



Helping young people to get a start in life

2012-10-31 - ABB is taking part in a scheme in South Africa to address the skills gaps of students who leave college with little prospect of employment in industry. It's a scheme which benefits the student, the community and ABB.

The 50 percent unemployment rate for people between 15 and 24 in South Africa is partly due to the gap between the education provided by public vocational schools and industry requirements.

To improve the situation, ABB joined the Swiss-South African Co-operation Initiative (SSACI) in 2008 to provide workplace experience for engineering students at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. The scheme also equips lecturers with tools and skills training.

SSACI is a public-private partnership between the Swiss government's International Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Swiss and South African companies. About 40 companies, including ABB, support the program both financially and by hosting students.

About a dozen students come to ABB every year under the scheme. Four have been hired by ABB since the program started.



Hands-on experience: The students learn how ABB equipment works

Work experience at ABB

Earlier this year, nine students from South West Gauteng College in Soweto township spent their two-week holiday break gaining workplace experience at ABB's facility at Longmeadow, which provided learning opportunities in the Power Systems and Process Automation divisions, front-end sales, business in Sub-Saharan Africa, and service sectors.

They received support from ABB mentors, got to know different departments, learned how to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice, and received a taste of corporate working life.

Pacha Mukuna, a sales engineer who has mentored students on several occasions says: "The students came to us with a very stereotypical view of industry and had no idea what sales actually does. With this work experience, we have helped to create alternative career paths and new perspectives for them."

Cecilia Makhado, a 23-year-old student says: "Being in the Sales Department at ABB made me aware for the first time how important it is to talk to your customer." For Michael Mothlwula, 21, the experience was eye-opening. "I could see how things are connected to each other and that everybody needs to work together. Practical tasks became much easier to



Students from a Further Education and Training college arrive at ABB premises to learn more about the practical aspects of their studies

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understand.”

Multiple benefits

The college teachers also see the benefit. Xoliswa Elizabethy Diyane said: “After work experience at ABB, students work faster on projects and have a better overall understanding.” Another teacher, Rebecca Malebo Langa observes: “Students gain confidence because they experience that things they learn can actually be applied in industry, and they are now really looking forward to get an opportunity to work.”

The work



Students are introduced to ABB's technology at the Longmeadow facility

experience also has a positive impact on students' grades and career prospects. According to Edith Mashile, Campus Manager at South West Gauteng College: “In 2007 hardly any of our students were able to pass the National Certificate Vocational level because of a lack of vocational experience. In the past year we have seen good progress. This is also the case for work placements: while formerly we had a rate of less than 10 percent we have now been able to place almost 80 percent of our students.”

The workplace experience also has positive aspects for ABB employees. As Pacha Nukuna says: “To be able to broaden a person's perspectives in a professional environment was very beneficial, and quite a fulfilling feeling for me as well. It was also an excellent opportunity to brush up my leadership skills.” Jonas Paseka Mokoena, Manager of After Market Services says the experience was very enriching. “It made me very proud to help give these kids an opportunity for their future. We planted some seeds that can make them better students and good future employees.”

Shiven Sukraj, Local Division Manager of Process Automation concludes: “With this workplace experience we initiate interest in and awareness of ABB. The students may turn out to be future employees or they could become future customers, both of which would be excellent.”

Creating business value

There are other potential benefits from the scheme. Phindo Mohlala, Vice President Human Resources of ABB in South Africa, says: “Corporate social investment is one of the main vehicles to make our brand visible in public, and such community engagement makes our employees proud to work for ABB.”

Community projects like this may also create direct business value. Confidence Mabuswana, Senior Proposal Engineer, explains that “we can use our community projects as a reference for project proposals. Requests for proposals often require information about what kind of skills a company will develop in the community. It is, for example, a mandatory part when we quote for customers such as Eskom or Transnet. Such community projects can also lead to a competitive advantage”.

Filling the skills gap through work experience schemes clearly benefits multiple stakeholders – not just the students and teachers, but ABB employees and the company itself.