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#### SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

## Nzimande seeks further cooperation with Swiss on training initiatives

By: [Loni Prinsloo](#)  
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Higher Education and Training Minister Dr **Blade Nzimande** on Tuesday called for further interaction between the South African government and the Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative (Ssaci) to combat youth unemployment in the country.

Speaking at Ssaci's ten-year anniversary, the Minister praised Swiss companies operating in South Africa for their dedication to providing apprenticeships and other training opportunities to young previously disadvantaged South Africans, through Ssaci.

Ssaci is a South African development agency funded by Swiss and South African companies in collaboration with the Swiss government, aimed at strengthening the skills-training system in South Africa, thereby opening up new pathways to skilled employment for young South Africans.

Nzimande invited Ssaci to share its inputs at the next meeting of the Human Resource Development Council, headed by South Africa's Deputy President **Kgalema Motlanthe**. The council, launched in March in 2010, aims to provide an environment that promotes participation by all stakeholders in the planning, stewardship and monitoring and evaluation of human resource development activities in the country. He believed Ssaci, which is currently playing an active role in supporting the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), would have some valuable inputs to deliver at such a meeting.

The Minister also asked Ssaci to submit its proposals for a new Green Paper that would map out South Africa's future plans for the country's post-school system.

Ssaci CEO **Ken Duncan** said that the agency had seen strengthened relations with government, especially over the past 18 months, adding that it would like to see this increase even further.

The agency had rolled out a number of projects in the past year that had already been picked up by public entities, or projects where Ssaci had formed partnerships with public enterprises, including an accelerated artisan training programme for the engineering sector.

"We would like to see more of our programmes being picked up like this as only government has the mandate and resources to roll out these projects on a national scale," said Duncan.

Ssaci is also supporting the DHET's Further Education College (FET) system by providing college lecturers with formal qualifications.

The Minister mentioned that government would soon make a bursary scheme available to FET and university lecturers to improve their qualifications as only a third of the country's lecturers currently had PhDs.

Further, Ssaci and the DHET would be looking to set up an institute that would assist FET colleges in research, data capturing and monitoring the programmes and progress of these colleges.

Also at the event, the Swiss embassy representative **Heinrich Maurer** said that Switzerland, which has achieved one of the highest per capita incomes in the world with low unemployment rates, would be 'keen' to support South Africa in vocational training.

He said that it was important for the State to set up an effective framework for a well-performing training system, while a growing economy was needed to "set up shops" to absorb a skilled labour force.

Switzerland has been using a dual education system that combines apprenticeships in a company and vocational education with a standard vocational course for specific skills.

The Minister said that going forward the DHET and Ssaci would be piloting such a dual-track system. He noted that there might be as many as a 100 different courses for artisan training currently in South Africa, and that the country needed standardised courses as soon as possible.

Edited by: david shepherd