



Opinion piece:

# Collaboration: the key to giving education the edge

With impending changes to the Sector Education and Training Authority (Seta) landscape, new qualifications for the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), amendments to university curricula and the ongoing search for fresh initiatives that will benefit the pulp and paper sector, collaboration has become more important than ever before. *Mike Truelock* unpacks the role that industry plays in shaping the education landscape.

While pulp and paper companies are fiercely competitive in the marketplace, education is one area in which they actively co-operate to address the skills needs of the local industry. Over many years, the Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa (PAMSA), which represents more than 90% of the local industry, has played a seminal role in driving such collaboration in line with its education mission: to maximise productivity by promoting cost effective, quality local education for the pulp and paper industry.

This has been done through PAMSA's education unit, comprising a group of representatives from member companies who meet quarterly to keep a finger on the pulse of needs in respect of human capital. It also requires working with universities, technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, industry organisations and government.

Over the past five years, this multi-stakeholder collaboration has helped establish agreements that have grown the number of students receiving education by 30% per annum. An average of 250 students across eight paper and pulp related qualifications are now supported.

The PAMSA Qualifications Ladder, a framework of the levels of education required for respective industry roles, has grown to include the NCV: Pulp and Paper Operator, the National Diploma: Pulp and Paper Technology, the BTech: Pulp and Paper Technology, the Pulp and Paper Occupational Programme and unit standard-based qualifications from NQF level 2 to 4. These qualifications are continually adapted to meet changing industry needs as well as structural amendments in the country's education system.

An example of the latter is the move away from unit standard-based education by 2018 and its replacement by QCTO qualifications. The process hinges heavily on input from the industry, with the end result that the qualifications offered by tertiary institutions are specifically tailored to meet ever-changing business requirements.

Each of the 11 projects PAMSA currently has under way specifically benefit the sector, address a current education and training gap and solve a challenge experienced across the board.

These initiatives are backed by R4.7 million in funding and focus on the development of qualifications, TVET college capacity building, learner tutoring, work integrated learning (WIL) and work-based experience (WBE).

It is important to understand the difference between WIL and WBE. WIL speaks to a situation when a learner needs practical experience in order to complete a relevant qualification whereas WBE is a temporary work placement, which exposes a graduate to the workplace.

Guided by a simple eight-step plan for both education and member companies PAMSA, in partnership with universities, TVET colleges and the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Seta, has successfully placed more than 90 learners over the past few years.

The Umfolozi TVET College recently determined that of the 55 PAMSA students it placed between 2013 and 2015, almost 70% were either permanently or temporarily employed after their WIL experience.

This is an excellent achievement and proves that the WIL and WBE approach gives companies the opportunity to carefully observe learners with a view to recruiting the best available talent.

## Managing the sector skills plan

PAMSA plays a role in informing and managing the sector skills plan. According to industry surveys conducted in 2010 and 2015, some very insightful realities were highlighted in terms of skills needs and numbers of employees at various education levels.

- » There has been a significant shift in the expectations of organisations regarding the numbers and levels of education required of operators.
- » In 2010, the unit established in a survey that there was a 7% deficit in suitably qualified operators. After addressing this concern, there is now in fact an over supply of 2.4%.
- » The actual education levels of current operators have improved.
- » Some 36% have added to their qualifications by one NQF level over the past five years.
- » The perceived needs of industry into the future require a significant upskilling of people.

Industry demands a 280% move, or 2.8 NQF levels per person, and considering the age profiles of current operators, there is a significant need to review and strategically increase efforts to provide for the future needs of the industry.

PAMSA has also been collaborating with companies to facilitate an MSC research programme which leverages external funding and university collaboration to focus on key research needs and the development of higher level professional qualifications. There are 13 students enrolled in this programme currently.

### Make your voice heard

The PAMSA education unit believes that all of these achievements prove the success of pre-competitive collaboration. Its job in terms of meeting the industry's education and skills challenges is far from done. Massive value still remains untapped for the next five years.

PAMSA welcomes your input as the success of the industry relies on transparency and active professional participation. ■

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## And in other education news...

### Mpact Springs Mill congratulates its graduates



At the end of 2015, two Mpact Springs Mill employees graduated with their Bachelors of Technology in Pulp and Paper. Francois Schenck (far left), shift superintendent, completed his B.Tech project on alternative fibres while Rudzani Ravele (left), BM3 wet end operator, focused on the importance of process monitoring cameras. In addition, Kabelo Ntshudisane (right), paper maker, and Leondo Alexander (far right), superintendent, passed their respective national diplomas in industrial and chemical engineering. ■

### Mondi Richards Bay gives learners and graduates a step-up

Mondi Richards Bay mill recently welcomed a new group of 10 learners – one from Unisa and nine from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) – who have come on board to complete their work-based experiential training as part of their journeys towards their national diplomas in pulp and paper technology.

Another milestone is that the mill has nine employees enrolled in the B.Tech in Pulp and Paper Technology qualification through DUT - the largest number of people ever enrolled at one time! "The members of this group of industrious students are at various stages of their studies, and include both engineers-in-training and employees who have graduated with their pulp and paper diplomas," says the mill's training manager, Ralph Niebuhr. ■



Mondi Richards Bay in-service trainees are, from left, Sanele Zondi, Ayanda Ngcobo, Muzi Nxumalo, Nompilo Mthethwa, Mthokozisi Mkhize, Zandile Zondi, Lwande Mkhulisi, Snehlanhla Shange, Phumulani Luthuli and Kwanele Jobe.

### Kimberly-Clark welcomes three in-service trainees and five engineering apprentices to Enstra Mill

Kimberly-Clark is giving an opportunity of a lifetime to chemical and engineering students who have graduated with a full diploma, and providing them with work-integrated learning (WIL). Learners are assigned coaches and mentors who expose them to real experiences within the work environment, while lecturers visit the site to monitor their progress.

Having partnered with the Ekurhuleni East College to source learners from the local community, the mill has also employed five mechanical and electrical apprentices who will follow the full apprenticeship programme and complete their workshop training while based at the Enstra Learning Centre. ■