



***REPORT ON THE ROUNDTABLE
ON THE PROFESSIONALISATION
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN
SOUTH AFRICA***

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

DECEMBER 2018

FOREWORD

The Public Service Commission (PSC) has been championing the implementation of the values and principles espoused in Chapter 10 of the South African Constitution. These values and principles are complemented by the findings and recommendations of the National Development Plan, Vision 2030 which called for a capable and developmental public service.

As a result of the concern with the slow progress made in implementing the recommendations of the National Developmental Plan, the PSC deemed it appropriate to create a platform where relevant role players can come together to deliberate on the need for a common understanding of professionalisation and progress made towards the creation of a capable and developmental public service. This was done in the form of a Roundtable discussion, which was attended by different stakeholders, including the Deputy Minister for Public Service and Administration, key senior administrators in government, various academic institutions and non-governmental institutions such as professional associations.

The various expert inputs and discussions, which are summarised in the report, have contributed towards an appreciation of the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of professionalisation, and the importance of context in its conceptualisation.

The PSC is therefore pleased to present this report as a record of issues discussed during the Roundtable. The report should serve as basis for future engagements and joint action towards creating a professional and developmental public service in South Africa.



MS MOIRA MARAIS-MARTIN

COMMISSIONER

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ACRONYMS

AGSA	:	Auditor-General of South Africa
CVP	:	Constitutional Values and Principles
DG	:	Director General
DPME	:	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DPSA	:	Department of Public Service and Administration
HOD	:	Head of Department
HR	:	Human Resources
NBPEA	:	National Batho Pele Excellence Awards
NDP	:	National Developmental Plan, Vision 2030
NSG	:	National School of Government
PAMA	:	Public Administration Management Act
PARI	:	Public Affairs Research Institute
PSC	:	Public Service Commission
SMS	:	Senior Management Service

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

As part of promoting service excellence and effective human resource management in the public service, the Public Service Commission (PSC) hosted a Roundtable on Professionalisation of the Public Service on the 25 September 2018. The Roundtable took place during the Public Service Month (PSM) Programme. It was also integrally linked with the promotion and implementation of the Project on the Constitutional Values and Principles (CVPs) governing public administration which was launched on the 20 September 2018. This occurred at a time when the government is hard at work with the implementation of the National Development Plan Vision 2030 (NDP) and the African Union 2063 Agenda. The focus of the Roundtable was informed by one of the basic tenets for a capable and developmental state, as stated in Chapter 13 of the NDP. This entails the creation of a professional and meritocratic public service which is driven by the democratic values and principles as enshrined in section 195(1) of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 (Constitution).

The Constitution directs the public service to be professional, accountable, and development-oriented¹ and the NDP² amplifies this directive through identifying specific steps that need to be taken to promote the values and principles across public administration, which is inclusive of the public service with particular emphasis of building a capable and developmental state. The NDP highlights the need for well-run and effectively coordinated state institutions with skilled and capable public servants who are committed to the public good and who are capable of consistently delivering high quality services, whilst prioritising the nation's developmental objectives. The NDP further emphasises the imperative of making the public service a career of choice and building a competent, skilled and professional public service from the top and the bottom. At Senior Management Service levels, recruitment and management should be based on experience and expertise, while at junior levels focus should be on developing the skills and expertise that will be necessary for current and future public service cohorts.

In building a capable, career-oriented and professional public service to underpin a capable and developmental state, the PSC has focused on the following key attributes of a public service³:

- A Values-driven Public Service.
- Meritocratic Recruitment.
- Career Pathing.
- Role of Performance Management and Development.
- Competencies of Public Service Leadership.
- Political-administrative Interface.

¹ Republic of South Africa, Constitution, 1996.

² The Presidency. National Planning Commission of South Africa. National Development Plan, Vision 2030, 2012.

³ Public Service Commission (PSC), 2016. Developmental State Discussion Document. Republic of South Africa.

- Capacitation/training and its Funding in the Public Sector.
- Role of the Public Service Commission.

To this end, the PSC deemed it fit to convene a Roundtable in an effort to professionalise the Public Service.

1.2 Objectives of the Roundtable

The overall purpose of the Roundtable was to assess progress made with the professionalisation of the public service since the adoption of the NDP and to propose initiatives that can be undertaken to deepen and consolidate it. The specific objectives of the Roundtable were as follows:

- To develop a commonly agreed understanding and definition of professionalisation of the public service in South Africa.
- To clarify the process that should be followed to professionalise the public service.
- To reflect on progress towards the professionalisation of the public service in line with the ideals of the Constitution and the NDP.

1.3 Format of the Roundtable

The Roundtable was held over one day and divided into a number of sessions. Each session comprised of presentations by expert panelist who offered opinions and solutions to some of the identified challenges with respect to specific topics. This was followed by an interactive discussion with comments and questions from the floor. The session was facilitated by Commissioner Moira Marais-Martin.

1.4 Structure of the report

The report is divided into three sections which are structured as follows:

Section 1 provided the background which includes the introduction and discusses the objectives and format of the roundtable.

Section 2 presents the analysis of the issues discussed; and

Section 3 provides the recommendations and conclusion.

2. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Establishing a commonly agreed understanding and definition of professionalisation of the Public Service in South Africa

The Roundtable's keynote address was delivered by the Deputy Minister for Public Service and Administration, Dr Chana Pilane-Majake. The Deputy Minister's key message was that there is a need for a more coordinated, strategic approach to build state capacity and this calls for more collaboration by all stakeholders. The Deputy Minister contextualised that one of the basic tenets for a capable and developmental state, as stated in the NDP, is a professional and meritocratic public service which is driven by the democratic values and principles as enshrined in section 195(1) of the Constitution. The imperative to professionalise the public service is driven by Chapter 13 of the NDP which focuses on building a capable and developmental state and outlines, amongst others, the following objectives as attributes of a developmental state:

- A state that is capable of playing a developmental and transformative role.
- A public service immersed in the developmental agenda.

The Deputy Minister further emphasised the need for the Roundtable discussion to clearly articulate a common understanding of professionalisation in line with the ideals of the Constitution and the NDP. As a starting point, there are varied definitions of professionalisation. Some define it as a social process whereby trades or occupations transform themselves into true professions of the highest integrity and competence. However, others define it as a process of organising occupations in terms of knowledge, skills, standards and codes of conduct to achieve recognition. The professionalisation process can include or exclude the formation of professional associations.

The responsibilities for the regulation of the affairs and behaviour of members are typically delegated to professional bodies who assume the responsibility of setting relevant competence criteria for admission into the profession, overseeing the certification of professionals, and setting and enforcing ethical work practices and behaviour. However, there is a need to guard against having a proliferation of bodies that might equally undermine the basic tenets of professionalisation.

The Deputy Minister intimated that the task of professionalising the public service is not easy and requires strong partnerships between government departments, academia, professional associations, the private sector and civil society. There is therefore an urgent need for government institutions to foster strong partnerships towards building a capable, career-oriented and professional public service. The Deputy Minister further stated that the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service emphasizes the need to promote professional ethos and ongoing skills training for all employees at all levels as part of their professional life. Such skills

and competencies will not only be occupational, technical and professional in nature as they must also relate to problem solving, innovation and leadership.

The session following the Deputy Minister's keynote address was dedicated to discussions towards establishing a common understanding and an agreed definition of professionalisation in the context of the public service in South Africa.

The main input in this regard was received from the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) which was represented by Ms Sara Meny-Gibert. In her input, on behalf of PARI, she pointed out that professionalism means different things in different contexts. In order to define professionalisation of the public service one must first understand the context in which public servants work and train. The organisational context in which public servants work shapes both the development of their skills as well as a shared sense of organisational mission. For the purpose of the roundtable discussion, two core dimensions to professionalism were identified. The first dimension is skills and experience or competence in the given area. The second dimension is the values and norms that help bind members of the profession, occupation or organisation to a common understanding of an organisation's mandate or professional mission. In the context of the public service, this is often referred to as an *esprit de corps*, which is a shared commitment to deliver on the mandate of their departments.

Professionalism is developed and shaped by the institutions operating within organisations in which public servants are trained. An institution can however be defined by implicit social rules and norms that structure people's behaviour. Professionalism, on the other hand, can be defined and shaped by formal rules (regulatory and operational) operating in organisations such as places of training or in the workplace), or through professional and other regulatory bodies. Irrespective of context, there are however implications for policies that are related to professionalisation. Professionalisation cannot be manufactured simply through the development of written codes or through certification and training and it cannot be done overnight.

Ms Meny-Gibert emphasised that it is further important that the public service pays attention to both the training regimes and to organisational building. Organisational building requires an understanding of the political and economic circumstances shaping public sector organisations. As such, the formal architecture of a training regime should not be compared to that of other countries as each country is unique and what is successful in one part of the world will not necessarily be successful in another. The underlying institutions which are essential to make the training regime successful must also be considered.

2.1.1 Key levers and structural conditions for the development of greater professionalism

The first and most important task involves establishing cohesive organisations. This entails clear hierarchies, clear lines of work and stability in leadership in part through establishing clarity on the political-administrative interface and a supporting executive and public servants to each play their role appropriately. This must be done whilst ensuring stability particularly at the senior administrative level.

Instability in any organisation tends to result in staff being unable to focus on their work, or make appropriate decisions particularly when they require a long term approach. It also limits senior officials' abilities to mentor and train their subordinates. Instability is more prevalent in organisations that are shaped by patronage politics rather than on the basis of the appropriateness to the organisation's mandate. When an organisation is stable, it is more likely that policies are not disconnected and that public servants are deployed and utilised in line with their respective skills and competencies.

To achieve this level of stability, the NDP has outlined a number of appropriate proposals which include changes to the recruitment regulations and mechanisms and proposing a stronger role for the PSC. It also encourages developing training organisations and pathways that can support a sustainable cohort of public service managers. Cohort training requires lengthy periods of training with the same group of people to help support the development of networks and communities of practice. It is therefore vital that the various stakeholders play their respective roles accordingly.

The task of professionalising the public service is quite a challenging one and will require a strong partnership between the government, academia, professional associations, the private sector as well as civil society. The country's success in this process will depend on the ability of the public service to learn, reflect, implement and grow. The National School of Government (NSG) is critical in this regard, and it will be required to lead the implementation and create the necessary partnerships.

In closing, PARI suggested that focus should first be on core 'competencies' for state capacity within supply chain management and human resources as well as the technical skills required for key economic and social sectors. This will be followed by using e-learning and other more efficient approaches for core training for all public servants. PARI further suggested that Graduate Recruitment Programmes should be coordinated across the public service. Equally important is the need to avoid fragmented recruitment schemes so that cohort training can be supported and the public service must also consider placements and reduce the reliance on outsourcing. In closing, a policy on professionalisation of the public service should not focus on individuals but should rather follow a holistic approach.

2.2 Understanding the process that should be followed to professionalise the public service and the appropriate institutional arrangements

This session was preceded by expert inputs by Professor MH Maserumule, Acting Executive Dean of Humanities at the Tshwane University of Technology. In dealing with the question on 'What is the process to be followed in Professionalising the Public Service,' Professor Maserumule provided an analysis of the experience of other countries.

Countries such as China were of the view that only the best shall be deemed to serve the country and must be appointed on a permanent basis. Therefore, the professionalisation of the public service can happen as a function of meritocracy which is a system of appointing or promoting staff based on the knowledge and skills required for the performance of public functions, rather than on social status. This therefore begs the question of how to institutionalise meritocracy in the administration of the state in order to realise a professional public service? Meritocracy in the administration of the state can only evolve in a meritocratic society. A society where ability and skill count more than a privilege status; where consciousness is a norm; and corruption and nepotism are rejected. Members of the meritocratic society are all knowledge based and the public service should institutionalise itself to align with the meritocratic society.

According to Professor Maserumule, in South Africa, meritocracy has not necessarily been a priority. For example, the apartheid government was divided based on colonial balkanization of South Africa into the former Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and the Cape Colony. The apartheid regime also resulted in the ethnic balkanization which resulted in the creation of Bantustans and self-governing territories. The common practice was that whites were appointed in the private sector, and those that could not be accommodated in the former British colonies would be placed in the Bantustans or self-governing territories. In fact, in the early nineties, at the dawn of democracy, the senior management in the administrations of the Bantustans and self-governing territories comprised of white officials who could not make it in the four administrations of the British colonies. Black officials that were appointed in senior positions within the Bantustan governments were also not appointed on merit, but rather based on royal lineage.

In a democratic post- apartheid South Africa, the government was transformed and focus was on creating a public service that is unified through changing the discriminatory policies and improving service delivery. However, meritocracy was not part of the culture. This is the reason why two decades into our democracy, the South African government is still grappling with the challenge of building a professional public service. Appointments from the apartheid era which were based on race and royal lineage were then replaced by "reckless" cadre deployment. While cadre deployment is an acceptable practice, reckless cadre deployment is a state where appointment processes for certain positions in the public service are subordinated to party whims. A study conducted by the PSC in 2008 found that the turnover rate of Heads of

Departments to be more than 25%⁴. This figure seemingly increased over the years and this is linked to political influence of the ruling party in the administration of all three spheres of government.

In essence, a professional public service can be achieved through meritocracy, and various authors agree to the notion that elements of meritocracy are encompassed mainly by fairness and equal opportunity. To achieve meritocracy the community and all other stakeholders must be involved. The institutional arrangements for the professionalisation of the public service requires collaboration of all relevant stakeholders and should include the following processes:

- The development of a clear set norms and standards for all the disciplines in the public service.
- The identification of professional bodies that are operating within the various disciplines to collaborate with government departments and institutions of higher learning, to ensure that service delivery challenges are addressed through strategic approaches.
- Research by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and the NSG, together with professional bodies and academia should develop customised training programmes to mitigate the practical challenges that face the public service.
- The development of effective control measures within government departments in order to promote an environment that will be conducive for individual employees to thrive as professionals for the benefit of the public service and to enhance productivity.

In closing, Professor Maserumule emphasized the role of social institutions such as schools and universities to facilitate the creation of a meritocratic society. This should be done through quality education, where the instructional offering not only focuses on the development of the cognitive faculties, but also on character formation. It is a meritocratic society which can create a professional public service for a capable state.

2.3 Progress towards the professionalisation of the Public Service in line with the ideals of the Constitution and the NDP and Public Service Institutional Arrangements

This section highlights the progress made thus far pertaining to the professionalisation of the public service in line with the ideals of the Constitution and the NDP. The progress will thus be measured against these two corner-stone documents. The Director-General (DG) of the DPSA, Professor Richard Levin, briefed the roundtable on progress made towards the professionalisation of the public service. Professor Levin emphasised that the public service is more than developing smart ideas but rather, it entails the ability to marshal the financial,

⁴ Public Service Commission. Report on the turnover rate of Heads of Department and its implications for the Public Service, June 2008.

political and organisational support to make those ideas resonate with the public and for them to take effect in government policies.

The public service must use and channel the financial and other administrative resources in a positive way to transform South Africa. For this to happen, the public service will require new relationships between the state and society. The public service must also develop the capacity to understand people's needs, facilitate participation in policy implementation, and be development orientated as these are all critical to fighting social inequality. The preamble of the Constitution asks of the public service to improve the quality of life of all citizens and to free the potential of each person. There is a lot of capacity within the country and many frustrated individuals in various communities. The energy that goes into social protests can be channeled into positive energy.

The Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The state must respect, protect, promote and fulfill the rights in the Bill of Rights. To achieve this public administration must go beyond compliance and be innovative in order to be responsive to the needs of the people of South Africa, be developmental in nature and be participatory.

A Capable and Developmental Public Service must embrace the values and principles in Chapter 10 of the Constitution in order to offer a professional service through public servants who:—

- have the necessary competence and experience;
- strive for excellence in performance; and
- adhere to the standards and values that underpin the profession.

Chapter 13 of the NDP on Building a Capable State targets five keys areas:

- Stabilise the Political-Administrative interface;
- Make the public service and local government careers of choice;
- Develop technical and specialist professional skills;
- Improve relations between the three spheres of government; and.
- Clarify mandates for public interest, and governance structures in State Owned Enterprises.

2.3.1 Stabilising the political-administrative interface

The NDP recommends the creation of an Administrative Head of the Public Service to whom DGs would report on organisational and administrative matters. A hybrid approach to top appointments that allows for the reconciliation of administrative and political priorities is also required. Most importantly is a recommendation for a purely administrative approach to lower-level appointments, with senior officials given full authority to appoint staff in their departments.

2.3.2 Professionalisation through regulations and practice

The Public Service Regulations, 2016, Chapter 4, Part 3 (Section 54) gives powers to Heads of Department (HoDs) to introduce appropriate measures for the institutionalisation of the Public Service Charter in their departments. It is intended that this will contribute to public servants maintaining acceptable levels of professionalism towards citizens when providing services. The Public Service Month has been a precursor to the National Batho Pele Excellence Awards (NBPEA), which take place in November every year. A key purpose of the annual NBPEA is to entrench the transformation and professionalisation of the public service.

2.3.3 Making the Public Service a Career of Choice

This requires the transformation of public service workplaces to ensure that employees are fully equipped to fulfill their responsibilities in a professional way. It also requires an organisational culture that provides a conducive environment for employees to work, grow and serve with distinction. However, uneven spatial development continues to limit the achievement of these objectives with the division of revenue at the provincial and local sphere inhibiting adequate resourcing. Achieving an integrated and uniform public service resourcing and culture through a “Single Public Legislation”, will not be fully realised through the current Public Administration Management Act (PAMA).

2.3.4 Building Skills and Capacity for a Professional Public Service

The Cabinet has endorsed a suite of compulsory programmes, defined as requirements to work in the public service. The compulsory programme offerings consist of those programmes that, through Ministerial Directives, legally compel every public servant to attend. The sole provider for these compulsory programme offerings is the NSG. The current compulsory programmes consist of the following:

- Compulsory Induction Programme (salary levels 1-14).
- Executive Induction Programme (salary levels 15-16).
- Khaedu training and deployment to service delivery sites (salary levels 13-16).
- Pre-entry to SMS echelon.

Informed by the current conditions in the public service (as identified by the AGSA, PSC and DPME), the Cabinet further endorsed five compulsory programmes. The new Compulsory Programmes are as follows:

- Ethics in the Public Service (all public servants) – online.
- Managing Performance in the Public Service (salary levels 6-12) – online.
- Supply Chain Management for the Public Service (salary levels 9-16) - online.
- Financial Management Delegations of Authority (salary levels 9-16) – online.
- Re-orientation in the Public Service.

The primary consideration for including these five programmes as compulsory is because the programme design and content addresses a number of the knowledge, values and skills gaps identified in review reports as being critical to promote professionalism in the public service.

A further set of mandatory programmes, defined as responsive programmes to current contextual challenges in the public service and are aimed at providing direct support to departments to fulfill their respective mandates, were endorsed by the Cabinet. These are:

- Citizen-centred Service Delivery (front-line service employees).
- Supply Chain Management for Practitioners.
- Programme and Project Management (salary levels 13-16).
- Avoiding Irregular, Fruitless and Wasteful Expenditure (salary levels 9-16).
- Art of Facilitation – lead facilitator of development (for the progressive realisation of socio economic rights).
- Coaching for Leadership Development (salary levels 13-16).
- Youth development (all interns).
- Evidence-based policy making and implementation (salary levels 9-16).

The Commission on State Capture has also revealed the urgent need to strengthen governance across state owned companies and entities. It also strengthens the case for a single and uniform public administration as required by section 195 of the Constitution. Furthermore, professionalisation of board member requirements (and a move towards meritocratic approaches to appointments) will drastically improve the performance of state owned and public entities.

It is important to note that all of the above can be achieved if there is political will. Although the presentation illustrates that some progress has been made towards professionalising the public

service, critical action in line with the Constitution and NDP remain incomplete. These include in particular:

- The establishment of an Administrative Head of the Public Service.
- Promotion of a people-centered service culture.
- Merit based appointments, including political competence, the skills to meet people's needs and the understanding of how to implement programmes to progressively realise socio-economic rights.
- Demonstrated economic inclusion and development.

All these are critical attributes of a professional public service in our country. In conclusion, Professor Richard Levin stated that some progress has been made towards professionalizing the Public Service. Nevertheless critical action in line with the Constitution and the National Development Plan remains incomplete. In particular, the establishment of an administrative head of the Public Service and a people-centred service culture. Appointments based on merit, including political competence, the skills to meet people's needs and the understanding how to implement programmes to progressively realise socio-economic rights, economic inclusion and development, are all critical attributes of a professional public service in our country.

The input by the participants and the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, Advocate Richard K Sizani was that there is a need for more discussion on closed and partially open recruitment system and on entry examinations in Public Service to support the professionalisation process.

2.4 Summary of Issues: Remarks by Commissioner Mthembu on Behalf of the Public Service Commission

According to Commissioner Ben Mthembu, the common thread across all the speakers, including the Deputy Minister in her opening speech, was that:

- Professionalisation of the public service in South Africa cannot be discussed outside the context of the Constitution and the NDP. The constitutional imperative, especially section 195, speaks of a public administration and public service that is effective, efficient and conducts its work with a high standard of professional ethics. The NDP resonates with the Constitution as it emphasizes the building of a capable developmental state that is underpinned by a professional public service which is responsive, developmental and transformative to the needs of citizens.

- The 2030 Vision as highlighted in the NDP is very clear that we must have teachers, nurses and doctors who care, who are committed and who can deliver quality public services and committed to the development agenda of the country.
- The second finding that emerged in discussions is that there are many definitions of professionalisation depending on the context in which it is used. However, there were certain dimensions that were identified. Firstly, professionalism refers to skills and competencies, values and norms, code of conduct, and secondly meritocracy. Meritocracy sums up the issue of knowledge, skills and values. All this resonates very well with the NDP when it refers to a professional public service as one where persons are recruited on the basis of merit and potential rather than connection or political allegiance.
- A further important finding is that the institutional context also plays a role as there can be no development of the national goals, values and principles that are enshrined in the Constitution without a professional public service. In the absence of people that have the requisite skills, knowledge and commitment the implementation of the developmental agenda will not be attained.
- Throughout the discussions it was emphasised that the necessary tools exist for a professional public service in the form of policies, the Constitution as well as the NDP but the caveat remains one of implementation.
- There is therefore a critical need for training and development based on an appropriate curriculum that will speak to the NDP. The NDP has set targets to be achieved by 2030 in this regard. In respect of top level appointments, the hybrid system where the PSC and the Administrative Head of the Public Service work together was endorsed as requiring fast tracking. Furthermore, the decision of the Cabinet to introduce compulsory programmes, amongst others, “evidence based policy making and implementation” was noted as crucial and the programmes must therefore be implemented.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The professionalisation of the public service is undoubtedly the most important project for the government since the dawn of democracy. The vision espoused in the Constitution and NDP depends on a capable and professional public service that is able to deliver on the promises made. To this end the Roundtable was unanimous that a capable and developmental state is imperative if the vision of the NDP is to be realised.

Participants of the Roundtable supported the following recommendation:

- I. The implementation of key recommendations in Chapter 13 of the NDP need to be fast tracked. These include the creation of the Administrative Head of the public service and a strengthened role for the PSC. This is critical for the public service and should be led by the Office of the President.

- II. Whilst definitions will remain contested, the public service must have its own definition of what professionalisation means in the context of South Africa. This definition should be informed by the imperatives of the Constitution and the NDP. The Department of Public Service and Administration should lead this initiative.
- III. All the key role players should collaborate on a common vision in creating a professional public service. This would include key institutions such as the Presidency, DPSA, NSG and the National Treasury as well as non-governmental and academic institutions. The DPSA should, however, be the champion of the project to professionalise the Public Service
- IV. Current initiatives on training and development and minimum requirements for employment in Senior Management Service (SMS) positions should be improved.
- V. Evidence based policy-making should be encouraged through the NSG training initiatives and promotional work of the PSC.