

MEDIA STATEMENT

For immediate release
Friday, 14 July 2023

SALGA wishes to clarify the KwaZulu Natal Councillor Skills Audit Report

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) would like to clarify the misinterpretation surrounding the KwaZulu Natal Province Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department's (CoGTA) "Councillor Skills Audit 2021/2022" report, which has resurfaced in the public domain.

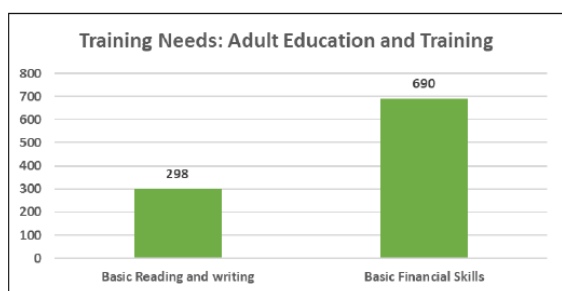
Various media outlets have portrayed the survey results in a manner that suggests 298 councillors in KwaZulu-Natal lack basic reading and writing skills and require government assistance. However, upon closer examination of the report, specifically Slide 14 titled "Presentation on the Councillor Skills Audit 2021/2022," it becomes evident that participants were asked to indicate their training needs in various areas related to their roles as councillors.

Slide 14:



GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

4. Findings of the Councillor Skills Audit



Training Needs: Adult Education and Training

- Within the broad category of Adult Education and Training, the survey revealed that 690 (43%) require training on basic financial skills and 298 (19%) Councillors requested training on basic reading and writing.



Training Needs: Municipal Governance & Administration

- Majority of Councillors, 69% of Councillors requested training on Understanding legislation governing local government; 68% of Councillors on understanding local government principles of good governance, public participation, Batho Pele, transparency and accountability and 65% Councillors on understanding local government structures such as types of municipalities, interaction and relationships with other spheres of government.
- A further 64% of Councillors requested training on understanding the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and the separation of powers between councillors and municipal officials and the implications.

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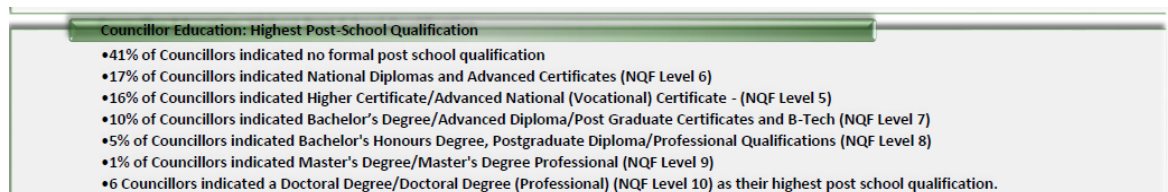
One of the questions posed to the councillors concerned their need for "basic reading and writing skills," along with other skills such as "basic financial skills," "councillor roles," and "understanding of legislative processes." It is essential to note that indicating a need for training in reading and writing does not imply an inability to read or write. Furthermore, the question itself was presented in written format, which might have influenced the responses.

It is a well-known fact that even professional writers undergo training when necessary. The need for training in writing and reading council reports is expected from councillors in their new roles, and many would respond positively if asked about it.

The KZN CoGTA conducted the survey by emailing a questionnaire to municipalities on 04 November 2021. Councillors were able to access the questionnaire using various devices such as laptops, computers, cellphones, or tablets, and the deadline for completion was 3 December 2021. The analysis was based on an 82% submission rate, with a total of 1,609 completed questionnaires.

Regarding the highest school qualification profile, the majority of councillors (76%) indicated having a Grade 12/National Certificate Level 4 (Vocational) (NQF Level 4), while only 1% indicated no formal schooling.

Slide 21:



It is worth mentioning that SALGA has consistently advocated for political parties to consider education when deploying councillors, although the organization does not possess the authority to mandate such deployments. The Constitution of the Republic also does not require public representatives to possess certain level of education in order to hold office. Only political parties themselves can address this matter and find a resolution. And for the sake of fairness and consistency, this call should apply in all spheres of government, including councils, provincial legislatures and the Parliament of the Republic.

To suggest that “33%” of councillors are incapable of reading and writing is an exaggeration and misrepresentation while the report states that clearly that 19% indicated reading and writing as their training need (**Slide 14**). Prior to being elected, many councillors actively participate in their communities, taking on roles as activists. They assist in organizing funerals and connecting those in need with the relevant departments to access social assistance.

SALGA urges the media and the public to approach the findings of the Councillor Skills Audit report with accuracy and a fair understanding of the context. It is essential to avoid perpetuating a sense of doom and gloom associated with local government, as this hinders progress and undermines the significant contributions made by dedicated councillors across the country.

SALGA remains committed to working alongside local government stakeholders, political parties, and communities to ensure the effective functioning of local governance and the delivery of essential services to all citizens.

END

Issued by SALGA President Cllr Bheke Stofile