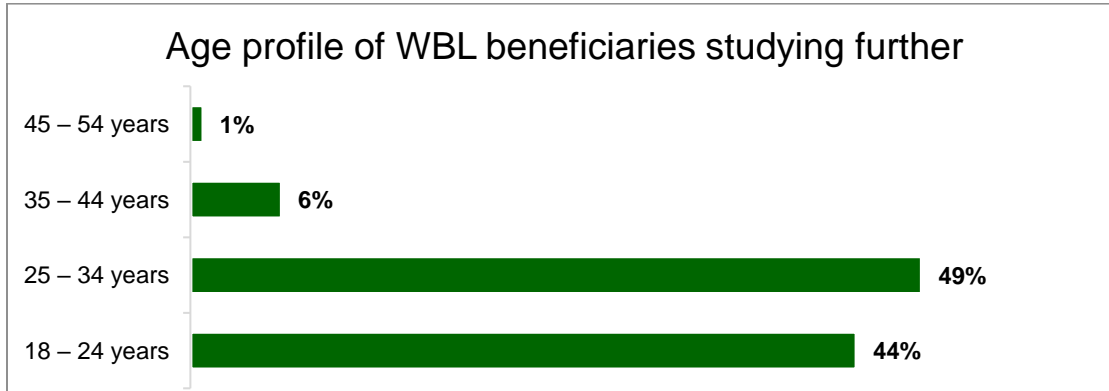


Figure 33: Age profile of WBL beneficiaries studying further

Referring to the age profile of the WBL beneficiaries, most beneficiaries at 49 percent were recorded for the 25 to 34 years age category. Overall, 93 percent were below the age of 35 years. This is encouraging because it suggests that W&RSETA is creating opportunities for youths by kicking off their life-long learning journey.

The following chart present the education profile of the WBL tracer participants that indicated that they are studying further.

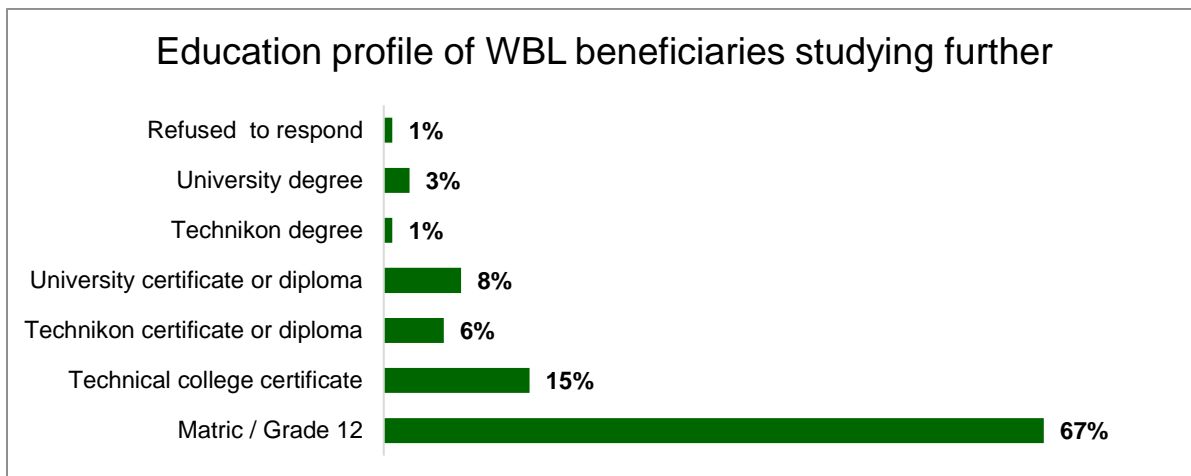


Figure 34: Education profile of WBL beneficiaries studying further

A big 67 percent of the respondents indicated that their highest level of education was Matric / Grade 12 – in line with that 48 of them were unemployed at the time they started the WBL learnership. There were 15 percent of the beneficiaries that revealed that they held Technical college certificates while a further 8% had University certificates or diplomas. There was only one (1) participant who had a Technikon degree making up 1% and three beneficiaries that held university degrees. These made up three (3) percent of the education profile.

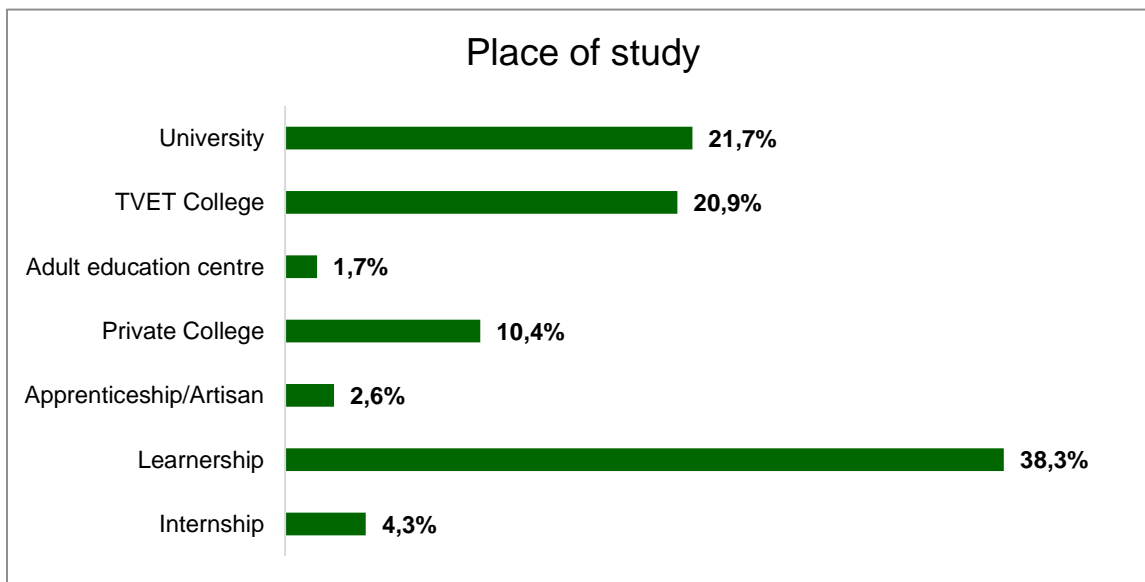


Figure 35: Place of study

When asked where they are studying, thirty-eight (38) percent of the 115 WBL beneficiaries that ascribed to studying further listed Learnership as the place of study whereas University was mentioned by almost twenty-two (22) percent. A further 20,9% indicated TVET college as the place of study. Half of the learners enrolled in 2020 for their further studies, followed by 35 percent in 2021.

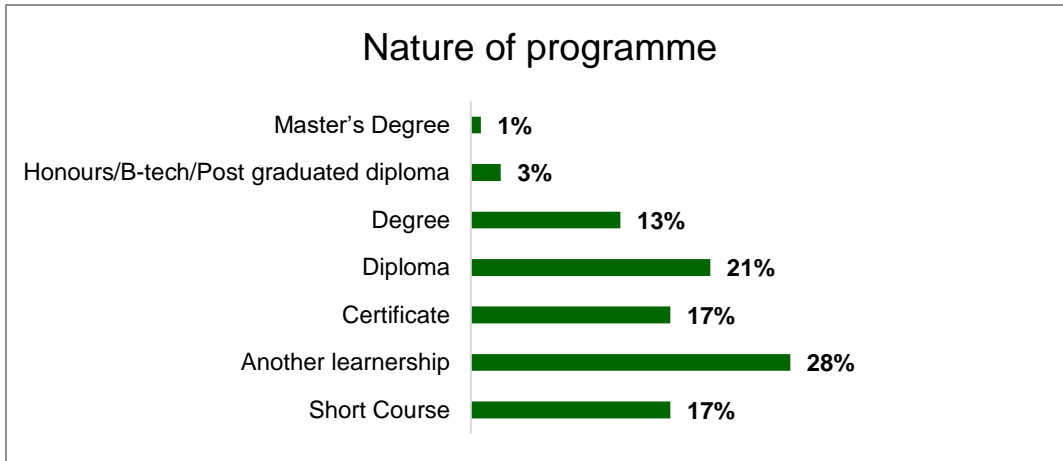


Figure 36: Nature of programme

Relating to the nature of study, about 28 percent highlighted Another learnership – which is in line with the highest indicated place of study being Learnership. Diploma followed second at about 21 percent even as a short course and certificate were both mentioned at 17% each.

8.1.6.5 Volunteering

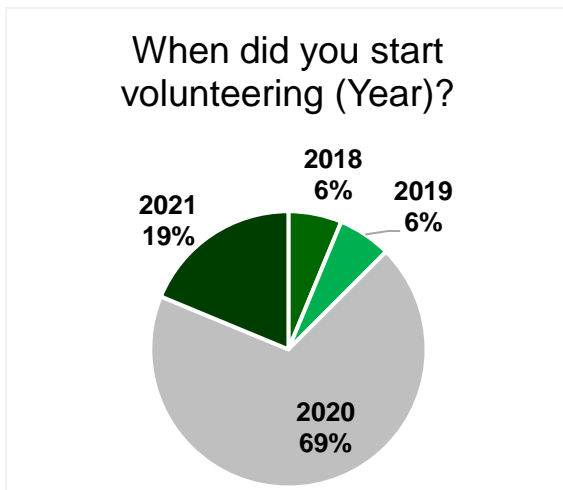


Figure 37: Year of volunteering

Table 5: Month of volunteering

Month	Frequency	Percentage
January	2	12.5
February	2	12.5
April	2	12.5
July	2	12.5
August	1	6.3
October	3	18.8
November	1	6.3
December	3	18.8
Total	16	100.0

As previously mentioned in section 8.1.6, a total of 16 participants makes up less than 1% of the completers that revealed that they were volunteering. Of that number of volunteers, almost 60% of them indicated that they started volunteering as recent as 2020, followed by 19% who cited having started volunteering in 2021. The peak of volunteering was indicated to be in October and December, with both months recording volunteering percentages of about 19%.

Results indicated that appetite for volunteering was concentrated on NGO/NPOs, with 44% of the beneficiaries volunteering in NGO/NPOs and 50% being equally shared by Private and Public sector at 25% each. Training Providers had the least volunteers at 6%.

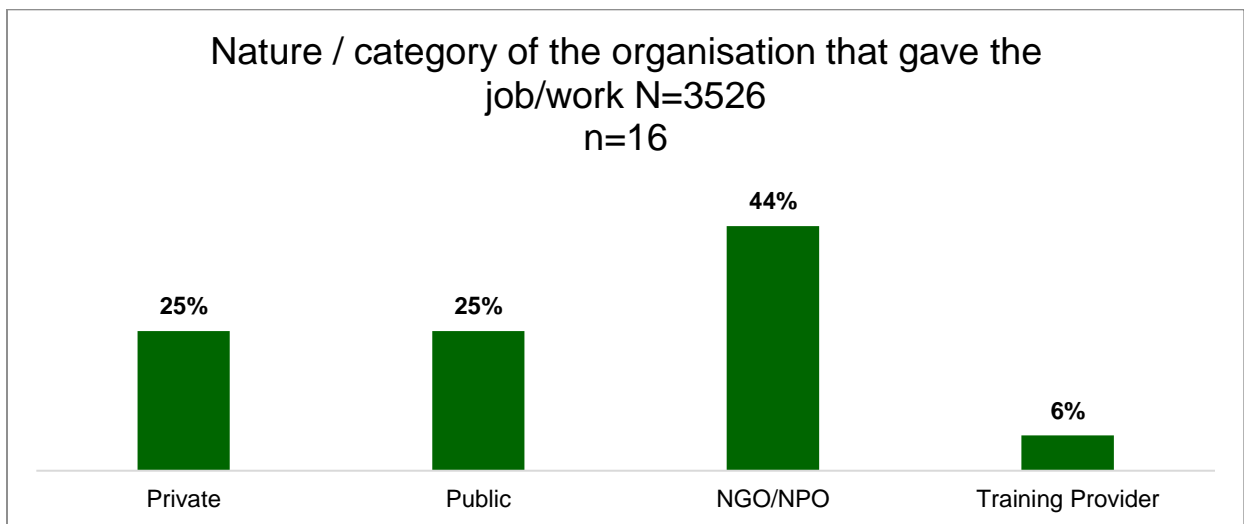


Figure 38: Nature of Company volunteered at.

When it came to stipends, 44% of the volunteers mentioned that they did receive monthly stipends for their contribution while in contrast to this, 38% mentioned that they did not get any stipend from the organisations that they volunteered at.

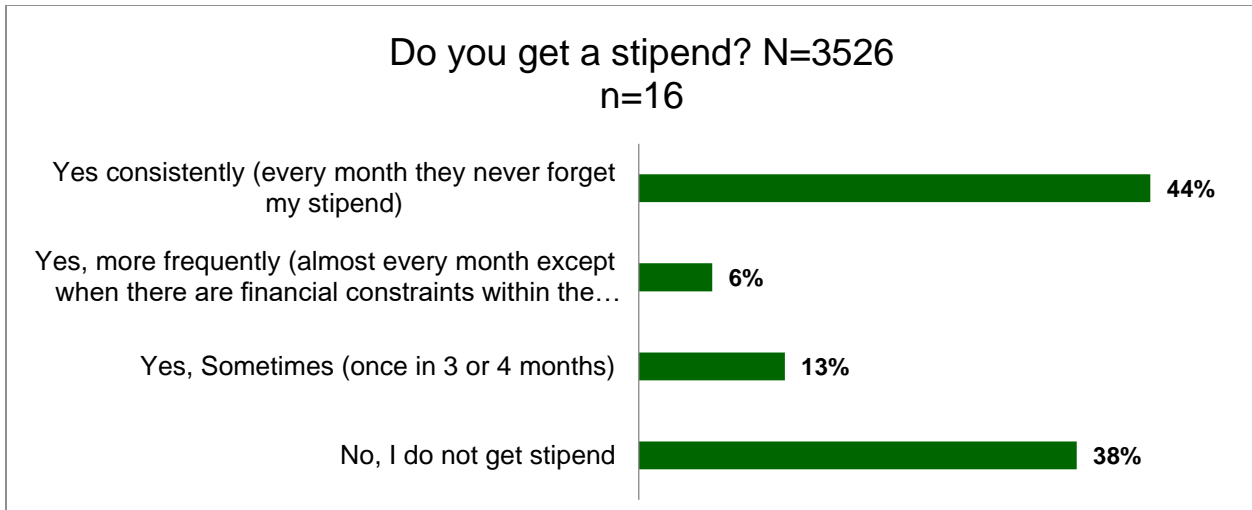


Figure 39: Do you get a stipend?

Of those participants who mentioned that they did get a stipend from their income, 50% of them were getting less than R3150 while 20% received R3151 - R3900 and 10% receiving R3901 - R4300. About 20% of the respondents refused to answer this question, indicating that they were not comfortable in talking about their income.

8.2 Employers

8.2.1 Employer profiling

This section presents results from the employers of WBL learners who participated in this study.

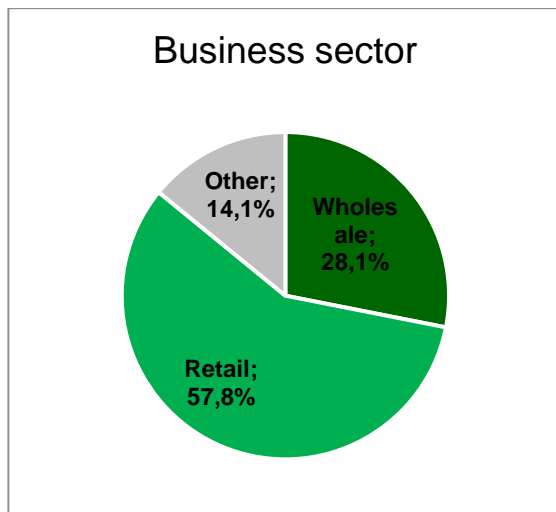


Figure 40: In which sector does your business operate?

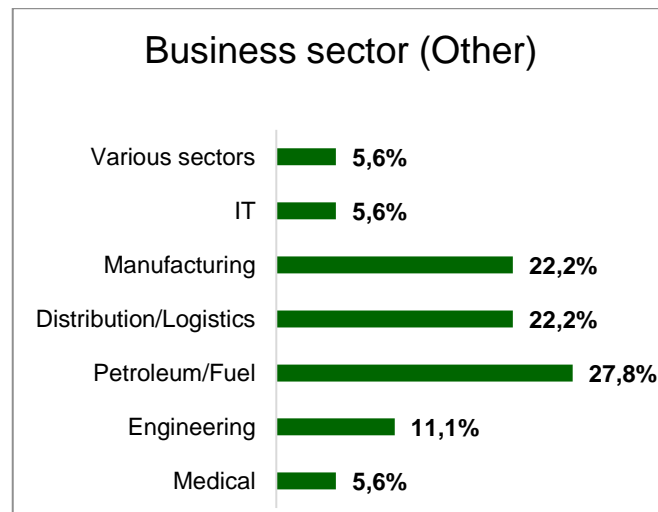


Figure 41: Business sector operations (Other)

There were 100 respondents in this study who gave 128 responses of which 58% were in the Retail and 28% were in the wholesale sector whilst 14% couldn't be classified as either retail or wholesale. South Africa's Wholesale and Retail industry is composed of more Retail than wholesale (Africa Business Information, 2018), as such the data presented above shows that relationship in the industry. It was of interest to note that some businesses operate in both the wholesale and retail sectors. This shows the synergy that is between those two industries. Hence, future studies can seek to find out if these industries are able to take the learners through all their departments from the wholesale to the retail, as this will produce versatile graduates within the industry.

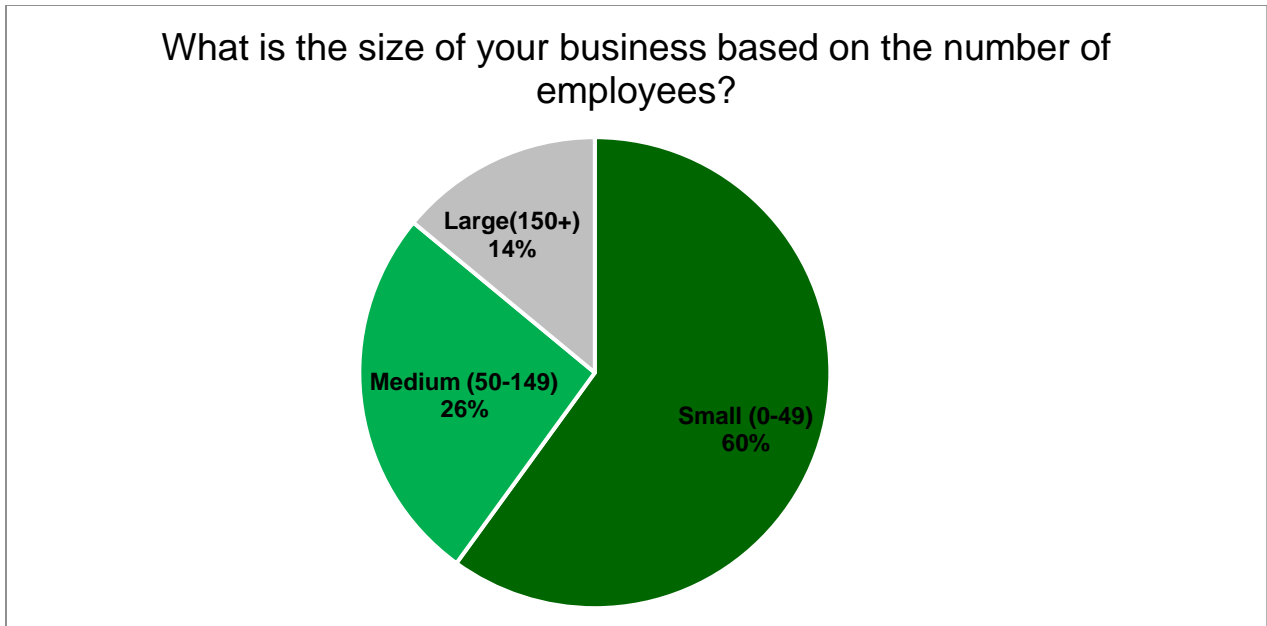


Figure 42: What is the size of your business based on the number of employees?

The distribution of businesses that took part in the study was according to size of business and was as follows: 60% small businesses, 26% medium business and 14% large businesses. The size of the business was determined according to the number of employees the business employs, with 0-49 classified as small, 50-149 as medium and 150+ as large businesses. It should be noted that there are a number of methods that can be used to measure the size of the business (Doing Business, 2020). However, it was of interest that in this study that the size be measured using the number of employees. This was because the study was interested to know the number of learners who has been attached to the organisations in the period 2015-2018.

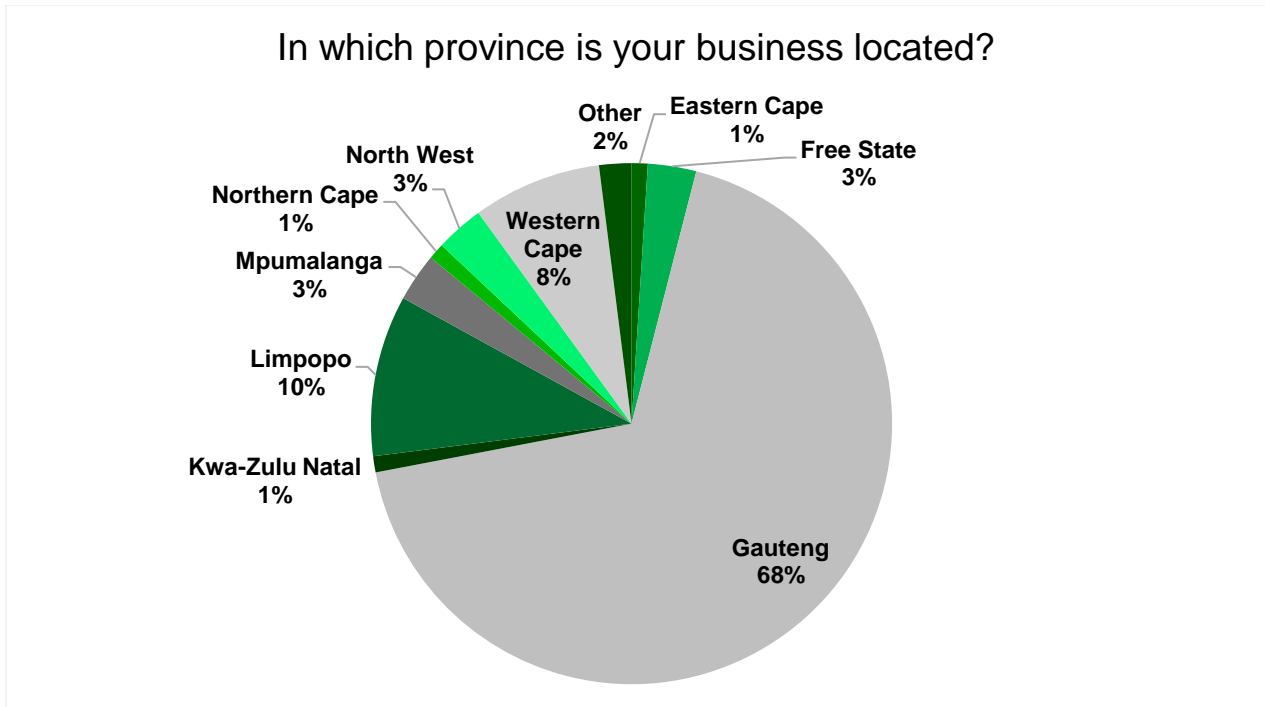


Figure 43: In which province is your business located?

The majority of the businesses which were part of this study were from the Gauteng Province with 68%, followed by Limpopo Province with 10%. The general distribution of industries in South Africa is such that the majority is Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces. The distribution of the response rate however, does resemble that South Africa’s distribution of industries due to factors that related to database used to contact employers among other factors. However, it should be noted that this did not affect the validity and reliability of the study since the study was more focused on the WBL than the industries themselves or their distribution.

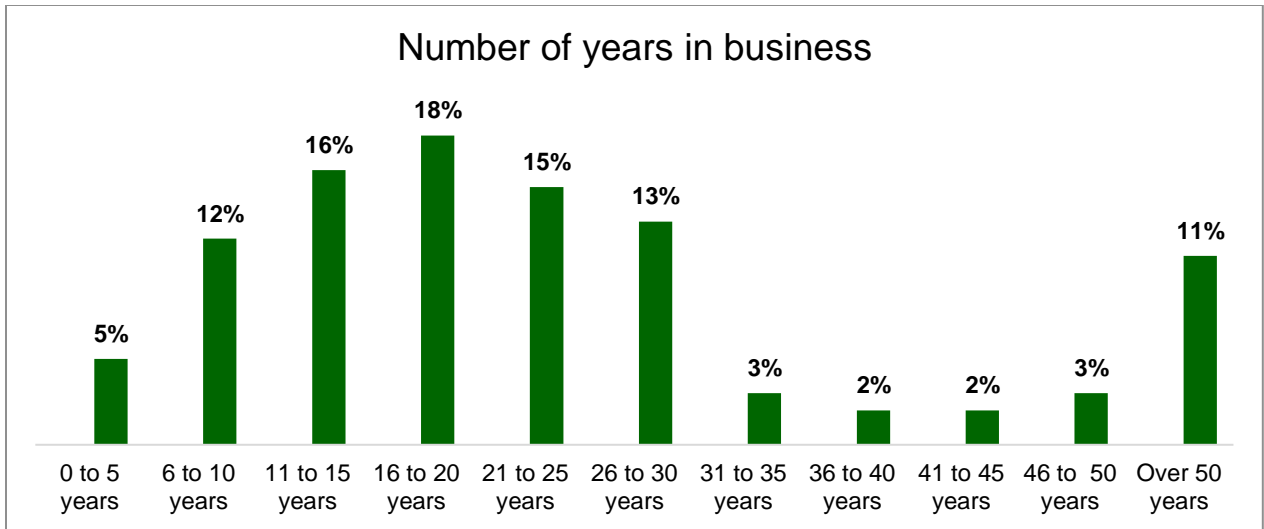


Figure 44: In which W&RSETA programme did your business participate?

About 18% of the businesses, who participated in this study, had between 16 and 20 years of existence. The study was conducted with the most seasoned companies, as most of them have been in existence form more than 5 years and some as old as over a half a century. The implications of this are that these companies had much experience in the Wholesale and Retail industry. Therefore, all other factors held constant that the companies involved in this study were rich in experience and their input was valuable in driving the interest of the WBL programme.

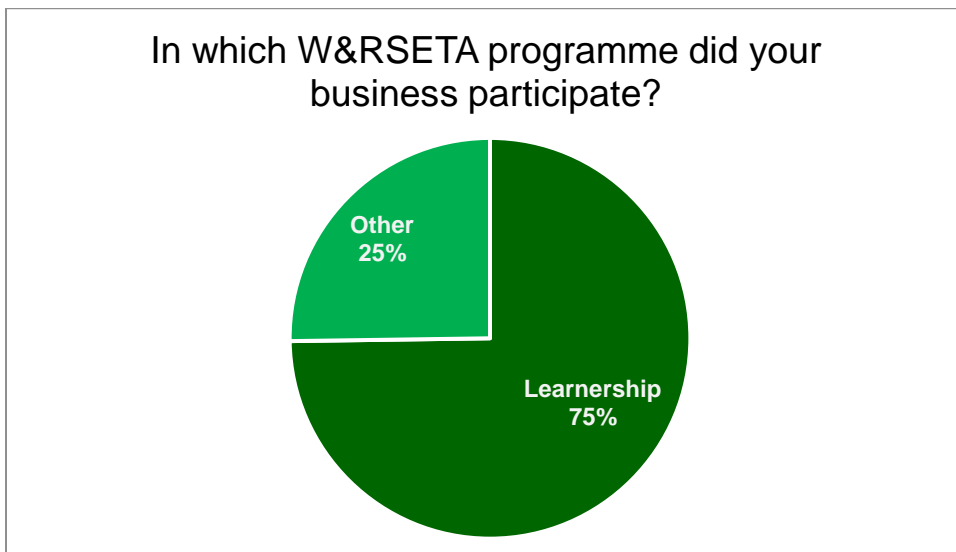


Figure 45: In which W&RSETA programme did your business participate?

About 75% of the companies who participated in this study indicated that they had participated in the W&RSETA programme. This implies that the majority of the industries that participated in this study had direct experience in the learnership programme hence their participation and involvement increase the validity and reliability of the study.

8.2.2 WBL programme administration

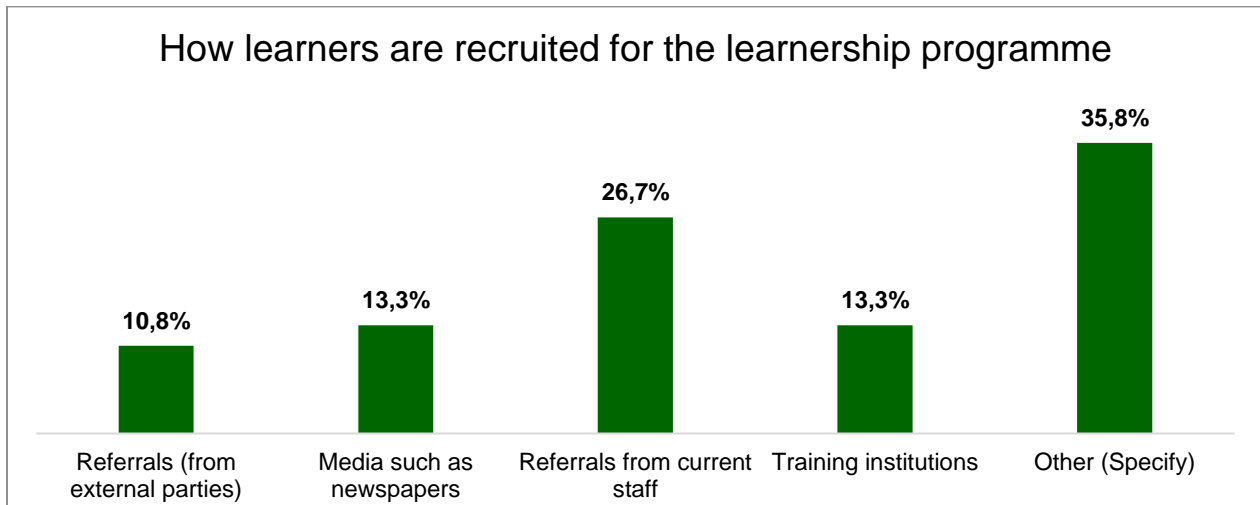


Figure 46: How do you recruit suitable learners for your learnership programme?

It is interesting to note that 26.7% of the companies recruit through referrals from current staff, this in contradiction with finding of some studies conducted by McKeown and Lindorff, (2011). Their findings were that traditional job search strategies, such as responding to newspaper advertisements, online job searches and circulating resumes were popular methods of seeking employment. Therefore, one would have anticipated that these companies use such popular methods to recruit suitable learners for their learnership programmes. Whilst learners are still at school or during their learnership programme it might be necessary to educate them about the importance of networking and developing strong relationship with the people they interact with them. This might increase their chances of employment in the future.

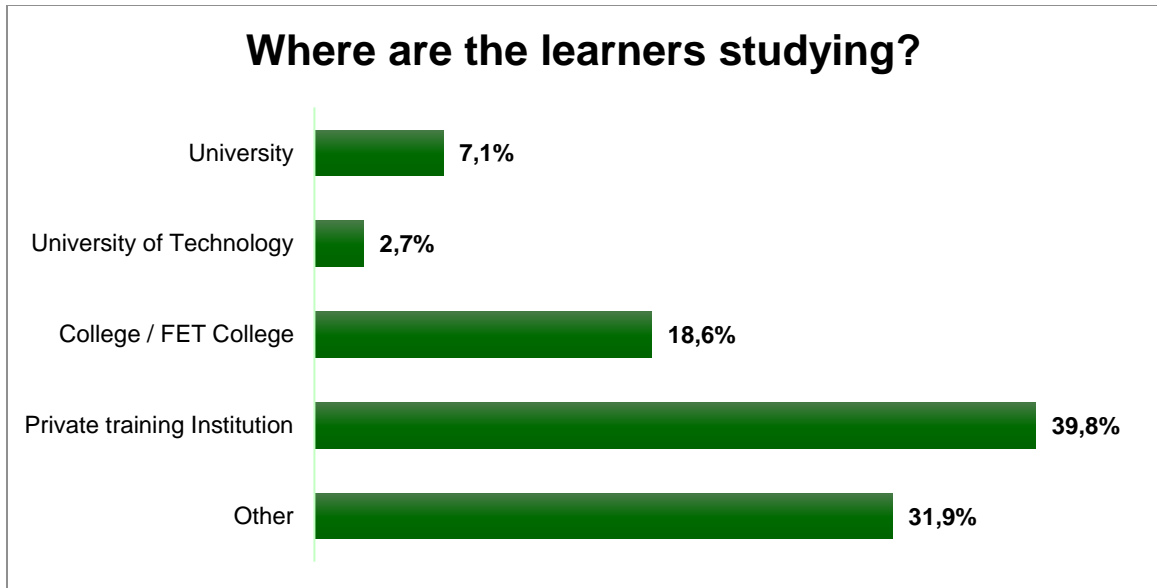


Figure 47: Where are the learners studying

The private training institutions contribute the largest number of learners as indicated by the bar graph with, a total of 39.8% learners coming from the private institutions. In the future studies it might be necessary to find out why are state institutions are with the lower numbers of learners in the WBL compared to the private sector. It is important that there be cohesion in state institutions on driving national agendas.

Table 6: Learners formed part of the learnership programme

Year	Number of Learners
2015	26
2016	21
2017	28
2018	51
2019	89
2020	150

The table above shows the number of learners that formed part of the learnership programme from the year 2015-2020. The number of learners has been on a consistent rise since the year 2017 to date. This is a positive sign in the learnership programme, this

might mean that the programme is yielding positive results for the learners. However, there is need to find out how it compares with other programmes rather than viewing it in isolation with other SETAs.

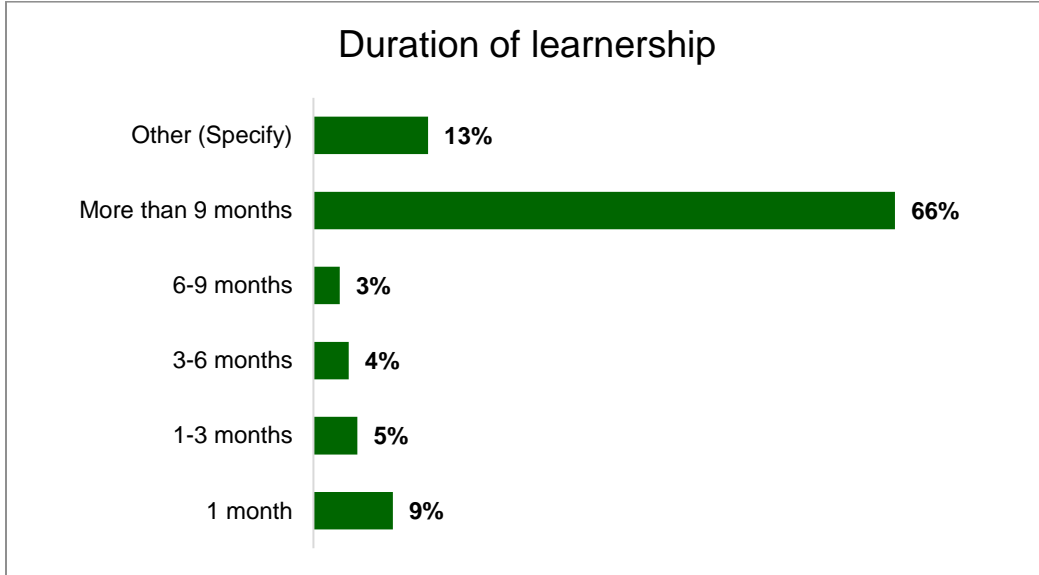


Figure 48: How long is the learnership?

The majority (66%) of companies who took part in this study indicated that the learnership programme is more than 9 months.

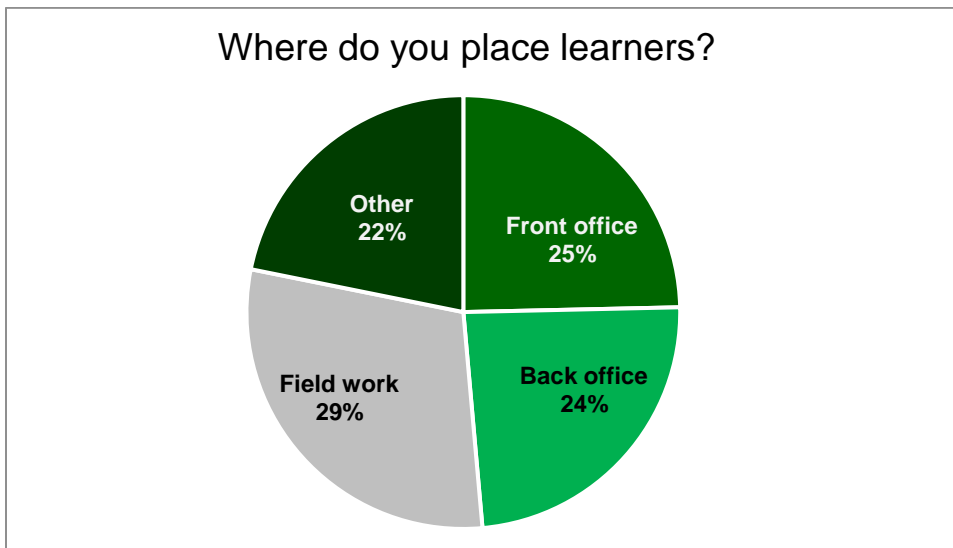


Figure 49: Learner placements

About 29% of the employers indicated that they use the learners in field work more than any other place in the company. There were 31 other responses (22%) who could not be classified as either office or fieldwork. From those other responses, 45% of them stated that they rotate the learners in various departments. A learnership programme should allow the learners to learn as much as possible. Hence, it is vital that learners be rotated into different departments within the organisation during the learnership programme.

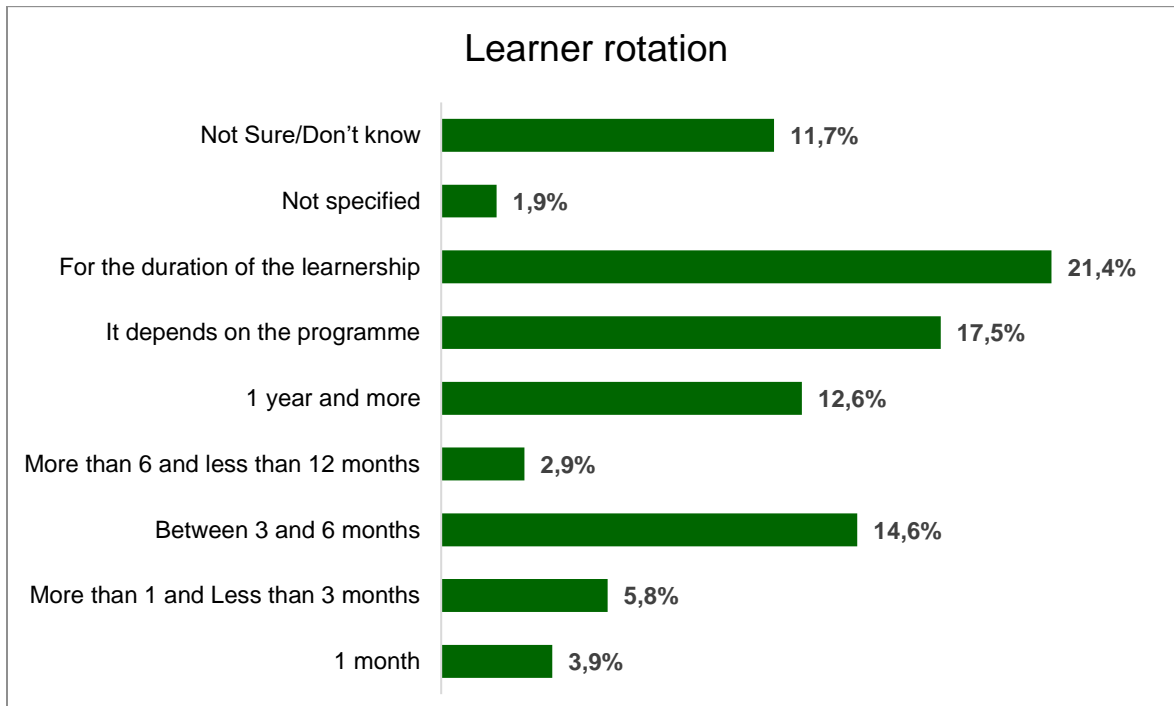


Figure 50: Learner rotation

When asked on how long they keep learners in one department, 21.4% of employers indicated that learners work in one department for the duration of the learnership programme. It is important that employers be engaged and advised of the significance of job rotation during the learnership programme. Job rotation increases the knowledge of learners and, as a result, the graduate produced is versatile and ready to work in any part of the organisations.

8.2.3 Employer perceptions

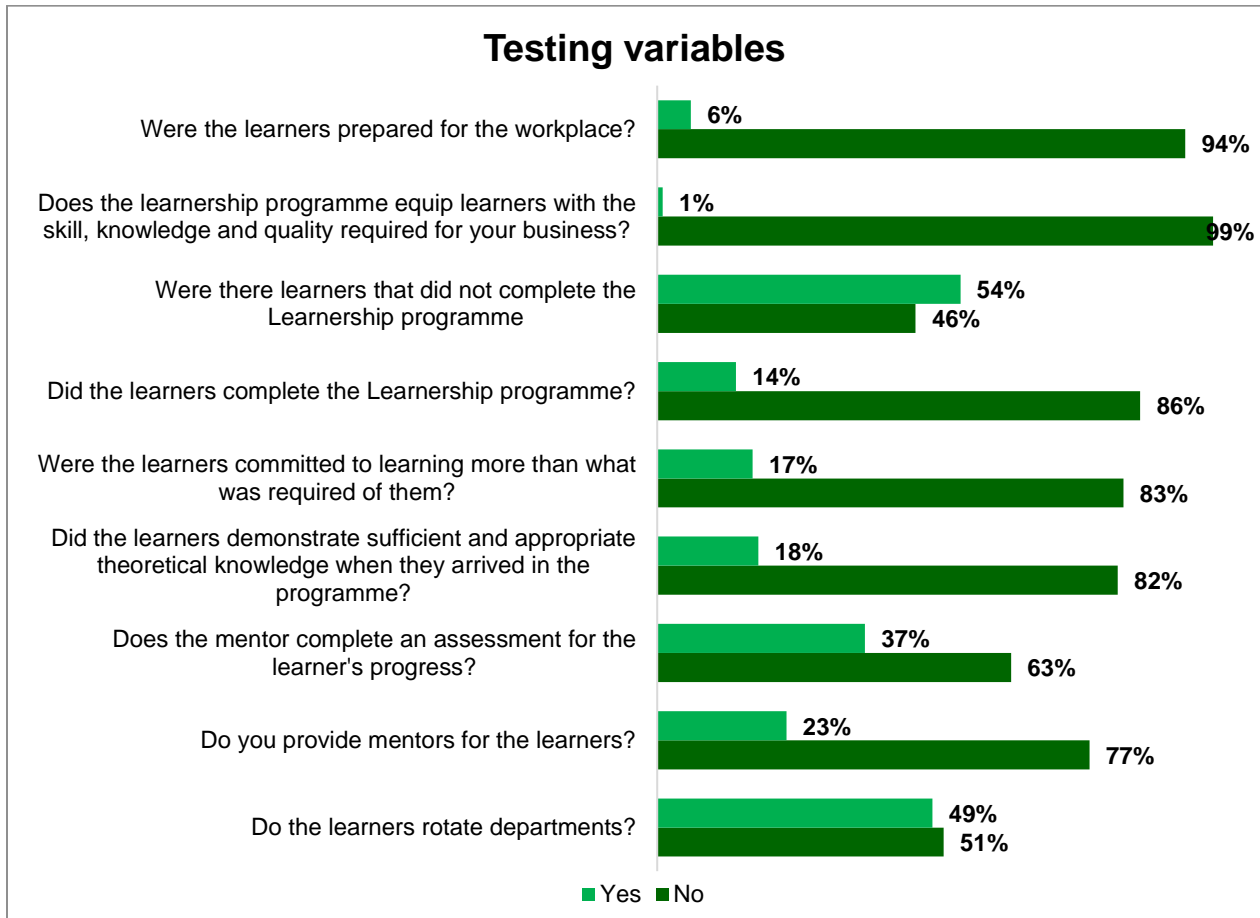


Figure 51: Testing variables

The bar graph gives an indication of important variables as the learners who took part in the learnership programme. 99% of employers are of the view that the learnership programme equip learners with skills, knowledge and qualities required within the industry and 94% also indicated the learners were prepared for the workplace environment. It would be prudent for the W&RSETA to find out reasons for dropout in future studies.

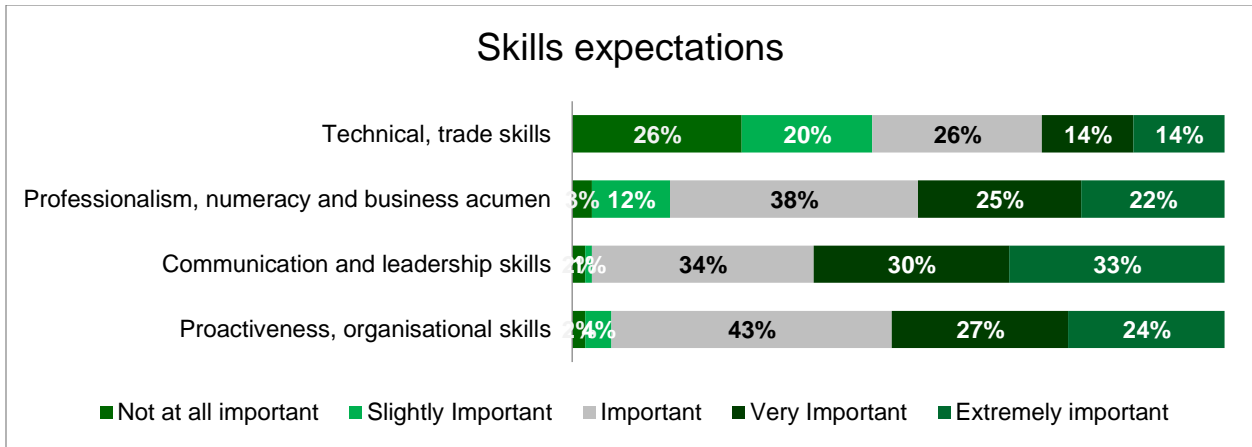


Figure 52: Skills expectations

The finding of the study showed that people skills (communication and leadership skills) are top of the employers’ expectations followed by self-reliance (proactiveness and organisational skills). Furthermore, general employment skills (professionalism, numeracy and business acumen) were also rated as an important skill for the employers. These findings are in line with findings of the study carried out by (Harvey et al, 1997; Little 2001 in Lees 2002). The finding was that employers value critical thinking, communication, numeracy, information technology, and learning how to learn. Moreover, authors like Rothwell and Arnold (2007) document that employability involves a number of inter-related attributes, skills and competencies that help individuals to both secure employment and perform well in employment. Rothwell and Arnold, (2007) further went on to propose factors such as the student academic performance, ambitions, confidence, skills, abilities, strength of the University brand or reputation field of study as key takeaways from what the employers look at during employment of new employees. Additionally, the study found that trade skills were less important, with a high negative score of 26%, in line with Archer and Davison (2008) finding that the “soft skills” (communication skill and team work) have more weight than technical or ‘hard skills’ (e.g. a good degree qualification, IT skills).

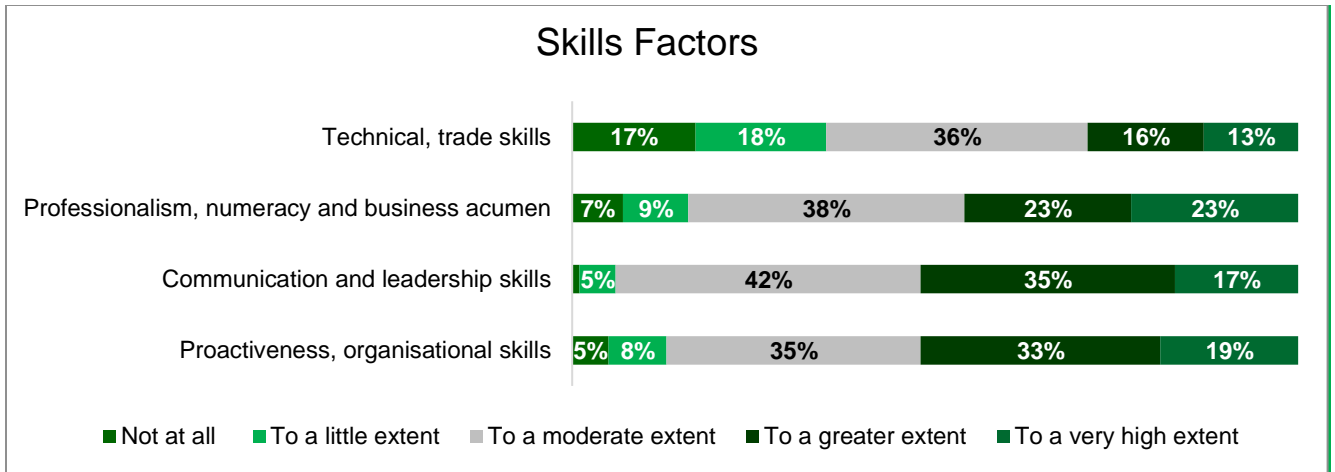


Figure 53: Skills factors

Most employers were of the view that most learners possessed people skills (communication and leadership skills) at commencement of the learnership. Employers showed a high satisfaction with learners' general employment skills (proactiveness and organisational skills). Specialist skills (Technical, trade skills) had the lowest satisfaction rating, with more employers of the view that the learners lacked these skills on joining the learnership.

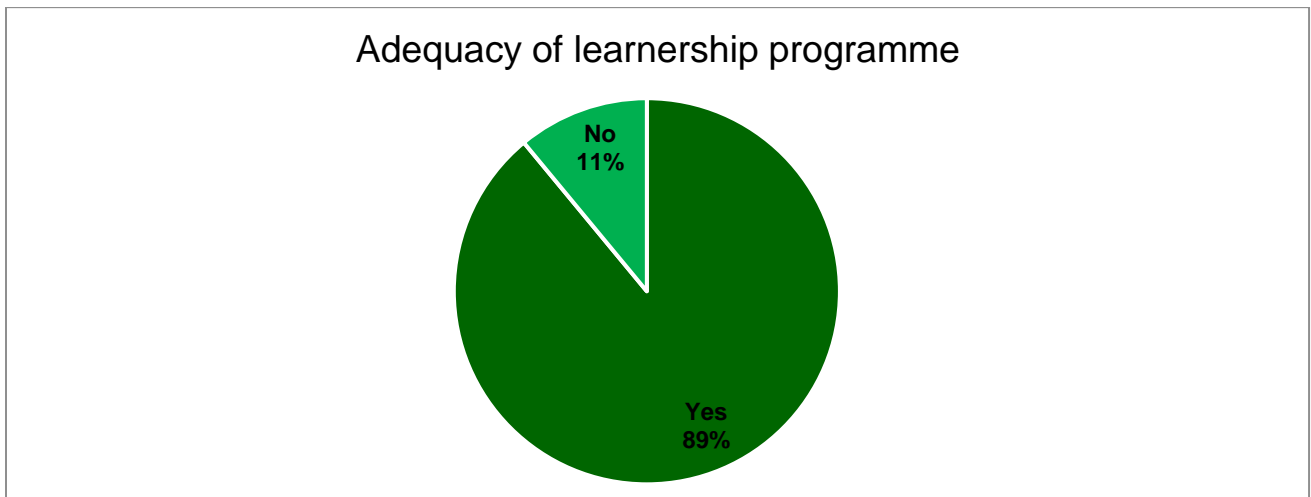


Figure 54: Adequacy of W&RSETA learnership programme

From the employers who took part in this study, 89% of them indicated that the learnership programme is adequately delivering on its mandate of producing a qualified and skilled labour force for the Wholesale and Retail industry. The finding is in line with the Confederation of British Industry, (2014) that asserts that the learnership or work-based learning is widely accepted by employers for students' vocational skills development and employability. They are an important starting point for learners looking for employment after the programme as well as employers looking for readily available skill to boost productivity of firms and to be innovate in enterprises.

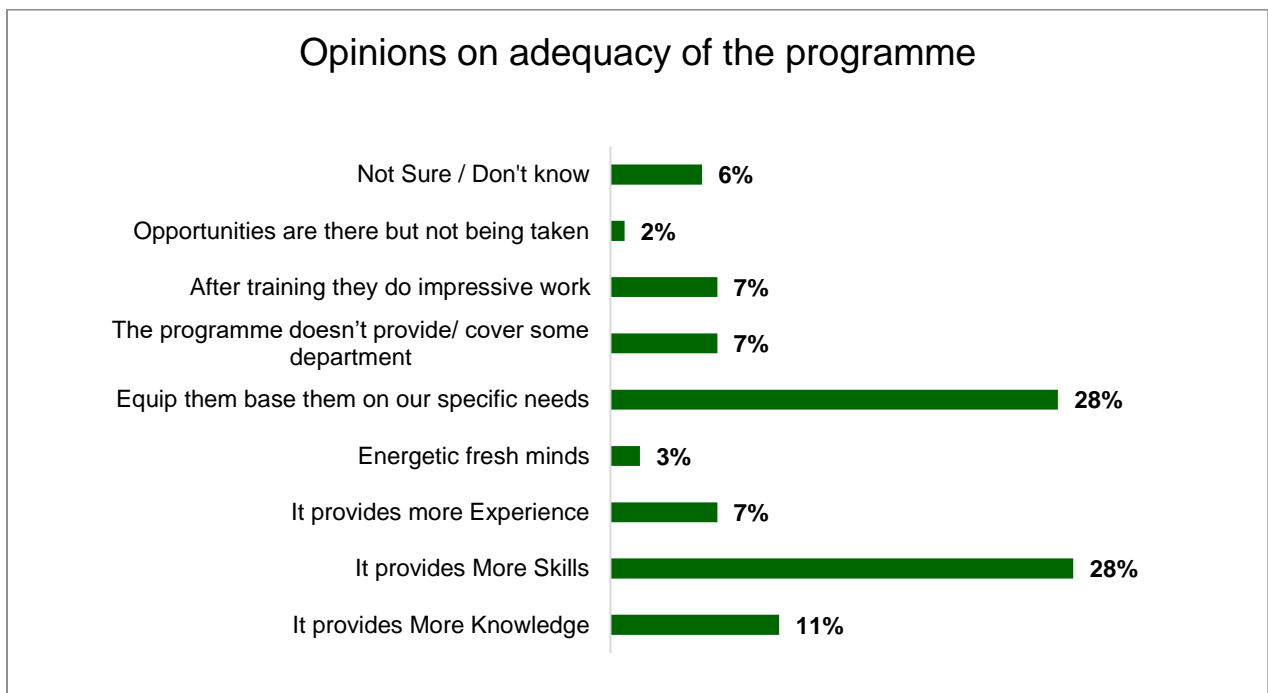


Figure 55: Opinions on whether the programme is adequately addressing the skills gap in the Wholesale and Retail Industry

About 28% feel that the learnership programme is adequately addressing the skills gap because it provides more skills to the learners.

Table 7: How can the programme be improved?

How can the programme be improved?	Percentage
More Professional Training / Give them closure	14%
Everything in order / it reached its peak	13%
Improvement within the organisation	6%
Improvement in communication	4%
Passionate people who are willing to participate in a programme	4%
More duration in learnership	3%
More Resources	2%
Improvement electronically and online	2%
More mentorship Programmes	2%
It must be compulsory to students	2%
It should be linked with the future of retail industry / accommodate	2%
Get bureau seta admin sorted	2%
Improve Curriculum	2%
Provide study materials on time	1%
More follow ups should be done	1%
Payment process is poor	1%
Connectivity between learners	1%
Time Management	1%
More Theory should be done	1%
Reduce paper work before admitting learners	1%
Make it have variety in terms of careers	1%
Nothing/not sure	34%
TOTAL	100%

When asked to give their suggestions on how the learnership programme can be improved, various propositions were given. Others felt that the programme should be left as it is whilst the highest mention was for improvement in professionalism.

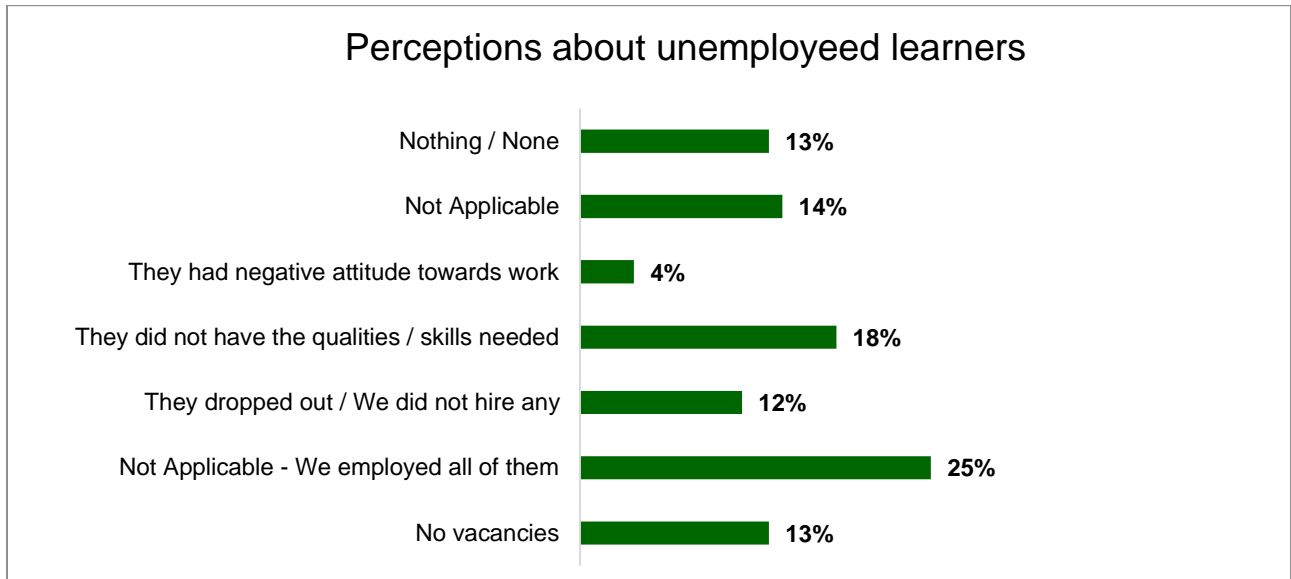


Figure 56: Perceptions about unemployed learners

About 25% of the employers who participated in this study indicated that they employed everyone who participated in the learnership programme. There were other employers (18.3%) who indicated that the learners did not have qualities or skills needed. The contemporary literature seems to agree with the findings of the study. Glass et al, (2008) document that employers need graduates who have different capabilities ranging from multi-cultural appreciation, innovativeness and enterprising and have strong communication language skills. Additionally, the employers assert that the design of degree courses and student experience in general should articulate with the needs of business and emerge from a strong working partnership with employer organisations. Hence, learners who do not possess the indicated skills may not manage to break through into the industry.

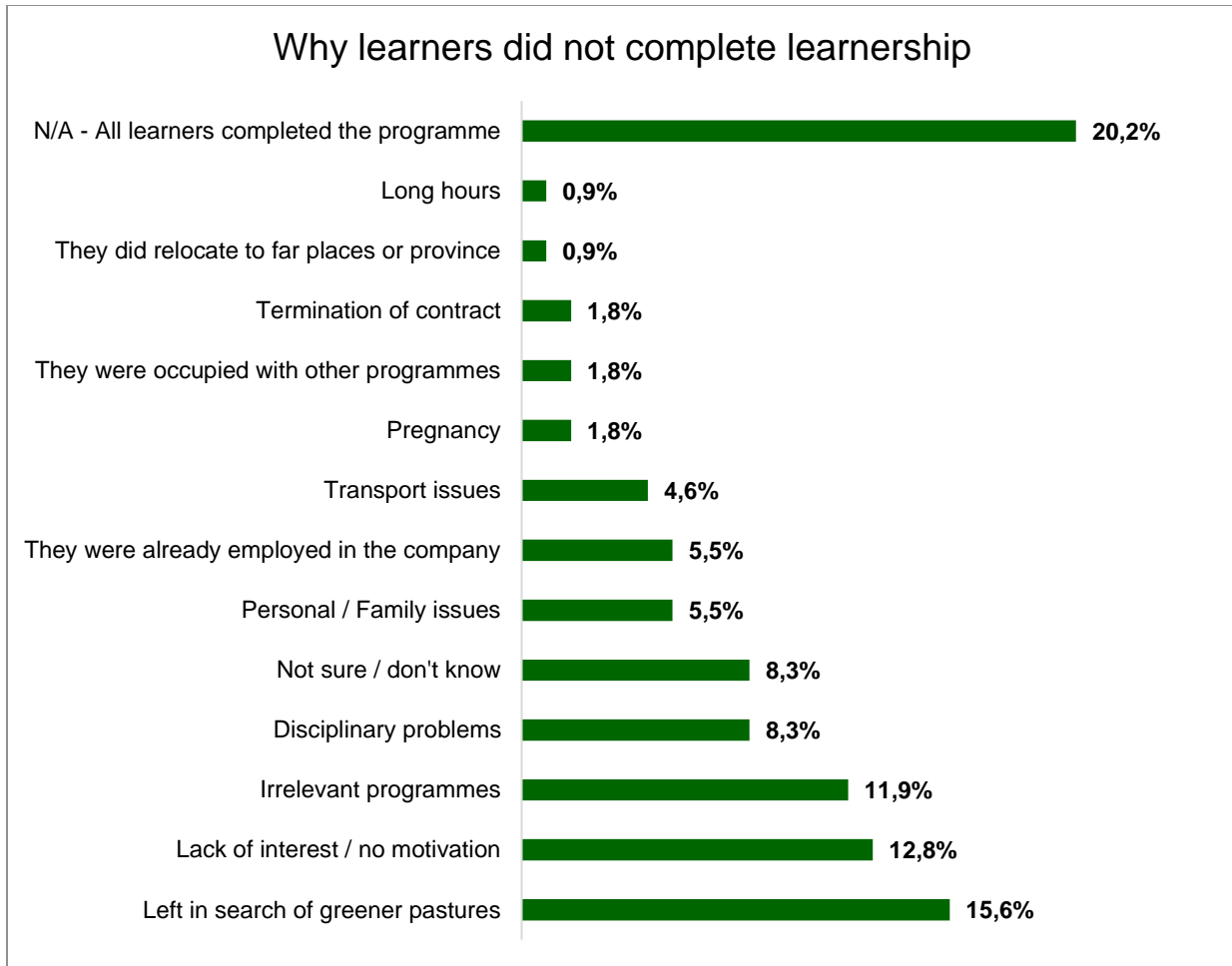


Figure 57: Main reasons why learners did not complete learnership

About 15.6% employers indicated that learners fail to complete the programme because they leave in search of the greener pastures whilst 20.2% indicated that learners completed the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

The W&RSETA WBL learnership programs were largely effective in providing beneficiaries with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to gain access to job opportunities.

Through the learnerships, WBL completers were provided with learning-rich environments that resulted in the development of specific skills required in the workplace.

WBL learnerships promoted career development, particularly in terms of broadening knowledge of available career paths.

While beneficiaries have relevant skills for entering the labour market, lack of employment opportunities prevents them from effectively applying their knowledge and skills. This indicates that, while the learnerships were successful in providing skills, their ultimate goal of reducing unemployment wasn't fully met.

The increase in both full-time and part-time employment demonstrates that WBL learnerships are not only effective in achieving the W&RSETA mandate, but also contribute to the reduction of unemployment, if job opportunities are consistently available.

Less than 1% of learnership graduates were able to start their own businesses after completing the program. This statistic reflects a lack of entrepreneurial development. Establishing and maintaining businesses after completion is important in the sector because it can be a vehicle for job creation and alleviate the high unemployment rates, even if one does not find work, especially at this critical juncture with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on unemployment as well as the slow issuance of certificates.

The Literature review and general perceptions from employer participants indicated that the WBL programs appear to be used as a stepping stone for other prospects because they are deemed insufficiently lucrative.

- *One identified gap is that digital transformation is moving faster than the industry can keep up with technological advances. As a result, there is a skills shortage, which WBL does not address.*

This finding complements a PwC study in 2018 of global manufacturing companies whose key findings showed that there were no Digital Champions among the South African companies that participated in the survey. And South Africa was lagging on path towards digitisation

- *When it comes to soft skills, such as communication and leadership, the WBL curriculum falls short.*

Furthermore, the employers' survey findings revealed that:

- *Employers are attempting to foster robust partnerships with training providers to facilitate a better curriculum within the WBL programs.*

According to the findings, the age group 25-34 years has the highest number of WBL participants. It is worth noting, however, that according to Statista.com, (2020), the age group under 25 has the highest unemployment rate in South Africa, at around 63.2 percent. The study also reveals that the majority of WBL participants had a matric or grade 12 education. Over 75% of the 18-24 age group had completed matriculation / grade 12; however, their participation in the program is very low at this age, only to increase when they reach the age of 25-34 years.

RESEARCH GAPS

The following were identified as research gaps not covered by the survey or emanating from the findings.

Disability – The scope of the questionnaire on WBL completers did not include learners with disabilities. As a result, the findings do not shed light on how WBL impacts disability and inclusion within the sector.

Entrepreneurship – Based on the findings, the low number of self-employed graduates following completion of the WBL program identifies a potential area for development. Entrepreneurship is an opportunity worth exploring if the W&RSETA is to reduce the high number of unemployed graduates, albeit so minimally represented. The most important question is how to ensure successful entrepreneurship. In line with the W&RSETA Skills Development plan of 2019-20 there is a need for a revised focus on entrepreneurship skills development.

Digital transformation - The world over is fast embracing the fourth industrial revolution and South Africa is no exception. Part of the 4IR is digitally transforming the industries just like the cell phone did in the 1990s. However, within the South African context, certain prerequisites must be met to ensure an all-inclusive approach that minimises loss of employment, alleviates discrimination and eradicates monopolies amongst others. This global paradigm shift has created a competitive gap for the country and resultantly, the sector. To assist in creating opportunities for participation in this new era, QRS suggest incorporating the basics of Industry 4.0 must-have skills into the WBL curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following methods are proposed to increase the value of W&RSETA-funded learnership programs:

- **Manage and share a database of WBL graduates** with companies in the Wholesale and Retail sectors to encourage graduate uptake and ensure the relevance of skill development.
- **Incentivize or encourage WBL graduates to volunteer** at training providers. This will help to bridge the gap between qualification and employment as well as enable the ability to apply new knowledge in the workplace.
- **Enforce and improve the W&RSETA certification policy and procedures to expedite the issuance of certificates** by the W&RSETA QQA so as to avoid delays in job applications.
- **Establish a system for conducting bi-annual tracer studies** to assess the success rate and efficacy of the learnerships. As a result, impact evaluation and planning should be addressed beyond NSDS III.
- There is a critical need to **expand access to skill development beyond specialized skills** in order to ensure comprehensive skill development for participants. Industry 4.0 digital economy skills need be integrated into the curriculum and to enhance employability, both entrepreneurial and soft skills may be developed. Conflict resolution, effective communication, and Customer Service Training are just a few examples of soft skills for the retail industry.
- **Bolster the co-operatives and community partnerships; specifically, the Community Retail Development Programme (CRDP)** to include more low-income urban communities and **extend the training curriculum** to include entrepreneurship. This will help increase the positive outcomes of the WBL programmes as entrepreneurship in urban communities will promote competitiveness and further grow the local 'Township' economy.
- **Implement an aggressive WBL Awareness strategy** to increase the visibility of the W&RSETA in communities while also targeting the 18-24 age group. According

to Zetlin (2018), those in their early twenties have a better chance of finding work than those in other age groups. This strategy will address the possibility of low visibility, as evidenced by the fact that most of the programme recruitment is through referrals, and will target the 18–24-year age group so that they are engaged early on and do not waste 4-5 years attempting to establish themselves only to pitch up when they are 25 and above for the WBL program.

- *According to the evidence gathered in section 8.2.1, only 14 percent of the companies that participated in this study were large companies. QRS recommends that W&RSETA **engage with larger companies more** because they have the potential to employ many learners. According to the company's website, Shoprite employs over 140 000 people. As a result, QRS recommends that such **large corporations and SMEs be involved in and encouraged to participate in W&RSETA WBL programs.***

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