



DRIVING TRANSFORMATION

KEY INSIGHTS FROM
PHASE 1 OF THE
HIGH GEAR
PROGRAMME

August 2023

Funding Partners

Skills
for prosperity
SOUTH AFRICA



Implementing Partner



National Partners



CONTENTS

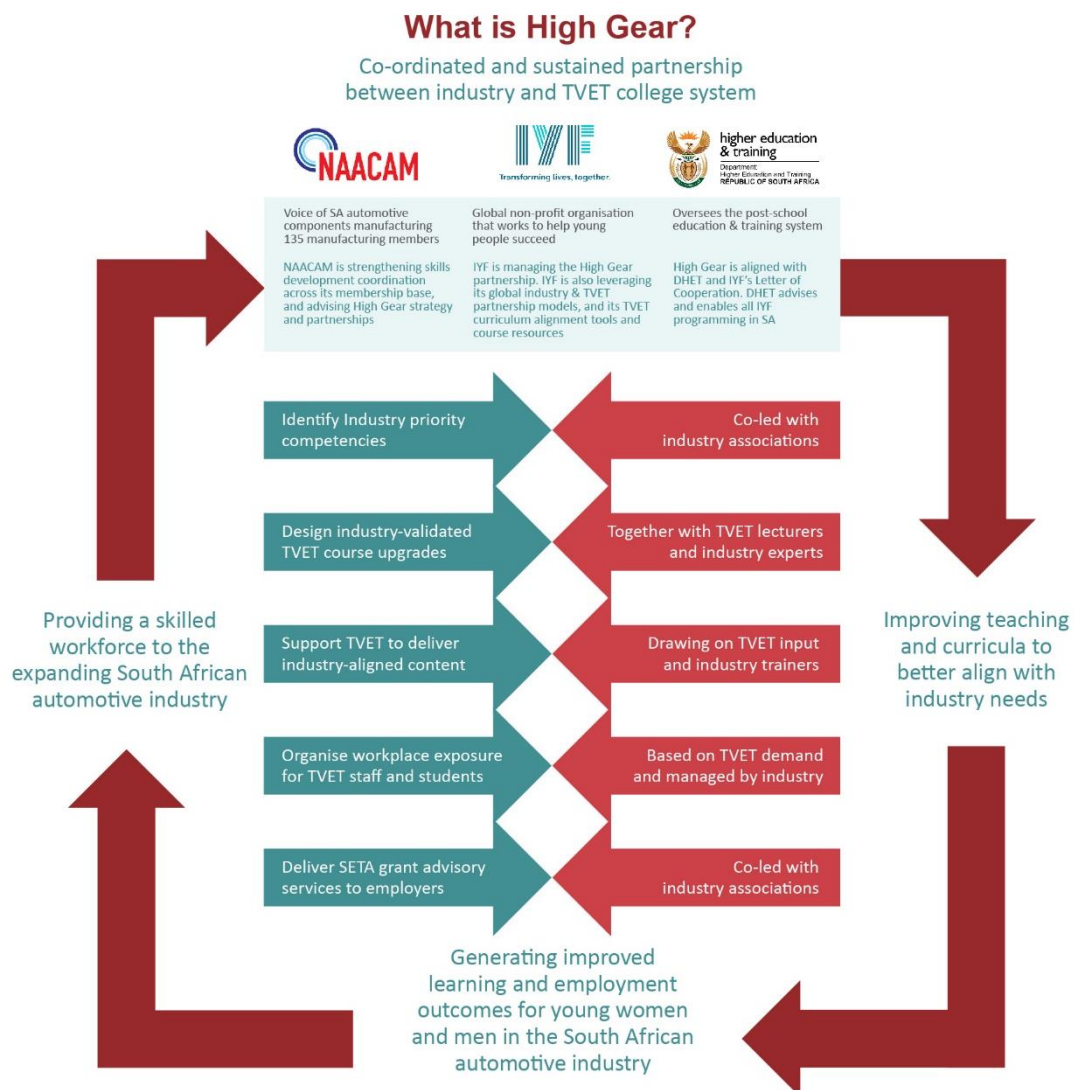
1 INTRODUCTION	3
Background to the High Gear Programme	4
Why is systems change important?	5
Supporting the automotive sector to reach the Masterplan goals	6
What is the High Gear Theory of Change?	6
2 OUTLINING HIGH GEAR'S INTERVENTIONS	8
3 SHIFTING THE SYSTEM: ACHIEVEMENTS & KEY LESSONS LEARNED	12
Sustainable partnerships between industry and the TVET system	12
Responding to changing insights about demand & supply	15
Enabling young people to make choices informed by understanding the labour market	16
4 SHIFTING THE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE	18
5 SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY	19
6 LOOKING FORWARD	21
7 REFERENCES	23

ACRONYMS

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ERPT	Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan
NAACAM	National Association of Automotive Component and Allied Manufacturers
PDI	Previously Disadvantaged Individuals
SETA	Sectoral Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

INTRODUCTION

The High Gear programme was created to showcase a model for greater industry involvement in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) course design and delivery. High Gear aims to generate enthusiasm amongst TVET educators and industry players, while providing positive returns for young people and employers.



The programme is built on a foundation of improved and sustainable partnerships between industry and TVET colleges, focused on creating curricula and teaching that are better aligned with industry needs. It has been implemented in the automotive components manufacturing sector in KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape in South Africa and is designed to improve learning and employment outcomes for young people seeking employment in this sector.

“[The High Gear programme and the IYF team] have really been playing an intermediary role and have brought us closer to the colleges and the management of the colleges.” (Employer, Eastern Cape)

This learning brief shares findings on how High Gear has impacted systems change. We outline our key learnings and reflect on the ways that High Gear is integrating this increased understanding adapting High Gear to respond to the evolving context as outlined in the broader industrial plans for green technology. Through sharing these perspectives, we aim to provide insight for education and training, auto industry, and development partners about the value of the approach adopted, and

the challenges that come with it. Although this learning brief is based on interventions implemented in the auto sector, the lessons learned apply to all those working towards transforming the TVET system and improving its relevance to sectors across the economy.

Background to the High Gear Programme

A strong pipeline of skilled individuals is a cornerstone for the sustainability and growth of the manufacturing industry. To achieve this High Gear sought to harness the role of industry intermediaries in facilitating the interaction between supply and demand, enabling them to play a role as aggregators of demand in a context where institutions struggle to engage individually in demand activation and responsiveness¹. High Gear recognised that this change required a move towards a more collaborative and integrated approach, involving partnerships between TVET colleges, employers and industry associations, founded on changes in policy, practice, and culture and the development of new models of collaboration that are sustainable, effective and mutually beneficial.

This conceptualisation of the High Gear programme took place within the context of a difficult economic context but one that was seeing growth in the auto industry and the possibility of employment opportunities. This context became more challenging at the point of implementation with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, severe unrest followed by devastating floods in KwaZulu-Natal, and the national energy crisis which have all caused extended pressure on employers.

As part of addressing this situation, the South African Presidency launched the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) to stimulate equitable and inclusive growth. The ERRP strategy aims to combat the current 74% youth unemployment rate and support the uptake of the new jobs to be created through the ERRP². The High Gear programme, as an intervention, fitted within this strategy as a key focus area of the ERRP is skills development for youth.

Specifically, the High Gear programme seeks to harness the resources within the TVET college system in South Africa, which offers programmes that seek to provide students with a broad range of knowledge and practical skills within specific industry fields. The attainment of qualifications are dependent on varying durations of work experience. Those enrolled for the Nated Engineering Studies programmes require a minimum of 24 months (2 670 hours) of applicable work experience or a relevant trade test certificate to obtain a Diploma qualification³. The need for both work experience and industry-relevant qualifications, necessitates mechanisms to support employer engagement in the TVET system. These partnerships are crucial to enabling young people to access the labour market.

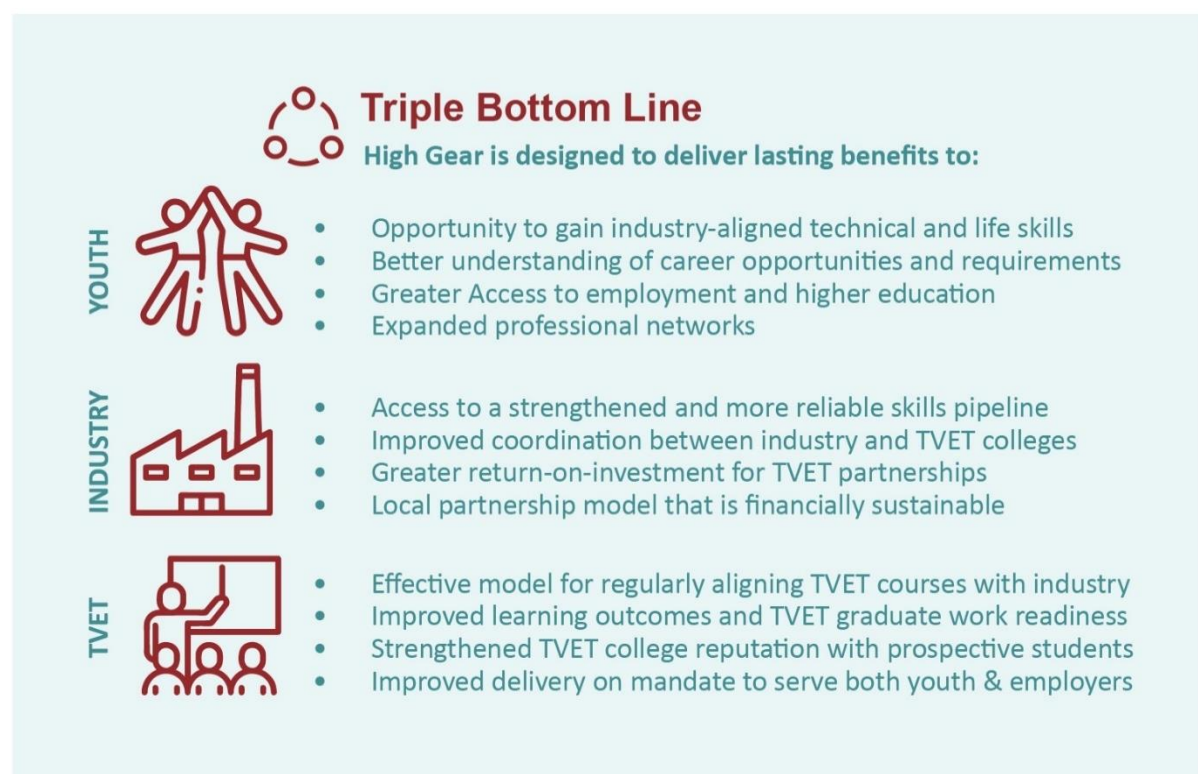
In this context, High Gear aims to develop and demonstrate a model for greater industry involvement in TVET College course design and delivery. In doing so, the programme tests the key assumptions that improved and sustained **partnerships** between industry lead to **curricula and teaching** that is better aligned to industry needs, which provides employers with an improved skills pipeline and results in improved **learning and employment outcomes** for young people.

Why is systems change important?

Historically, the TVET sector in South Africa has been characterised by poor alignment between colleges and industry, contributing to a mismatch between the skills that young people acquire through TVET programmes, and the skills required by employers. This has made it difficult for graduates of TVET programmes to access employment in a scenario characterised by high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment alongside a shortage of skilled workers in key sectors of the economy. Systems change is necessary to address these challenges and to create a more enabling environment for skills development in South Africa. Specifically, High Gear recognised the need to shift from the current fragmented and siloed approach to skills development, in which there is a complete disjunct between education and training that takes place in the TVET colleges and the training that takes place in the workplace, and between the provisioning system and industrial planning mechanisms ¹.

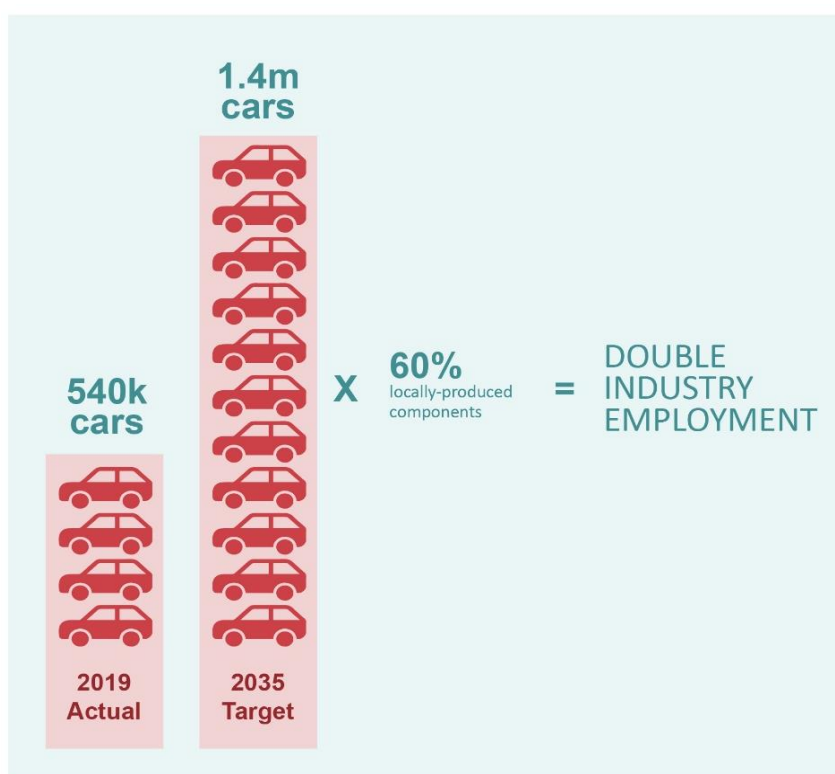
“The fascinating thing with the High Gear Programme is that they surfaced input for industry regarding the competence of graduates and curriculum content gaps – and have been able to support colleges and DHET to sit down and look into these issues. They have been able to connect colleges with industry and this is a key lesson that can be taken to other qualifications and industries” (DHET respondent)

High Gear has been designed to connect colleges, industry players, employers, and government to strengthen the skills ecosystem to achieve a “triple bottom line”, which ensures lasting benefits for young people, TVET colleges and industry in an approach that jointly shares the responsibility and resources for addressing skills shortages in the country between key public and private stakeholders ⁴.



Supporting the automotive sector to reach the Masterplan goals

The *South African Automotive Masterplan: Vision 2035* aims to increase local vehicle assembly from 540 thousand cars in 2019 to 1.4 million cars (1% of global vehicle production) by 2035, while increasing local content in South African assembled vehicles to 60%, up from the current 40%. Through increased production volume, the Masterplan anticipates the sector will double employment to more than 220,000 jobs ⁵. To achieve these objectives, the automotive components manufacturing industry requires a pipeline of young people with demand-aligned engineering, higher-order thinking, and work readiness competencies.

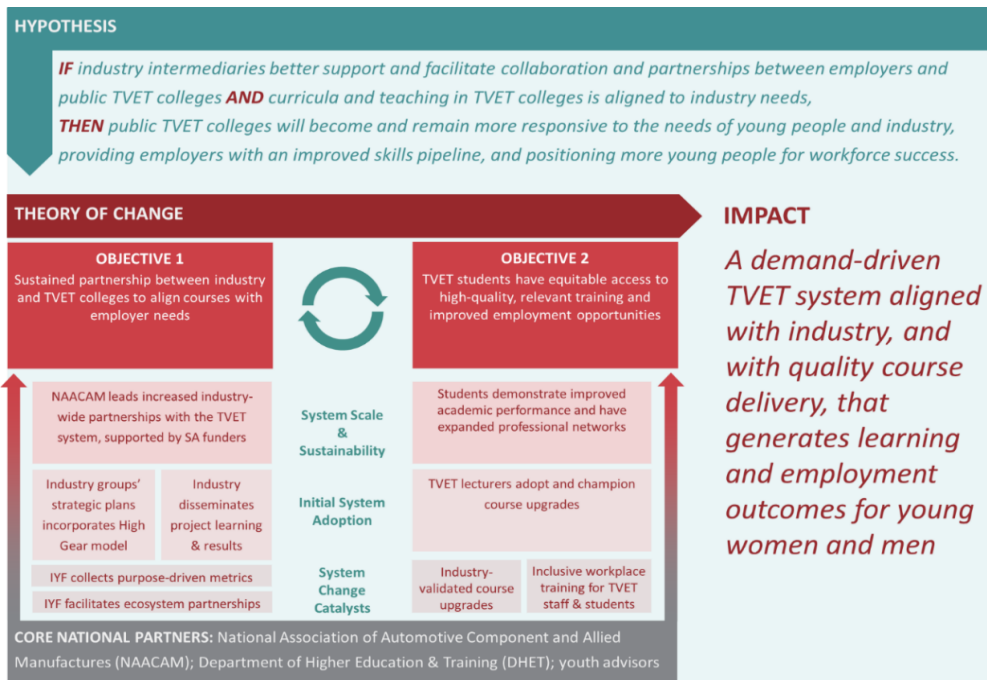


Specifically, the young people in the pipeline need qualifications from TVET colleges in areas such as Automation, Mechatronics, Manufacturing Management and Advanced Manufacturing. Additionally, they need soft skills (such as professional conduct and ethics, emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills), academic skills (such as critical and analytical thinking, communication, and science and mathematics), and workplace-related skills (such as creative thinking and problem-solving, teamwork, working with tools and technology) ⁶.

What is the High Gear Theory of Change?

The vision for High Gear, depicted in the diagram over the page, places an explicit focus on ensuring that the supply base is globally competitive, but also 'transformed' ⁷. This transformation aspect encompasses many elements including:

- ▶ increased employment of previously disadvantaged (PDI) South Africans
- ▶ targeted development and upskilling of PDI employees
- ▶ empowerment of dealership and repair facilities
- ▶ increased participation and inclusion of Black-owned business (as defined in national empowerment legislation) in the value chain
- ▶ improved employment equity outcomes which reflect the national population demographic



Specifically, the programme tests the key assumptions that improved and sustained **partnerships** between industry lead to **curricula and teaching that is better aligned to industry needs**, which results in **improved learning and employment outcomes** for young people.

It does this by supporting TVET Colleges and industry to:

- 01.** Identify priority industry competencies with industry associations and work with identified colleges to integrate these into the teaching environment.
- 02.** Design industry validated TVET course upgrades in partnership with TVET lecturers and industry experts.
- 03.** Support TVET Colleges to deliver industry-aligned content by drawing on lessons learnt in the colleges and on industry-based needs.
- 04.** Organise workplace exposure for TVET staff and students, which is co-developed with employers.
- 05.** Assist employers and industry associations to secure funding from SETAs by delivering Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) grant advisory services.



OUTLINING HIGH GEAR'S INTERVENTIONS



Implementation phases and timeline

High Gear was launched in February 2020 and runs through January 2024. Activities in the programme have focused on addressing the needs of industry, colleges and young people, as summarised in the diagram on the following page.



Industry



Colleges



Young People

2020

High Gear is introduced into South Africa

Initial work with stakeholders, planning and designing, baseline interviews and focus groups. Managing the impact of COVID-19

2021

Synthesizing Industry Insights, Building Strategic Partnerships & Enriching Classroom Experience

Engaging with companies to bring industry experts into the Colleges

Talking to lecturers about how to better support teaching & learning

Launching the mentorship strategy

Facilitating industry input

Supporting the development of a resource database – sample lesson plans, external resources

Unpacking the 'difficult topics'

Development of the 'Demokits'

Exploring the best ways of getting lecturers and students into the workplace, understanding how to maximise the benefits

Digital workshops to enhance knowledge transfer in the classroom

Starting to explore possibilities around a career platform

Working together with the QCTO to redesign curriculum frameworks

2022

Expanding Horizons

Curriculum framework redesign is completed and submitted to QCTO

Guest lecturers provide direct exposure to industry

Yakh'iFuture is launched, exploring partnerships with SAYouth.mobi

Bringing in more WIL opportunities, facilitating more placements

Supporting learners with soft skills training

Providing insights to GESI issues through industry cased research

WIL training and placements

Supporting lecturers with effective teaching & project based learning

Guiding learners into leaderships & apprenticeships

Providing SETA grant advisory services

Training of Trainers for Project Based Learning

Developing a competency framework for the EV industry in South Africa

2023

A Journey Towards Excellence

Developing a competency framework for the EV industry in South Africa

Providing support to companies to take on learners

Supporting lecturers with professional development opportunities

Guiding learners into learnerships & apprenticeships

Supporting learners with 'soft' skills

Supporting employers to access SETA funds

Supporting lecturers with effective teaching & protect based learning

Supporting learners with digital literacy training

Guest lecturers provide direct exposure to industry

WIL training and placements

These activities were initially implemented in two TVET colleges, Eastcape Midlands College, in the Eastern Cape and Elangeni TVET College, in KwaZulu-Natal, but the programme's footprint has organically expanded to Coastal TVET College, Tshwane North College, PE College, mainly based on requests from the colleges. Interest has also been shown by Eskom (South Africa's power supplier) to work with colleges in the Northern Cape and with the College of Cape Town.

This has largely been driven by the quality of the outputs, and active and visible social media and conference presentations have also created an interest in High Gear. A summary of programme offerings at the various sites is provided in the table below.

Programme offering	Description	Implementing TVET institutions				
		Eastcape Midlands TVET College	Elangeni TVET College	Coastal KZN TVET College	Tshwane North TVET College	PE TVET College
Short-Term WIL Placements	Both lecturers and students have the opportunity to participate in Work-Integrated Learning placements for practical experience.	X	X			
Capacity Building Interventions	• Mentorship Support: Lecturers receive valuable guidance and support from experienced mentors. • Resource Development: Teaching aids are readily available on a shared drive for easy access and utilisation. • Train the Trainer: Lecturers are equipped with effective teaching techniques and trained in Project-Based Learning methods.	X	X			
Career Development	Yakh'iFuture Platform Promotion: Lecturers are supported in promoting the Yakh'iFuture platform and its primary components, including Educational Content (PTS, Games, etc.), Career Resources (Video Vlogs from industry youth), and Employment Pathways through the SAyouth.mobi link.	X	X	X	X	X
Learner Placement	Employment Opportunities: Both funded and non-funded learners are placed into long-term opportunities, such as Learnerships and Apprenticeships, to enhance their career prospects.	X	X	X	X	X
Learner Development	Guest Lecturing support: Students attended talks facilitated by industry experts, the topics included are ; Job roles, Role of learnerships and apprenticeships, How to apply for a job and succeed in interviews, How to grow within a firm (including emphasis on soft skills and higher-order thinking skills), Supervisory management,	X	X	X	X	X

Programme offering	Description	Implementing TVET institutions				
	Production and quality control, Industry skills/growth trends, Latest industry tools (& methodologies) and practical examples, Problem-solving in industry and practical examples, Gender and diversity in the workplace, Women leaders in automotive manufacturing & Professional Ethics Soft Skills development: Through the Yakh'iFuture platform learners are able to access the Passport to Success platform which offers fun, game-based work readiness skills training that takes you around the world, virtually, using your smartphone or tablet tools for communication and productivity.					
Learner Development	Digital Literacy: The digital literacy workshop aimed to equip participants with essential skills and knowledge to navigate and utilize digital technologies effectively. Topics covered include basic computer operation, internet usage, online safety and security, social media management, and understanding digital tools for communication and productivity.		X	X		



SHIFTING THE SYSTEM: ACHIEVEMENTS & KEY LESSONS LEARNED

High Gear focuses on the transition from a fragmented and siloed approach to skills development, and instead seeks to cultivate a more collaborative and integrated approach that involves **sustainable partnerships** between TVET colleges, employers, and industry associations that are effective, and mutually beneficial. This

shift is founded on **changes in policy, practice, and culture**, and has resulted in a **better understanding of the demand** for skills within the sector. This creates an environment to make it possible for **supply to align** with demand, and to provide support services to students, with better signalling and more credible information about work opportunities.

“High Gear has been able to connect colleges with industry and this is a key lesson that can be taken to others....” (Industry respondent)



“Colleges are seeing a great response from industry who are more into the programme – they are seeing the benefit and industry is now enjoying working with the colleges and they are starting to donate equipment to the colleges.” College respondent

Sustainable partnerships between industry and the TVET system

The High Gear programme has worked effectively with industry associations to encourage greater and more effective collaboration between employers and colleges. Through this engagement, employers have increased their ability to shape learning outcomes to meet industry needs. The partnerships have also allowed lecturers to gain insight into current workplace practices and opened opportunities for students to obtain work-integrated learning experiences. Employer, industry association and TVET College respondents have all acknowledged that High Gear has played a significant role in creating these partnerships.

The key industry association continues to **take forward priorities** related to the High Gear programme, including administering surveys to determine demand, working collectively with employers to aggregate this demand, and leveraging funding to implement bursaries and apprenticeships that meet the demand.

Key Lessons:

- **Select credible implementation partners.** This is key to successful programme development and implementation.
- **Establish the mutual benefits of collaboration and buy-in** including through ensuring that all stakeholders participate in the development of the programme and are involved in celebrating successes to encourage ongoing engagement. Keep the partnership momentum going by making quick decisions and keeping processes moving, not-with-standing the busy schedules of all parties involved. High Gear played a pivotal role in achieving this.
- **Reinforce the value of each partner's involvement:** for example, industry provides input into curriculum development while TVET colleges improve the quality of education and training. TVET colleges provide their students with practical experience in the colleges while employers offer workplace experience to students and absorb skilled graduates in the workplace.
- **Ensure the programme and its work gets adequate exposure.** High Gear worked to ensure visibility in the industry, and as a result, more partners have requested to join and benefit from the programme and collaborations.
- **Identify passionate and credible individuals at both colleges and businesses to serve as champions** for the collaboration.
- **Establish clear terms of the partnership** through detailed Memorandums of Understanding. The key is to ensure that the terms of partnership are agreed upon upfront and then as indicated above that these are reflected upon and sustained to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals and creating a sense of ownership and commitment among all stakeholders.
- **Develop partnerships with those already working** in the ecosystem and encourage collaboration amongst partners. High Gear has effectively done this with Harambee, SA Youth.mobi. It will be valuable to encourage TVET colleges to form stronger partnerships with each other to ensure that the TVETs are up to date with new happenings, new technologies and have a voice when they participate in such programmes.
- **Create a reflective ethos.** Stakeholders need to be able to respond to shifts in the ecosystem, learn from successes and failures, and revise roles and responsibilities.
- **Address challenges** (such as limited resources, limited capacity of TVET colleges, limited engagement with employers, limited integration of technology, and limited training and support for lecturers) to ensure that the partnerships are sustainable over the long term.
- **Build on solid foundations.** Relationships that have been developed during the first phase of High Gear, as well as its established location within industry planning, are the foundation for moving forward.
- **Building on existing linkages** creates a basis for staying abreast with industry.
- **Embed into broader industry plans,** such as the proposed revision of curricula to integrate green skills across educational institutions and provide educators with the necessary training to effectively teach future-ready skills.

"Industry needs to own up to their role in providing work experience for these graduates, they also need to accept that there is a cost to on-boarding graduates as they may not be ready with the right skills to be knowledgeable and practically apply knowledge gained from the colleges". (Industry respondent)

Resulting shifts in policy, practice and culture

While there are not yet policy changes within the industry at this stage of the programme, there is evidence of the programme's impact on industry practices, particularly in the way skills planning is embedded into industrial strategies, in understanding skills demand and communicating to inform supply. Further, partnerships between TVET Colleges and Industry have resulted in changes in the way employers think about skills, work-integrated learning, and career guidance and heightened awareness about the value of sharing best practices and lessons learned across the skills development ecosystem. Specifically, interviews conducted with employers shows that, since their engagement with High Gear, they are more open to offering work integrated learning opportunities to TVET students as they see the quality of the learners, that they have both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and crucially that they recognise the potential of the WIL process as a recruitment tool, realising that “taking in students during their studies for a little while is a wonderful opportunity to ‘cherry pick’ the best because one will see who is eager, who is bright eyed, who is reliable and who is a fast learner.

“(They ensured) that the people that we are getting are of the right calibre, they have been screened and they are ready to come and take this opportunity” (Employer respondent, Eastern Cape)

Shifting the prevailing culture and practices around issues of gender equity and social inclusion in the auto sector has been a key focus of High Gear. A learning brief, based on research⁸ conducted with young female professionals and their employers found that there would be value in introducing engineering to young girls at the school level to

generate interest in the field. It also spoke to the importance of establishing long-term strategies and targets for women's representation and retention, creating a pipeline of skilled female professionals, offering mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for women, addressing gender bias and stereotypes within the workplace, providing flexible work arrangements to promote work-life balance, and encouraging male allies to support gender diversity and inclusion initiatives. These recommendations were shared with High Gear with the aim of enhancing the presence and growth of women in the sector and foster a more inclusive work environment.

The need to consider the implications of this programme for the policies within TVET Colleges was also highlighted by industry partners. This is seen as critical to creating a basis for meaningful TVET college engagement in such partnerships. This includes the need for colleges to have space to respond to specific curricula needs of employers and to incentivise lecturers to fully participate in additional training and to participate in workplace learning. This could take the form of recognition or certification when they participate in lecturer development programmes.

“Companies need to actively focus on creating a skills pipeline of talented women. We can't keep saying ‘we can't find them.’” (Employer respondent)



Key Lessons:

- **Share successes** and examples of good practice so that others in the eco-system can adopt such measures.
- **Engage with all stakeholders** to ensure that the wide range of voices are heard and considered in the enhancement of practices and the strengthening of policies. Industry partners observe that it will take many stakeholders in this space to collectively close the gaps that exist to ensure better curricula alignment for our youth at all levels and emphasise that this is particularly critical due to technological advances.
- **Build capacity** to ensure that everyone has the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- **Monitor and evaluate** to ensure that progress is being made towards the goals of the programme and identifying areas where improvements can be made. This should support the generation of insights about the practices and policies that should be enhanced to strengthen the space and the development of a **shared vision**.
- Continue to **consolidate** fragmented work done in silos to encourage effective collaboration and the development of an integrated system that brings together the different components of the education and training system, workplace transformation, industry planning and development.

Responding to changing insights about demand & supply

Another key shift in practice is the collaborative work being done to create new qualifications and curriculum frameworks that better satisfy industry demands, as well as the support being provided to improve TVET curricula to establish a stronger connection between colleges and the industry.

We have noted that the High Gear programme is being implemented in a very difficult economic context, creating further pressure on the ability of graduates to access and retain work opportunities. This pressure has meant that many employers are unable to focus on training and recruitment of TVET graduates as their immediate concerns relate to retaining current staff and resuming and continuing with production. In this context, skills development and training interventions were seen as a secondary priority during 2022. Despite this, significant progress has been demonstrated and laid the groundwork for continued engagement between industry and the TVET college system. This will enable High Gear to adopt green technologies, such as electric vehicles, as the global demand increases.

“...through our quarterly automotive labour market survey..., we were able to understand ... the scarce skills, ... the hard to fill vacancies and ... the challenges with graduates coming in the labour market. We submitted these inputs to the IYF team, and they worked on upgrading course content” (Industry Intermediary)

Key Lessons:

- **Increase and sustain engagement with employers:** The involvement of industry intermediaries has provided a sustainable model for ensuring that there is a greater understanding of demand and, as indicated by an industry respondent, that the graduates of the TVET system are ready to enter the labour market and have better skills.
- **Build a responsive approach to linking immediate demand with supply:** Companies who are willing to go to the colleges and inform colleges and learners about what they do and host companies who are willing to go extra mile. This requires engagement with industry associations but as critically with employers at the local level. Without this it is difficult to fully understand the needs of employers and to adapt curricula that are responsive to these needs.
- **Increase the capacity of TVET colleges** to respond to the needs of industry, particularly in relation to curriculum development and work-integrated learning. In addition to limitations on curriculum change, as outlined previously, limited capacity has also made it difficult to fully engage with industry and to develop curricula that are responsive to fast-paced changes in industry needs.
- **Placement of both learners and lecturers** into industry so that they can see what industry is currently and locate their lectures and their learning in a workplace context. This assists learners to continue to scaffold their learning at the colleges and their learning in the workplace in ways that builds their competence. This also assists lecturers in framing what they teach and to introduce learners to the new technologies of the auto sector thereby creating awareness of where the future of the industry is going.
- **Use credible data.** For example, the use of scarce skills data from the auto industry's quarterly labour market surveys was a key and reliable input into the course revision process.
- **Be flexible and adaptable** to respond to changing circumstances and emerging needs and ensure relevance and effectiveness over time.

Enabling young people to make choices informed by understanding the labour market

The Yakh'iFuture platform is an online resource designed for TVET college engineering students to help them explore careers in the automotive manufacturing sector, practice with tools to help students with their studies, as well as find learnerships, apprenticeships and job opportunities. The platform was launched in 2022 and while there are some concerns about its capacity as well as about the challenges that young people experience in accessing data to use the system, stakeholders are very positive about how it was developed and the extent to which it has the potential to provide a powerful tool for providing career guidance. **Yakh'iFuture** has been institutionalised within NAACAM and in partnership with SAYouth.Mobi, is finding ways to aggregate opportunities and guide and place young people in auto companies.

"We have some companies who are willing to go to the colleges and inform colleges and learners what the companies do - we have had some great host companies who are willing to go extra mile." College respondent

"The Yakh'iFuture platform was designed, developed, tested, and launched by NAACAM in collaboration with the IYF. We spent a lot of time with our members to inform the content..." Industry Association respondent

In addition to the platform, career advice and guidance was offered by guest lecturers in 2022. These guest lecturers were predominantly Human Resource employees from auto components companies. Topics covered in these lectures included careers in engineering, workplace conduct, interview tips etc. These services helped students to navigate the transition from education to employment and ensured that they have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workplace.

This has helped to equip students for employment in the automotive components manufacturing sector and has contributed to the overall success of the programme.

Some **work-integrated learning opportunities** for youth have been enabled, which have helped to improve the employability of young people and promote a better understanding of the world of work.

Key Lessons:

- Provide students with **access to information** about the labour market, current and future job opportunities, required skills and qualifications and potential career pathways.
- Assist student with '**soft**' skills such as interview skills, CV writing and workplace conduct information.
- Ensure that students have access to online information. **Zero rating of data** is fundamental to the success of Yakh'iFuture.
- **Create opportunities for lecturers to share skills.** One of the challenges has been limited training and support for lecturers particularly about the use of digital learning pathways and other technologies. This has made it difficult to fully integrate these platforms into lesson plans and to use them effectively in the classroom.
- **Address the challenges of limited resources** including funding, equipment, and staffing. These limitations have made it difficult to fully implement the programme and created barriers to effective curriculum development and work-integrated learning.



SHIFTING THE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

*"Industry needs to own up to their role in providing work experience for these graduates, they also need to accept that there is a cost to on-boarding graduates as they may not be ready with the right skills to be knowledgeable and practically apply knowledge gained from the colleges".
(Industry respondent)*

One of the programme's core objectives is to improve employment opportunities for young people in the automotive component manufacturing sector. This objective is based on the premise that young people need not only high-quality and relevant training but also skills and tools to access employment and guidance on how to look for work and what employment opportunities are available. High Gear has collected employment data since its implementation, which shows that where young people have accessed employment, this is primarily in contract work or learnerships/internships. Data from tracer studies indicate that the number of graduates who indicated that they are employed are still low, and most employed young people

have contract work or are on learnership agreements. The percentage of employed graduates increased between the two tracer studies, from 4% to 15% of respondents, which is important given the challenging economic context and the depressed labour market.

A review of Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) reports highlight that low levels of economic activity adversely impacts colleges' ability to provide locally relevant work experience. This suggests a need for mechanisms for students to travel to workplaces that can provide opportunities to gain practical skills. This issue is likely to become even more important as occupational qualifications require a workplace component. This means that the capacity of a college to deliver such qualifications will be determined by the availability of such work in the areas surrounding the colleges.

These factors have been taken on board in the plans for the next phase of the High Gear programme with a particular emphasis on building alternate pathways for young people into the economy.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY

The High Gear programme has made significant progress towards achieving its objectives, and there are positive signs that the programme's impact will be sustained beyond the end of the project. The development of a **robust monitoring and evaluation framework** has helped to document progress to date and identify areas for improvement. Evidence shows that the programme has successfully established strong partnerships between TVET colleges and industry, which are expected to continue after the project's completion. Additionally, the programme has developed new models for curriculum development and work-integrated learning. However, there are some concerns about whether the colleges will continue to revise their curricula, and whether there will be enough opportunities for students moving forward. Going forward, High Gear will need to maintain the focus on fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration that will continue to drive change in the TVET sector.

"Our members have realised the value of partnerships and its more than getting young people to work in the automotive pipeline but to understand their role within the skills ecosystem, which involves a community level obligation to work with other employers to achieve skills development change" (Industry Intermediary)



Evidence of sustainability and scalability is also seen in:

Expanding the footprint of the programme: The Coega Development Corporation, (owned by the Eastern Cape Provincial Government), intends to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with two TVET colleges in Port Elizabeth (PE College and Eastcape Midlands College) to take forward elements of the programme. And the publicity surrounding High Gear has strengthened relationships with Volkswagen SA, the biggest private employer in the Nelson Mandela Bay area, as well as with other colleges as shown above.

College staff taking ownership: **Exposure to new technologies** and approaches in the workplace and the establishment of a **mentoring programme** to support effective teaching have provided successful capacity development initiatives for lecturers. College staff have taken ownership of elements of the programme, particularly Work Integrated Learning placements. They are now equipped to inform prospective employers and students and generate the necessary reports to ensure the sustainability of student work experience. A respondent observed that management at the college is excited about what has changed and suggests that the programme has helped to consolidate their role in the programme and to improve the relationship between industry and the colleges.

A focused approach to work placements: eNtsa, a renowned innovation hub with a focus on engineering design, component and material testing, prototyping, and industrial R&D, has partnered with High Gear as a WIL implementation partner. They create and structure short WIL placements and have introduced students and lecturers to current technologies via a mobile unit brought to a TVET college. This provides yet another example of successful engagement around student and lecturer placement.

Yakh'iFuture: As High Gear adapts to industry demand, the Yakh'iFuture platform has the potential to expand beyond the automotive sector and become a versatile and sustainable source of information.

Pivoting to overcome challenges: Initially, Passport to Success (PTS) was meant to be incorporated into High Gear, but due to timetabling conflicts, this was not possible. As a result, evaluation results indicated a lack of improvement in soft skills among graduates. To rectify this issue, the PTS modules were moved to the Yakh'iFuture platform, with mixed results. IYF then worked with DHET to integrate PTS into the curriculum, leveraging DHET's mandate of including life skills training across the TVET system by the end of 2023. To complete the PTS modules, students now have access to computer laboratories for assessment and certification.

Integration of the programme into national strategies: High Gear is an integral part of the DHET strategic ERRP implementation plan 2022/2023, and the plan includes success stories that have emerged from this programme.



LOOKING FORWARD

Phase 1 of the High Gear programme, we have seen significant progress in promoting sustainable partnerships between industry and colleges, improving relationships between employers and the Sector Education and Training Authority for Manufacturing, Engineering, and related services, which have been welcomed by role players. A key area of success in this programme is the extent that it has begun to contribute to system change. Core to this is the extent to which skills development is now embedded in industrial processes. In addition, qualifications have undergone valuable revisions, resulting in better-aligned curriculum frameworks that meet industry needs. And while the practical learning and workplace exposure elements still need work, the programme's focus on improving industry alignment and promoting work-integrated learning has the potential for long-term impact.

Going forward, High Gear aims to build on this solid base as it diversifies its scope beyond the automotive industry, with a particular emphasis on renewable energy. This includes initiatives such as solar energy, wind energy, biomass, electric vehicles, green construction, and green hydrogen. The partnerships between college and industry which have been built in Phase 1 will be central in the development of the technology, engineering, and mathematical skills that are essential for young graduates to engage in this space. Specifically, High Gear 2.0 will leverage the experience from

Phase 1 to deliver targeted training programmes to equip educators with pedagogical approaches and tools to effectively teach future-ready skills and green skills and enhance the provision of STEM education, particularly Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, within the TVET College system. Further, the location of the High Gear programme within structures responsible for the Masterplan processes in the auto industry, allows these partnerships to be expanded and the programme to support shifts within industry, such as the pivot to focus on renewable energies.

The expanded network of partnerships realized through the course of Phase 1 ensures that the High Gear programme is in a strong position to increase WIL opportunities to enable learners to benefit from interactive learning experiences, mentorship programmes, and industry partnerships. This is central to enhancing TVET students' employability, develop future-ready STEM skills, and prepare them for careers in the new energy sectors.

"I think we need to broaden our perspective a little bit, and we need to be intentional about really driving transformation so that it not only works for society and the economy, but it works for you as a corporate as well" (Employer, KwaZulu-Natal).

Finally, our Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) framework is robust, allowing for continuous improvement. By analysing from the first phase of the programme, we have learned valuable lessons and used them to make data-driven decisions and shape the way forward. Our track record of success is the result of learning from our challenges and successes and adapting to new transitions. This emphasis on learning and an ability to make changes based on evidence emerging and considered by all partners will continue to be integral to the programme and to ensuring that the programme is able to meet its dual objectives of enabling TVET colleges to effectively prepare learners to transition into the labour market and of ensuring that through partnerships industry can build a skills pipeline that supports transformation and growth.



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