UNESCO-UNEVOC PROMISING PRACTICES

SSACI’s workplace based experience
Aligning skills with industry needs

2017
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 SACCI 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

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More references available on the initiative in
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