

SUGGESTIONS: MID-COURSE CORRECTION REQUIRED FOR THE TVET FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

With the new government in place and a vigorous emphasis on skills development, evident through the creation of the new 'Skills Development and Entrepreneurship' ministry and the prime minister's own words in almost every public outing, we are witnessing a phase where the TVET structure and framework is under a very critical eye and being reviewed. The TVET structure has been in focus over the past few years, given the realization of our youthful population, unemployment and related social challenges and poor educational attainment in the country, dissatisfaction of employers with the talent pool available, etc.

International attention has been rife as well with business and development agendas providing impetus to this area. New structures have been created with industry and government both providing direction and funds to this. A great deal of hectic activity has taken place and we now have the some of the following in focus

1. A New Skills Development Ministry
2. A National Skills Qualification framework (NSQF)
3. National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) a public-private partnership frame primarily for funding capacity building of large scale, high quality for-profit training providers, training schemes and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)
4. National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) looking at coordinating and harmonising work across ministries, government, NSDC and the private sector; directing and managing some other interventions including operationalizing and development of the NSQF, International Interventions and projects, being the nodal agency for SSDMs, etc.
5. State Skills Development Missions (SSDMs)
6. Sector Skills Councils developing occupational standards for industry requirements
7. Standards for developing assessors and trainers
8. Assessing body approval guidelines and procedures
9. Vocational Training Providers (VTP) approval guidelines and procedures
10. Trans-national standards and international equivalences
11. STAR scheme to increase throughput and other schemes to support the same based on geography and special interest segments. Precursor of some of these were the Modular Employment Scheme (MeS), etc.
12. Labor Management Information Systems (LMIS) proposed but still not functional
13. Other supportive elements like the NSQC, QRC, etc.

Key concerns

1. Current structure has low level of checks and balances on constituents. The system therefore has been exploited and not yielded the results that should have emerged from these.
2. There is overlapping of responsibilities or lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities in certain areas and therefore clashes of interest and turf battles undermining the efforts and diverting focus and priority.
3. There isn't a structure for planned capacity building of these institutions themselves.
4. Constituents are provided with roles and responsibilities that have built-in conflicts of interest.
5. New areas, agendas and concerns have emerged since the structure was created and there is no clear process or agency nominated to address these, therefore creating confusion.
6. Industry participation is patchy and industry funding is inconsistent.
7. Lack of integration in existing structures and working. The certificate and qualifications do not link to existing frameworks of education and recognition thereof is missing.
8. Unrealistic expectations of impact, returns and timelines along with short term thinking is undermining quality and creation of a robust TVET framework.

We propose a more updated structure that can serve the stated objectives with greater focus, clarity and robustness. Some of these were recommended even earlier prior to the current structure being put in place, but were ignored or not fully institutionalized and therefore we have suffered. It is important that this structure is created understanding the various principles this is based on. Therefore any element of this is not ignored.

1. Ministry of Skills Development
2. An independent Regulator
3. Qualifications Authority
4. Funding agency (NSDC)
5. Sector Skills Councils
6. Verified Assessment Centers
7. Assessment bodies
8. Vocational Training Providers

To understand the requirement of players in the system one has to understand the various functions within a TVET system that are required to be performed for it to be successful.

Functions:

1. Information of demand and supply of skilled manpower not merely at a national aggregate level but by sector, industry cluster, and regionally.
2. Nature of industry demand (standards), types and the quality of jobs on offer across industry segments.
3. Remuneration, progression and career paths offered by industry for incumbents in these jobs.
4. Requisite quality assured training capacity available in the requisite spread across the country as per demand and industry clustering.
5. Cohesive Curriculum and Content for delivery of the courses.
6. Availability of trainers and assessors of the requisite quality and capacity to produce them and develop them further.
7. Mobilisation and counseling of trainees.
8. Independent Assessment of trainees as per standards preferably in the workplace or a simulated work environment as close to the real one as possible.
9. Meaningful and authentic certification as recognition of achievement.
10. Communication to key stakeholders of value of certification and equivalences domestically and internationally.
11. A credit system that recognizes and integrates Vocational Achievement into general and higher education.
12. Grievance handling.
13. A system of checks and balances on each of the agencies (constituents).
14. Assistance in connecting job seekers to employers.
15. Development, Assessment and Certification of those already in employment through various schemes including recognition of prior learning
16. Viability funding and market making for any of the above where these are not self-manifesting or fully developed for quality and sustainability.

The key functions that have largely caused problems currently are:

1. LMIS not functional. There is no information on real nature, quantity and quality of jobs available, their locations, etc. While this had to be the starting point it is not there.
2. Accountability of funded agencies. A large number of agencies have taken funds from NSDC on the basis of poor business models and lack of understanding of ground realities overstating their capabilities and robustness of business model.
3. NSDC responsible for pushing numbers and achieving targets, at the same time funding SSCs and assessing quality and funding end beneficiaries. A total conflict of interest in the way this has functioned.
4. No real capacity building effort on the ground for missing trainers and assessors.
5. No counseling for potential candidates, no communication of jobs and career options.
6. Limited industry reach and involvement, inconsistent levels of funding across sectors.
7. No real capacity building of the people within this new structure.
8. Viability funding inadequate and set with unrealistic terms.

All the above should have been addressed before channelizing funding for training and focusing on throughput.

A number of criticisms in the past have been defended on the premise that this is a new system and it will take time and patience to get this right, which is accepted. Even though some of that excuse could be valid but some of the errors many can argue were preventable by taking a more informed and thoughtful approach.

There is of course a big contingent of detractors who believe that the whole new structure should be lumped as it has been ineffective and exploited by many, without producing desired results. The reality is that many of those see the new structure as a threat and run the risk of throwing out the baby with the bath water. There is no doubt that industry engagement and developing standards for outcome definition, training and assessing bodies, etc. is critical for the success of a TVET system, there is also no doubt that the prevailing system was not working, this warrants a change and the change is in the right direction. There is also no doubt that the new proposed system like any other has its own shortcomings. Therefore what we need to address within this system are loop holes, capacity building to address shortcomings in the knowledge and competence of personnel involved, misaligned incentives, contextualization, etc. We need to work together to make the system more robust and creative tensions coming out of critiques of the system are all important in this regard.

It is our endeavor to present a few suggestions within the current framework to make it more robust. Having studied and worked in the TVET sector with national and international agencies and discussed principles and practices of these and first hand witnessed and performed virtually every role in the

TVET value chain myself, I would like to see some of these come to fruition. For more than anything else to see it make a real difference to the many lives we ought to impact positively that beckons us to take this area a bit more seriously.

Proposed Mid-Course Correction

A 9 point agenda for restructuring of the Skills Development space in India is proposed below. This is outlining the various constituents and their proposed focus and role in the sector. This has been developed with a view to eliminate conflict of interests and keeping checks and balances to ensure desired performance and elimination of loopholes.

1. The Skills Development Ministry

- a) Policy and monitoring of overall skills framework
- b) Coordination of work between various ministries involved in skills development
- c) Interface with MHRD for education related equivalences and other joined up work
- d) Coordination with SSDMs
- e) Overall skills delivery framework parity across (Govt. ITI/Private ITI/Pvt. Providers)
- f) Registry of all training providers and assessment bodies

2. Need for an Independent Regulator

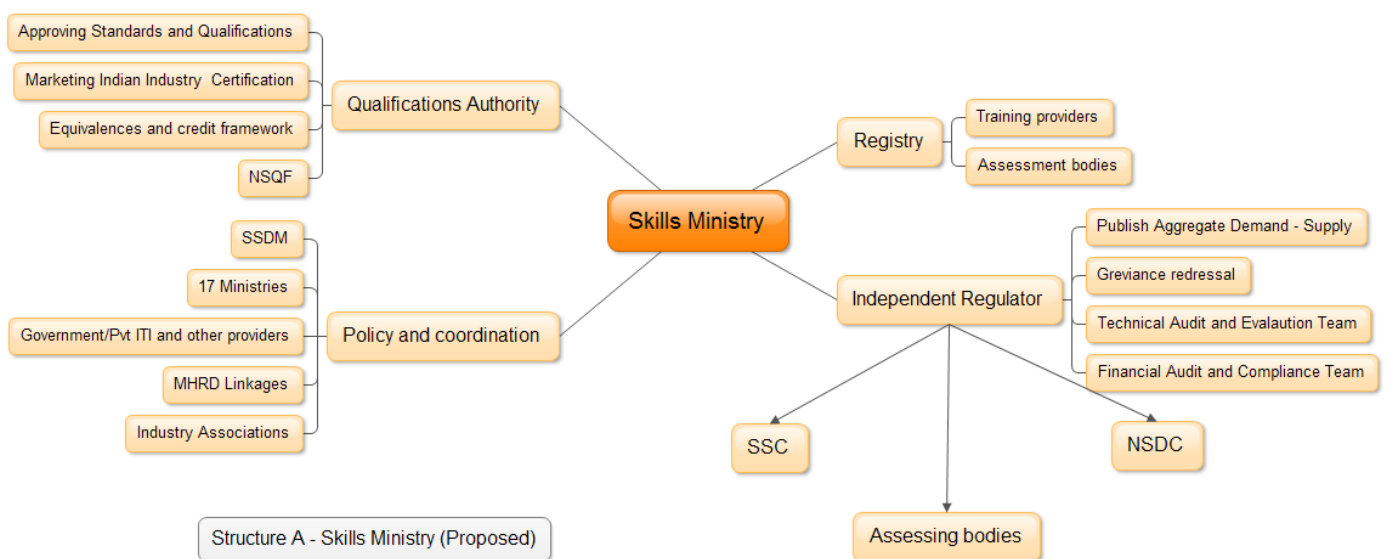
- a) Technical Quality and Audit check on NSDC, SSCs and Assessing Bodies
- b) Providing direction for funding and approving case put forward for it by NSDC/SSC
- c) Licensing SSCs and reviewing case for creation of an SSC or closing it down
- d) Grievance addressing
- e) Integrating, verifying integrity and publishing data for demand and supply of skilled manpower

3. Qualifications Authority

- a) Anchor the NSQF and operationlise it
- b) Approve qualifications put forth by SSC
- c) Drawing equivalences, approving credits and integration with the general and higher education streams
- d) Marketing the value of the certification nationally and internationally
- e) Approve funding for new or review of qualifications after evaluating the case for it
- f) Ensuring the standards are translating into the correct curriculum that is approved for delivery

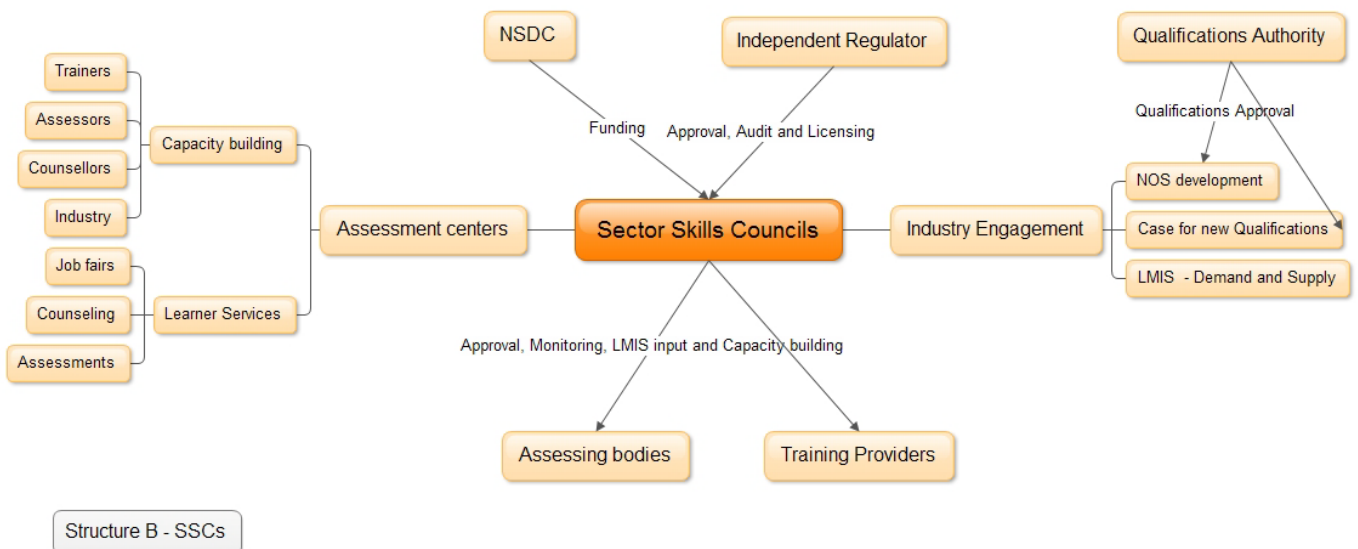
4. Industry lead funding agency (NSDC or equivalent)

- a) Technically evaluating proposals put forward for funding and fund disbursements for capacity building (private sector and NGOs)
- b) Funding SSCs
- c) Funding technology and innovation
- d) Developing and Proposing fund disbursement guidelines and schemes as per regulatory guidelines



5. Sector Skills Councils

- a) Cornerstone of the system responsible for Industry Engagement in the Sector
- b) Developing NOS and Qualification Packs
- c) Implementing the LMIS for their sector uncovering demand and supply
- d) Registry and approval of assessors and training providers for their qualifications
- e) Sectoral studies
- f) Industry/academia workshops
- g) Producing learner counseling materials and communicate industry offerings (jobs, career paths, etc.)
- h) Job fairs for their industry
- i) Training of trainers and assessors



6. Funding by Industry

- a) We propose a contribution be made by industry through a mandate as percentage of corporate tax or from CSR funds to a Skills Development Fund.
- b) This fund be channelized only for TVET and Skills Development through NSDC and the SSCs, this will ensure industry has a say in how and where the money will be spent.

7. Certification models (Very critical)

- a) A key gap is the lack of an assessor framework and capacity in the country. At the moment due to this gap assessments are of poor quality and a way forward to build capacity is not visible.
- b) While it will take time to develop this it is critical for independent assessments to happen right from the beginning
- c) We propose a **two level certification system**

'A' certificates be issued to candidates after independent assessments through approved assessment bodies (similar to certificates being issued now). Given the potential for loopholes which will be progressively tightened we expect this to not yield 100% result and requisite stringency required. But this will allow learners to use it to reach out to employers, etc.

A **'verified' certificate or a 'Skills Passport'** be issued for assessments done through **Assessment Centers** that are established and run by SSCs and manned by Master Assessors and Trainers employed by the SSC. An 'A' certificate holder can come and get assessed at this center to earn a verified certificate which will be necessary for credit equivalences for further studies or international recognition. This will be more valuable than 'A' certificates.

8. Assessment Centers

- a) Assessment Centers are set-up in various parts of the country in a phase-wise manner. These house the relevant equipment to assess candidates on majority of the occupations within the sector. They also have linkages to nearby industry to expand their capacity for assessment and access other equipment, etc. that they cannot own.
- b) They can co-opt industry professionals from nearby industry as independent assessors for conducting assessments.
- c) The Assessment Centers house master assessors and master trainers for the sector and are used to assess candidates, build capacity of VTPs and Assessing Bodies, also providing Industry with skill up-gradation support.
- d) It is important that these Assessment Centers are not owned or run by any particular company or provider, but a responsibility of the SSC.

9. SSC Sustainability, Reach and Impact

- a) SSCs in any country have taken over 10-20 years to get self-sustainable, unrealistic expectations and demands of attempting to make SSCs in India self-sustainable in 3 years is causing them to take short term views and thereby sub-optimal decisions are being made. This is causing them to take short-cuts thereby jeopardizing their own credibility and focus. It is important that this idea of being self-sustainable is not rushed and taken off their minds and agendas for the first few years. Industry funding channelized through NSDC should continue to be channeled into SSCs without burdening the government. A plan for self-sustenance should be discussed once SSCs are fully functional and performing effectively with a meaningful reach and impact across the country.
- b) SSCs are required to expand their presence in the country to be closer to industry and their potential talent and workforce pool. The SSC run Assessment Centers will also allow SSC to have presence in different parts of the country which will be essential for effective working to implement LMIS effectively and develop capacity across the country, especially around areas where industry is clustered.
- c) This will allow them to reach out more effectively to local industry getting greater buy-in and participation from industry
- d) These assessment centers should also offer counseling services to students, and build awareness of VTPs of their industry offerings
- e) Difference SSCs can be housed within the same assessment center for operational and cost efficiencies.