



Co-operation

SSACI News Update

News



September 2010

Newsletter Mission

The aim of this newsletter is to inform readers about what SSACI does and why. It presents information about our projects and highlights issues in education, training and skills development that affect SSACI's work.

This newsletter is published electronically on our website and distributed via email. You are welcome to send it to other people who might be interested. If you would like to subscribe or give us feedback please send an email to info@ssaci.org.za

► *News: SSACI launches new internships project*

Following on the success of our programme of workplace experience for college students, SSACI has initiated a complementary project involving 6-month internships for college graduates.

Work experience is an important stepping-stone to employment. This is something that graduates of public Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in South Africa lack because the college curricula do not require any practical, workplace-based experience before graduating. Most students get either simulated practical experience in the college or no experience at all. They therefore have no opportunity to demonstrate applied technical skills to potential employers or valuable characteristics such as diligence, personal initiative, reliability, self-discipline, responsiveness to direction and good timekeeping. As a result, most graduates of FET colleges find it as difficult to get a job as their unskilled counterparts.

In March 2010, the Minister of Higher Education & Training announced that his department would prioritise access for youths to structured workplace learning. He instructed the Sector Education & Training Authorities (SETAs), to provide funding for such initiatives. A number of SETAs responded by offering to pay a training grant to companies willing to take on college graduates as interns. However, the SETAs have no mechanism for bringing together prospective interns and host employers, for structuring the training that companies will offer in exchange for the interns' labour, or for organising and managing the internships.

SSACI proposes to step into this gap and play a facilitating role, bringing together engineering-course graduates from FET colleges and companies that are willing to host them for 6 months of work and on-the-job training. Logbooks for trainees and guidelines for their supervisors are being developed. Host companies will be chosen on the basis of their record of in-house training and their capacity to assign interns to a wide range of tasks. Suitable engineering-course graduates will be recruited from FET colleges in the vicinity of the participating companies. The number of students is dependent on the number of workplaces available.

Interns will be placed in host companies for six months, during which time the company will receive a once-off training grant of R50'000 and the intern will receive a monthly stipend of R2'000 from the SETA. Importantly, the company is under no obligation to employ any trainee on completion of his/her internship.

SSACI will place, monitor and support the interns through site visits and ongoing communication with workplace managers. In addition, an external evaluator will be appointed to assess the effectiveness of the programme and identify areas for improvement. Follow-up for two months after the internship will assess the career trajectory of the interns.

Interested? Contact us for more information at projects@ssaci.org.za

Issue: How to make a “cross-cultural marriage” succeed



College-industry partnerships are much in the news of late. At both the Further Education and Training Summit on 3-4 September and the National Skills Summit on 10-11 September, the Minister of Higher Education & Training called for closer collaboration between industry and public FET colleges in order to deliver much-needed skills to the South African economy.

It's easier said than done. Public colleges and private companies have very different cultures, objectives and structures.

So partnerships between them can be compared to cross-cultural marriages: they may bring great benefits to the partners but are very demanding. While the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) exhorts public FET colleges to form strategic partnerships with local companies, it has put no systems in place to support colleges in this regard, or even forewarn them of the difficulties they may face.

From our experience with colleges and industry, SSACI believes that workplace experience for students improves pass rates and prospects of employment for students, motivates lecturers to “raise their game” and brings the college curriculum into closer alignment with the skills needs of industry. But there are obstacles in the way of placing college students in companies for work experience:

- **Currently, colleges and industry are largely out of touch with each other.** Neither knows what the other actually does, so it is difficult to work out a meaningful programme of activities for students in the workplace.
- **Many company managers are sceptical about the college curriculum.** They sense that it contains too little practical work and at too low a level. They are also cautious about taking in students over whom they have no “ownership” as they do over apprentices.
- **There are no established systems at DHET or college level for supporting workplace experience,** including:
 - The logistics of getting students to and from workplaces
 - Assigning responsibility to a specific person on the college staff
 - Monitoring and assessing learners’ performance during their time in the company
 - Integrating lessons learned at the workplace back into the college curriculum
 - Dealing with legal liabilities (including damage to equipment and injuries to students)

For workplace experience to bring benefits to college, company and student, all these obstacles have to overcome.

SSACI’s experience has convinced us that:

- **Colleges have to take the initiative.** They cannot expect companies to come to them. Companies are too busy with their core commercial activities to think much about partnerships with colleges. So colleges have to get out there and “woo the girl”.
- **Responsibility must be clearly located within each organisation.** One person needs to be given both the responsibility and the authority for driving things forward. This person should be accountable to the CEO, who should regularly review progress.
- **Partners must be carefully selected.** Not all companies can help a college meet its objectives, or vice versa. Carefully researching which ones can, and then targeting them from the start, will save a great deal of time, effort and money later.

- **Each partner must define its own objectives** and then communicate these clearly to the other. Failure to do so always results in frustration for all concerned.
- **Priority must be given to your partner's objectives, not yours.** The best way to make any partnership stable and successful is to make sure that your partner is happy. This means making a *business* case for the partnership. Forget charity: it's for those who honestly can't help themselves - and that's not a message you want to convey about your organisation.
- **Careful planning is essential**, including the minutiae of budgeting, staffing, timetabling, pre-briefings, student logbooks, conducting assessments, de-briefings, problem-solving, dispute-resolution, handling emergencies and so on. The list is endless but if you don't get on with it the partnership *will* collapse.
- **Start small, build confidence and capacity.** Few colleges or companies have much experience in implementing meaningful partnerships. It's best to take small, incremental steps together – have a long courtship, so to speak – before plunging into serious commitments.
- **Relationships must be built at both management and operational level.** The company CEO might think it would be a great idea to bring in some college students but what does the production manager think? And who will the company phone when the students they were expecting don't arrive, or arrive when they weren't expected, or don't know what to do when they get there? Commitments from top brass are an essential but inadequate part of cooperative relationships between colleges and companies: the foot-soldiers also need walkie-talkies.

Taking all the above steps does not guarantee that a college-industry partnership will succeed. But it will greatly improve the partnership's prospects. Like cross-cultural marriages, college-industry partnerships face almost daily challenges that must be resolved to mutual satisfaction if the partnership is to survive and prosper: proof of the old adage that "love may be blind but marriage is an eye-opener"!

Success: SSACI's Fast-tracked Artisans Excel

In 2008, SSACI launched a pilot project with the Steel and Engineering Industries' Federation of South Africa (SEIFSA) training fitters, turners, boilermakers, electricians and millwrights through an accelerated two year apprenticeship instead of the normal four years.

Forty youths with at least an N4 certificate in engineering-related courses were enrolled for 24 weeks intensive training at SEIFSA's Fundi training centre in Boksburg, Gauteng, before being placed in workplace-based training for a further 54 weeks and then entered for the national trade test. This is the quickest route to artisan status permissible under current regulations.

In March this year **Lehlogonolo Mothapo** became the first graduate of this Accelerated Apprenticeship Training Project. As a reward for finishing top of his class, Nolo boarded a plane for Switzerland and a four-week internship in Bühler, the prestigious Swiss technology company headquartered in Utwil. On his return to SA, Nolo was immediately employed by his former host-company, Renold Crofts where he has since been made responsible for all client evaluations and quotations – a responsible job that has required him to develop new skills.



Nolo at work

When asked what SSACI's programme meant to him, Nolo's reply was "It helped me to reach my full potential".

The importance of this project lies not only in the fact that new artisans qualify quickly, but that it has started to revitalize interest in apprenticeships amongst medium-sized engineering companies, which have a lot of untapped training potential. SSACI is now looking to scale up the project with government funding.

Measurement Secrets

The second pocket-booklet in our series of SSACI's "trade secrets" is now being distributed. It focuses on monitoring and evaluation, which are essential to success in development.

The first trade-secret booklet, on working with community partners, was sent out last month and was well-received. "Very useful" and "Short and sweet!" were typical responses from recipients.

This month's booklet shares practical tips and tools for measuring results. It tells you what to evaluate, how and why. It highlights some classic evaluation criteria and lists useful sources of data for project evaluations. It also flags some "weasel words" that are often used in project reports to cover up a lack of progress!

If you would like to receive our trade secrets or more information about becoming a SSACI partner, please email a request to Ken Duncan.

Partner Introduction: SEIFSA

The Steel & Engineering Industries Federation



Since 2008, the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (SEIFSA) SSACI has collaborated with SSACI in the training of artisans in the engineering trades.

SEIFSA is a national employer federation representing the metal and engineering industry. For 67 years, it has supported its members with advice, training and technical assistance, and has lobbied for policies aimed at improving the business environment in which the industry operates. With a membership of around 2'440 companies that employ 60% of the industry's workforce, SEIFSA one of the largest and most influential employer organisations in South Africa.

SEIFSA is a non-profit-making body, deriving its income from levies on members and services rendered to companies in the industry.

SEIFSA is a champion of skills development in the industry and therefore a natural partner for SSACI in our quest to open up pathways to skilled employment for SA youths. SEIFSA's Skills Development Executive, Ms Janet Lopes, says that SSACI's accelerated apprenticeship project "has not only enabled formerly unskilled, unemployed young South Africans to get into skilled work but has also helped to revive interest and participation in the national apprenticeship system amongst medium-sized enterprises."

Development Support

For more information about SSACI visit our website www.ssaci.org.za
or phone 011 642 2110