

3rd HRDC SUMMIT: OPINION PIECE ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

The purpose of this short article is to stimulate discussion and debate on some of the major challenges facing vocational education and training in South Africa, particularly in the TVET College sector, and to search for potential solutions to these challenges.

As Principals and Campus Managers of TVET Colleges, we have to respond proactively to a host of ever-changing challenges if we are to meet the mandate we have been given by the DHET to increase access to a vocational education for the unemployed youth and so facilitate socio-economic transformation in South Africa.

We need to review how we can meaningfully and proactively address the following:

- The **huge skills-gap** between what school leavers are able to offer and what is required by the industry. How can we systematically bridge this gap?
- The recently introduced Dual Apprenticeship System addresses this crisis, in part, but South Africa faces unique challenges in implementation because this new method of training artisans is dependent upon the **support and commitment of industry**. How can we create a climate where South African TVET College students will benefit from the same close collaboration between the industry and educational institutions that is the case in Western Europe e.g. Germany?
- How can we involve influential members of the industry in **updating the curricula** to meet their needs and generating partnerships which will enhance our students' training through Work-based Experience (WBE) placements and exposure to current equipment?
- How can **funding** be generated for the provision of Short Skills courses and **Occupational Programmes** which respond better to the needs of industry than the more traditional NCV (National Certificate) courses which are funded by DHET? The Occupational Programmes are not funded by DHET which inevitably limits what TVET Colleges are able to offer. This is an approach which needs to be reviewed. We need to review what the high failure rate and general unpopularity of the **NC(V) course** among the student population, is saying to us about **student perceptions** regarding the course. How well does it equip students for the workplace by comparison with the Report 191 and Occupational programmes? How can it be made more distinct from what schools offer?
- An ongoing challenge for the sector is the **retention of skilled staff** who are offered better remuneration packages by the industry. What incentives can be offered to them?
- What creative, innovative means can be developed to **increase the abysmal "Throughput Rate"** (i.e. the percentage of TVET College students who complete their entire course within the prescribed period)? The current national average, as defined by DHET, is **only 10%**, which is shocking in view of the enormous amount of money which is fed into this sector and what the needs of the country are.
- Unique to South Africa is that the bulk of the TVET College student population, and many of the staff, are **working in a language that is not their mother-**

tongue. How can the standard of English teaching be improved across the board? How can the language curriculum be successfully adapted to answer the needs of a technical and vocational education as distinct from an academic one?

- How can the **perception** among the general population be altered to view a **technical and vocational education** more positively? Many young people still view having a university degree as the “Open Sesame” to employment when in reality a technical or vocational qualification would equip them far better for the workplace.

As a TVET College Principal and HRD Council member, it is my fervent wish that the issues raised here will generate constructive and robust debate which will ultimately pave the Way Forward to the enhancement of vocational education and training in TVET Colleges. As a sector they have a unique and vital role to play in addressing skills shortages in this country.

Ms HM Sibande

Principal: Ekurhuleni East TVET College and HRD Council Member