

"A dishonourable Parliament ... ANC MPs showed South Africa how far they were willing to go when others attempted to hold them to account." — Thorne Godinho, thoughtleader.co.za



# Employers, colleges must join forces

It is essential that the needs of students match those of business, and thus those of the economy

COMMENT  
Gwebs Qonde

**W**hatever a business's strategy is, it obviously needs skills to drive it forward.

It is clear that the average organisation in South Africa today is spending a lot of money for little return when it comes to training and development. This is not a suggestion that businesses should spend less, but perhaps spending it differently may bring a lot more value and options.

How many corporate organisations have their own training and development departments? Not one or two people managing processes, but fully fledged colleges with trainers, classrooms and instructors to ensure that business's sustainability is secured and that they are today developing the skills they will need tomorrow. Some do have such facilities but most can't afford them.

Many businesses believe that the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges do not deliver relevant curricula and training. They therefore decline to invest in establishing tailor-made programmes at the colleges, forcing colleges to develop more generic programmes less focused on business requirements — and so the mismatch is further compounded.

On the other hand, the government subsidises students in TVET colleges at between R10 000 and R60 000 a student a year, depending on the programme offered. Often these students are unable to find employment because employers believe that they are not suitably qualified for the employer's specific needs.

Without business support, colleges must develop programmes that are general, will enable students to be responsible citizens and provide them with the best possible range of options to find employment. This is often more generic in nature and perhaps not focused on the particular skills set businesses and other employers seek.

The only realistic option we can take is to approach the problem together and find a solution that is workable for both employers and colleges.

The government has a responsibility

**The fact is that, if the skills problems are not solved, businesses in this country will not be sustainable**

ity to its citizens to educate them for employability and a responsibility to provide the economy with relevant skills. At the same time, business has a social responsibility to develop the workforce to make it more productive.

I realise that every business has a profit motive and this affects almost every decision a business will make. However, the more progressive businesses in our country, and globally for that matter, are those that are concerned with long-term sustainability.

The fact is that if the skills problems are not solved, businesses will not be sustainable.

The partnership between members of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and the department of higher education and training to support these training colleges is an example of a progressive move forward. A group of Swiss companies has embarked on a programme that targets selected colleges and programmes for collaboration.

We have established a good relationship with the Swiss grouping, but it concerns me that South African and other companies do not offer this type of support. Of course there are exceptions, such as the motor industry and a number of others that have forged sound relationships with the department and the colleges.

But, if we are not able to secure adequate workplaces for students, we will be unable to turn this situation around. It is only once we have a critical mass that we will be able to move the processes of redesign and change forward significantly.

We expect that, for 2014, our total enrolment in TVET colleges will be about 800 000 students. This number is projected to grow to one million in the next year or two and to 2.5-million by 2030.

The government has given vastly increased resources to this sector. We now have a dedicated student financial aid scheme fund for TVET college students of R1.2-billion a year and a total of R6.5-billion is being invested annually into the college sector.

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Practical: Students at the technical and vocational education and training college in central Johannesburg attend a mechanics class.  
Photo: Lisa Skinner

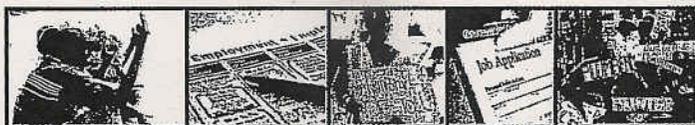
The department has developed and is implementing a comprehensive turnaround strategy for the TVET colleges. We are working on curriculum reform programmes and lecturer development programmes. We have invested millions in the governance and financial management processes of colleges to ensure that we make these entities vibrant institutions of choice.

The one element we have little control over is the participation of employers. Without this element, we will not be able to make the gains we are working so hard on — although we have had limited success, including from the public sector. We know that students who have adequate work experience will be significantly more marketable and able to find employment. So how then do we

encourage employers to play a more active role in this process?

We don't purport to have all the answers but we are willing and able to work with employers to find meaningful solutions. We hope that all employers will give this matter some thought and contact my department to further this discussion.

Gwebs Qonde is the director general of the department of higher education and training. This article is written in the light of this week's conference on technical and vocational education and training, which Minister of Higher Education and Training Blade Nzimande convened and hosted at Gallagher Estate, Johannesburg, on November 18 and 19



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## Mail & Guardian Critical Thinking Forum

in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the National Planning Commission (NPC) and the German Embassy.

Topic for discussion:

### Fighting Youth Unemployment together!

the role of social partnerships and innovation in bringing young South Africans into work

-Sharing the experiences and expertise of best practice examples-

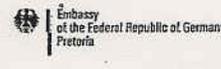
Date: Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014

Time: 18h00 for 18h30

Venue: Glenhove Conference Centre  
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