



**SSACI**



# UNESCO-UNEVOC PROMISING PRACTICES

**SSACI's workplace based experience**

**Aligning skills with industry needs**

**2017**

# SSACI's workplace based experience

## Context

Youth unemployment in South Africa is very high, even among graduates of TVET programmes, with a survey finding that only 34 per cent of the graduates in technical fields were employed (Patel, 2007, quoted in Erasmus and Breier, 2009). The high rate of unemployment among TVET graduates is considered to be primarily due to the lack of exposure among students to real-life working environments and the lack of alignment between TVET courses and industry requirements.

TVET colleges are the main training providers in South Africa, with 600,000 students enrolled in 2010 (DHET, 2015). Although these colleges recognize the need for their students to gain experience in workplace contexts and for courses to meet the needs of industry, until 2008 the colleges had no system for supporting workplace-based experience. Furthermore, many businesses were not willing to provide work placements as they doubted such placements would be a worthwhile investment. Accordingly, fewer than 50 per cent of TVET students had participated in work experience at the end of their study (OECD, 2010). Moreover, college courses were not aligned with industry demand, resulting in many graduates not having the right type of skills to find employment.

## The initiative and its impact

In 2008, the Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI), a non-profit, public-private partnership, began to address these issues through a workplace-based experience (WBE) programme for TVET college students.

WBE enables students to develop workplace skills and countries with well-established apprenticeship programmes have been found to be more effective than others in tackling youth unemployment (OECD, 2016). WBE also

## Overview

<i>Implemented by:</i>	Swiss South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI)
<i>Where:</i>	South Africa, since 2008
<i>Theme:</i>	Youth employment
<i>Funding:</i>	Initially donor-funded; self-sustaining in some colleges
<i>Status:</i>	As of 2017, over 8,000 students per year across 50 public TVET colleges

*Recognizing the need for better quality TVET courses that are more relevant and more effective in enabling youth to find employment, SSACI established a workplace-based experience programme in 50 public TVET colleges in South Africa.*

*The programme has enabled the colleges to form lasting partnerships with local companies and therefore implement effective learning experiences in those workplaces, with positive feedback from all of the stakeholders. Furthermore, the initiative has been endorsed by the government, with official programme guidelines adopted in 2015.*

facilitates closer collaboration between training institutions and the private sector, which helps TVET institutions better understand the needs of industry and adapt their curricula accordingly (Field, et al., 2014).

Between 2008 and 2010, through action research with four public colleges, SSACI developed a programme whereby students could be placed in industry positions for around 14 days of workplace-based experience. Subsequently, between 2010 and 2015, the programme was rolled out in 50 public TVET colleges.

In 2012, the basic programme was enhanced by incorporating assessments of student performance in the workplace, which count towards their end-of-year marks. In 2013, the programme was improved by offering industry-based experience to teachers. As of 2017, the 'assessed' version of the programme was being implemented in 41 of the 50 colleges, and 28 of the colleges were offering teachers industry-based experience.

The impact of the programme on the employability of graduates has yet to be measured, but surveys of students, staff and industry representatives found that, despite the short amount of time that students spend in the workplace, these stakeholders perceive that the programme has had positive impacts in terms of student learning and skills, and also in terms of public-private cooperation. Thus, the programme, by building confidence among the stakeholders, has paved the way for longer-term apprenticeship initiatives.

Recognizing the value of the programme, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) made WBE a core element in its policies relating to TVET, and in 2014 commissioned SSACI to develop standard guidelines for the implementation of WBE in TVET colleges, which were formally adopted in October 2015.

## Insights

### Working with individual colleges for successful adoption of the programme

To ensure each TVET college adopts the programme successfully, SSACI works with each institution separately; visiting the colleges in person to introduce the goals, clarifying the roles and responsibilities and training staff in the required skills.

Key activities by SSACI include: ensuring that responsibility for WBE is assigned to specific personnel in each college, and building college staff capacity to: (a) integrate lessons learned at the workplace back into college curricula, (b) manage legal liabilities (including the provision of personal protective equipment and preventing injuries to students and damage to equipment), and (c) monitor and assess learners' performance during their WBE periods.

SSACI also provides support in organizing initial internal planning and review sessions at the colleges and in facilitating meetings between college staff and host employers for students. In addition, the SSACI provides written guidelines and manuals that support the colleges in implementing the programme, including with regard to the four-step cycle: (i) planning, (ii) preparation, (iii) placement and (iv) reflection and review. When programme is launched at each college, the steps are explained in a one-day workshop.

### Fostering independent and self-sustaining programmes

SSACI builds the capacity of staff at the TVET colleges with the goal of enabling them to independently manage the full organization of the WBE programme, thus institutionalizing WBE at the college level. Accordingly, following the training, SSACI and DHET personnel gradually withdraw from the WBE programme, eventually providing only a monitoring and backstopping function.

SSACI also seeks to enable the colleges to sustain the programme through their own fundraising efforts. The funding for the programme is

initially provided by SSACI's donors, and later by the ministry, and is subsequently progressively assumed by the colleges themselves through a state subsidy scheme and annual grants.

### **Building strong, long-term relationships with local companies**

To foster strong partnerships between colleges and local companies, SSACI encourages colleges to: (i) conduct research on potential partners, as not all companies can help a college meet its objectives; (ii) take the initiative, rather than expect companies to come to them, as companies are focused on their core commercial activities; (iii) create meticulous plans and manage the partnerships carefully, particularly in the areas of budgeting, staffing, timetabling, briefings, student logbooks, assessments, de-briefings, problem-solving, dispute-resolution and handling crises; (iv) take small, incremental steps towards long-term partnerships, rather than plunging directly into serious commitments (i.e. start with course-related WBE and later move towards sharing facilities, launching staff exchanges, etc.); and (v) be vigorous and proactive about developing long-term, meaningful relationships with suitable companies.

### **Looking forward**

In 2017 SSACI hopes to source financial support for students so that they do not need to pay themselves for travelling to their WBE locations, as such costs can be substantial and may reduce participation among low-income students.

The DHET is developing national standardized formative and summative assessments of student performance, and plans to implement the first assessments in 2017.

### **References**

Erasmus, J. and Breier, M. (eds.) 2009. Skills shortages in South Africa: case studies of key professions. Cape Town, Human Sciences Research Council. [http://www.lmip.org.za/sites/default/files/documentfiles/Skills\\_Shortages\\_in\\_South\\_Africa\\_-\\_Entire\\_eBook\\_0.pdf](http://www.lmip.org.za/sites/default/files/documentfiles/Skills_Shortages_in_South_Africa_-_Entire_eBook_0.pdf)

Field, S., Musset, P. and Álvarez-Galván, J. L. 2014. A Skills Beyond School Review of South Africa. OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training. Paris, OECD Publishing.

OECD. 2016. Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators. Paris, OECD Publishing.

---

Published by UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Photo used in Cover Design under CC0 copyrights

UNESCO-UNEVOC is not responsible for the quality of the initiatives or programmes included in this database, is not managing or implementing them and has not evaluated them.

### **Learn more about SSACCI**

More references available on the initiative in our website at: [http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=PP\\_SSACI](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=PP_SSACI)

### **Discover other 'promising practices'**

The UNESCO-UNEVOC Promising Practices database presents inspiring projects tackling key-themes in TVET, such as Gender equality, Youth employment, Greening, ICT in TVET and more.

Learn more on our website at: <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/promisingpractices>

Questions or suggestions? Contact our team at: [unevoc-pp@unesco.org](mailto:unevoc-pp@unesco.org)

