



THE SWISS-SOUTH AFRICAN CO-OPERATION INITIATIVE

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SSACI

The DHET/SwissCham College Improvement Project

Evaluative Report

9 September 2016

The DHET/SwissCham college improvement project (DSCIP) was officially launched in April 2014. The objective of the project was to develop a model for college/industry partnerships that would help raise the standard of public TVET colleges.

This report reviews the current state of the project and considers its **design, activities, outputs and outcomes, finances and lessons learned**.

1. Project Design

1.1. The project initially envisaged a series of interventions by SwissCham member companies in two or three public colleges that would:

- Improve the standard of teaching and learning in the colleges' programmes and courses that relate to the companies' business interests
- Align those training programmes and courses more closely with industry practice
- Make students more employable
- Develop mutually-beneficial partnerships between the participating college(s) and companies

1.2. The interventions would include:

- Coaching and in-house training courses for college management and teaching staff
- Staff exchanges between college and company
- In-service training and mentoring for college staff by Swiss experts
- Workplace-based experience for college students
- Competitions and awards for students and lecturers

1.3. Participating college were to be selected on the basis of:

- Geographic proximity to participating SwissCham member companies

- Their current offering of programmes and courses related to the business interests of the participating companies (e.g. engineering, construction, IT, office administration, tourism and hospitality, financial accounting, sales and marketing)
- Reasonable level of managerial effectiveness and stability, and therefore a capacity to make effective use of the additional inputs listed in par 2.4 above
- Willingness to participate and commitment of own resources

Colleges in Gauteng and its periphery were invited to apply to participate in the project and, from six expressions of interest, Ekurhuleni West College on the East Rand and Western College on the far West Rand were selected. They were joined in mid-2015 by South West Gauteng college. Not all campuses of the colleges would be involved; only those offering one or more of the five programmes were chosen as the priority areas for intervention, namely:

- IT
- Engineering (mechanical and electrical)
- Sales & marketing
- Office administration
- Financial accounting

1.4. The desired **outputs**, **outcomes** and **impact** of the project were as follows:

<i>Outputs</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Sources of information</i>
1. Initial improvement in pass rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass rate increases year-on-year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exam results
2. Implementation of expanded programme of workplace exposure for lecturers, work experience for students, internships for graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College has institution-wide policy and systems in place • Number of college programmes implementing workplace exposure and experience increases annually, reaching 75% after 3 years • Number of lecturers doing workplace visits increases annually, reaching 50% after 3 years • Number of students getting on-course or post-course work experience increases annually, reaching 50% after 3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ College records and minutes of management meetings ○ Tracking of graduates ○ Interviews with employers
3. Programme of professional development for teaching staff implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College has institution-wide policy and systems in place • Number of lecturers receiving intervention increases annually, reaching 50% after 3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ College records and minutes of management meetings ○ Interviews with staff and training service-providers

<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Sources of information</i>
1. Sustained improvement in throughput and employment rates of students at participating TVET colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass and throughput rates increase by five percentage-points over initial level • Employment rate increases by ten percentage-points over initial level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual exam results ○ Tracking of graduates
2. More-effective college-industry partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of written college-industry partnership agreements increases • Partnerships cover lecturer development, workplace-experience for students & internships for graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signed agreements
3. More competent teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass rates under lecturers given in-service development increase by ten percentage-points over initial level • Improvement in subject knowledge of lecturers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual exam results ○ External assessments

<i>Systemic Impact</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Source of information</i>
1. Improvement in quality of TVET at participating colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass and throughput rates in top 10% of colleges nationally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual exam results
2. Other colleges decide to adopt programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other colleges approach DHET and/or SSACI for assistance in implementing similar interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Official correspondence

1.5. The roles and responsibilities of the project partners were to be as follows:

- **SwissCham** would be the initiator and overall co-ordinator of the project, which was branded as a SwissCham initiative.
- The **Department of Higher Education and Training** (DHET) was to be SwissCham's partner in government, providing the project with its 'license to operate' and the weight of official support.
- The **Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative** (SSACI) was the project management agency.

1.6. Other partner organisations would be:

- The Swiss embassy in SA, which could give the project profile and prestige with the SA government
- The **Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Educational and Training** (SFIVET), which would assist with curriculum development and the training of college instructors
- **B360**, a Swiss NGO with experience of facilitating working visits by retired experts from Switzerland to educational institutions in southern Africa.
- **SETAs** willing to provide some funding for internships in some technical occupations

1.7. SwissCham would convene a high-level steering committee to provide overall strategic direction, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It would comprise:

- 2 representatives from SwissCham
- 2 representatives from the DHET's directorate for the TVET Colleges
- a representative from the Swiss embassy
- a representative from SSACI

In addition, SwissCham would convene an internal "core committee" to lobby support amongst its members, co-ordinate their inputs and disseminate reports on project implementation.

1.8. The main division of operational responsibilities would be as follows:

SwissCham	SSACI	DHET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment of participating companies - Mobilisation of resources - Provision, through member companies, of some specific inputs (e.g. internships, in-house training, staff exchanges) - PR and communications with interested external parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Day-to-day management of project - Co-ordination of inputs from other implementing partners, service-providers, etc. - Organisation of some specific activities, including training, internships, staff exchanges - Reports to steering committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandating and monitoring of college activities - Funds 'in-house' costs (e.g. time devoted by staff to project activities) - Reviews and evaluations

1.9. The life-span of the project was initially envisaged to be 2½ years, from the middle of 2014 to the end of 2016. As a result of a slow start to the project, in June 2015 the Steering Committee decided to extend the project until the end of 2017.

1.10. The budget for the project was originally set at R6'200'000, to be covered by grants from participating SwissCham member companies. In June 2015 this was revised downwards to R3'0978'000 for the remainder of the project (i.e. July 2015 to December 2017), more or less equally split between the companies and the National Skills Fund (NSF)

1.11. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that insufficient care was taken during the planning of this project to ensure that the required funding was guaranteed and that participating companies and colleges were able to commit the necessary level of resources, including management time and attention.

2. Project Activities

- 2.1. In June 2014, a detailed implementation plan, drawn up by SSACI, was adopted by the Steering Committee. This shaped the project activities thereafter.
- 2.2. In terms of this plan, the first priorities of the project were to increase the provision of workplace-based experience (WBE) for college students and their lecturers, and to institute a programme of professional coaching for the lecturers. SSACI personnel ran training workshops at the colleges to familiarise them with the model of systematic WBE for students that SSACI had developed in 2008-10 and for workplace exposure for lecturers, which the DHET had approved for use by colleges in 2012. Thereafter, regular support visits and calls were made by SSACI to assist colleges with their placements and this element of the project has continued to operate effectively throughout.
- 2.3. In the meantime, the SwissCham Core Committee presented the project to member companies, focussing on 28 large or medium-sized enterprises within easy striking distance of the project colleges. Apart from sending out flyers and including the project on the agenda of SwissCham Executive Committee meetings, the committee held numerous meetings with the targeted companies. The Core Committee's activities wound down in the first quarter of 2015 but two of its members continue to represent SwissCham on the Steering Committee.
- 2.4. The Steering Committee has met quarterly, and sometimes more often, since the start of the project to receive reports, review progress and provide strategic direction.
- 2.5. The provision of professional coaching to the college lecturers ran into early difficulties. Initially it had been thought that Swiss experts could be provided without charge by B630, a Swiss NGO with experience in this field. However, B360 still hoped to recover its management costs, which were considerably higher than had been anticipated. Moreover, visiting experts still needed to have their travel and accommodation expenses covered and a sharp increase in the Rand:Franc exchange rate at this time escalated these costs. In the end, it proved uneconomical to use B360's services but a suitable alternative was found in a retired Swiss professor with extensive experience of peer-coaching. He made two visits to South Africa in 2015, running introductory workshops at the project colleges and offering individual follow-up. But the workshops were very poorly attended, one even being cancelled when no one from the college came. Interest in the follow-up programme was likewise very low and the programme had to be cancelled.
- 2.6. Between October 2015 and February 2016, at the request of the DHET through the Steering Committee, SSACI developed a guide to implementing guest lectures and staff exchanges between colleges and companies that could be used by and all public TVET colleges. This involved:
 - Conducting a desktop review of literature on the practice of guest lectureships, and of company and college staff exchanges and summarising relevant lessons from this.
 - Undertaking a review of the current state of guest lectureships and company and college staff exchanges in TVET colleges, universities and universities of technology, and from this summarising best practices.
 - Writing a detailed, step-by-step guide for colleges to lectureships and staff exchanges, covering such aspects as:

- General criteria for use of guest lectureships and staff exchanges
- Funding
- Legalities (including contracts, legal obligations and liabilities)
- HR issues (including job/task descriptions, personnel specifications, conditions of work, remuneration and performance management)
- Logistics (travel, administrative support, etc.)
- Official recording and reporting

This guidebook was completed on schedule and accepted by the DHET

2.7. In May 2015 a career-expo was held at which companies show-cased work opportunities in their industries and organisations to college students. A similar event will be held in October 2016.

2.8. Flyers are being prepared aimed at promoting to employers the value of graduates of the National Certificate (Vocational) offered by public TVET colleges.

3. Outputs and Outcomes

3.1. **Workplace-based experience for college students** has undoubtedly been the main success of the project to date. Since the inception of the project the number of students being placed in industry has grown significantly. This is illustrated in the table below, which shows such placements from the pre-project baseline figure of 2013 to the latest figure for 2016.

Number of students participating in work placements 2013 – 2016

Name of campus	2013	2014	2015	2016
Germiston	9	20	60	70
Tembisa	26	36	45	85
Carletonville	0	18	76	114
Randfontein	4	44	51	112
Krugersdorp	0	39	74	78
Total	35	157	306	459

Some increase could have been expected in any case because colleges are required by the DHET to place students and report on progress in this regard. Thus even without the project, colleges would have actively been seeking placements for their students in industry. However, these increases since the commencement of the project are significant and can in some measure be attributed to the project.

3.2. From the outset of the project it was hypothesized that **student pass rates** would improve through increased exposure to the workplace. The table below shows that this did in fact happen, by as much as 10%, between 2013 and 2015:

	2013: Baseline			2014: Year 1			2015: Year 2		
Campus	No. Enrolled	No. Passed	% passed	No. Enrolled	No. Passed	% passed	No. Enrolled	No. Passed	% passed
Randfontein	453	217	48%	540	274	51%	216	131	61%
Carletonville	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Krugersdorp	81	19	23%	109	36	33%	99	51	52%
Tembisa	86	39	45%	161	41	25%	127	67	53%
Germiston	22	15	68%	61	22	36%	87	42	48%
Total	642	290	45%	871	373	43%	529	291	55%

*Figures not yet available

The reason for the drop in the pass rate from 2013 to 2014 is not known but is likely to do with student unrest at the colleges during that period.

3.3. The **placement of lecturers in industry for workplace exposure** has been disappointing, as can be seen from the figures in the table below:

Number of lectures participating in work placements 2013 – 2016

Name of campus	2013	2014	2015	2016
Germiston	*	*	*	*
Tembisa	*	*	*	*
Carletonville	0	0	3	4
Randfontein	0	1	17	1
Krugersdorp	0	0	7	1
Total	0	1	27	6

*Figures not yet received from Germiston and Tembisa campuses

There are two main reasons for this poor output:

- i. Although SSACI convened several workshops with the lecturers on how to source and manage their work placements and undertook numerous monitoring visits to campuses to enquire about progress and provide support to lecturers, it seems that many of them have not yet seen the value of spending time in industry and have been resistant to doing so. Neither SSACI nor the DHET has any mechanism to compel lectures to undertake work placements. Compounding this problem is the fact that few campus managers have provided the required drive or leadership get this element of the project off the ground. They have not met regularly with lecturers to review and discuss progress, or attended meetings between SSACI and participating lecturers. As a result, the only time the project is discussed at campus level is when SSACI undertakes monitoring visits. This lack of college management support and interest in the project is picked up by lecturers, who then give it less attention themselves. This had had a very negative effect on the project.
- ii. Companies did not offer opportunities for industry exposure on anything like the scale that had been expected. The following table shows a breakdown of the involvement of SwissCham companies in the project:

Company	Type of support			
	Student work placements	Lecturer work placements	Training for college lecturers	Participation in the careers day
Schindler	9			✓
Nestle	22			✓
Geberit			½ day	
Buhler	4	2		✓
Sulzer		4		✓

The companies point out that they have not got from government what they asked for – namely, points on their BBEE scorecards for contributions in cash or kind towards the project. Despite the DHET's energetic pursuit of this issue with the DTI, which manages the BBEE system, this problem remains unresolved and is a powerful disincentive to companies that might otherwise have put more resources into this project.

- 3.4. As noted in Section 2 above, other outcomes of the project to date have been the production of a guidebook on college-industry exchanges and of programme-specific marketing fliers aimed at employers. The career days no doubt increased student awareness and understanding of possible careers in industry and job-opportunities in some specific companies.

4. Finances

- 4.1. Despite their interest in the project, SwissCham member companies never came close to covering the agreed budget. One reason for this is the nature of SwissCham itself. It is a voluntary organisation whose members have no obligations other than to agree with its objectives and pay their annual membership fees. Thus, although SwissCham's Core Committee and ExCo accepted the project budget, most member companies felt no individual responsibility for covering it. Initially, it was hoped that ten companies would each contribute R200'000 p.a. for three years but, in spite of strenuous effort by the Core Committee members to drum up support, this never happened.
- 4.2. The Swiss embassy made a valiant effort to attract sponsors. Apart from hosting two events for company CEO's, at which they were exhorted to support the SwissCham project, the embassy itself contributed R350'000 to the project between mid-2014 and early 2015.
- 4.3. Expenditure on scheduled activities, though always below the budget and cash-flow projections, quickly exceeded income and SSACI had to draw upon its reserves to keep the project going. By mid-2015, SSACI was R400'000 out of pocket and it was clear that another source of funding would have to be found if the project was to continue. Through the good offices of the DHET, the National Skills Fund agreed to co-fund the revised budget on a 50:50 basis with participating companies. The NSF has since kept its side of the bargain but contributions from companies have dwindled further and do not cover even a half-share of the reduced budget. As of 31 August 2016, total contributions amounted to R1'843'139, of which R775'000 came from the corporates, R350'000 from the embassy and R718'139 from the NSF. Expenditure to that date totalled R2'253'346.

5. Experience Gained and Lessons Learned

- 5.1. From the above, it is clear that the project should not have been launched without binding commitments from sponsors to cover its costs. Nor should the participating colleges have been accepted without stronger commitments and a mechanism for enforcing them. Additionally, the implementation plan was probably too ambitious, given the limited management capacity of the colleges at both central and campus level.
- 5.2. It has often been evident that colleges do not see industry as a client but, at best, as a distant end-user of their product. Too often college personnel have been slow to respond to contacts from companies, have arrived late at meetings or not arrived at all. Whilst placement officers do exist in the colleges, these individuals cannot be expected to secure placements for thousands of students. Without extensive support from lecturers, they have been unable to place large numbers of students in companies even for short periods of experience. The lack of enthusiasm that many lecturers have shown for undertaking industry engagements themselves is further evidence that they do not view current experience in the commerce or industry as a valuable asset in the discharge of their duties.
- 5.3. On the other hand, few companies came forward to support the project. And even participating companies did not go very far out of their way to assist colleges. It is true that there were no quick pay-offs for them in doing so and their expectation of getting BBEE points for what they did do was disappointed. Yet, whatever their frustrations were in dealing with the colleges, they knew from the start that the project was aimed at trying to fix things that are currently amiss. The companies do not seem to have thought through the implications of this – namely, that substantial effort was going to be required for a considerable period of time, and many frustrations and setbacks were likely to be encountered on the way. Instead of gearing up for this, some companies simply abandoned the effort to bring about systemic and institutional change.
- 5.4. At an operational level, this project has confirmed the experience of a number of similar initiatives conducted by SSACI, that:
- Colleges and companies are far apart in organisation and culture. This is seen in their different views of the length of the working day and week, in timekeeping, in misunderstandings about who in each organisation is responsible for what, in misdirected communications, and so on.
 - The content of the NC(V) is not aligned with the skills needs of industry, where 'work-readiness' is required. When college lecturers were asked, during the preparation of the marketing fliers for industry, to list jobs that an NC(V) graduate could do, not one lecturer could specify a single job. This may in part reflect their own unfamiliarity with industry but it also indicates that, while the NC(V) may teaches students much about a given industry, it does not prepare them for a specific occupation. Apart from the obvious detriment to the graduate's employment prospects, this also makes it difficult to work out a meaningful programme of activities for NC(V) students undertaking workplace experience – one that allows them to exercise within the company's business processes the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the classroom.
 - The delivery of the NC(V) as a full-time, all-year programme also undermines the students' prospects of getting workplace experience before graduation, because it limits them to working for just a week or two at a time during vacations. More

than one company CEO in this project commented that so short a period in the company might have some value for the student but it has none for the employer. At least a month – and preferably longer - is needed for a student in the workplace to do enough real work to compensate the employer for the costs of induction, instruction and supervision, and the disruption in the everyday activities of other staff assigned to these tasks.

- 5.5. Notwithstanding all the above difficulties, it should not be forgotten that the project has in its short existence had a measurable, positive impact on the students' performance, on the lecturers' professional knowledge and competence, and on the level of the colleges' engagement with local industry. It has also provided valuable experience, some of which has already been disseminated to all other colleges through, for example, the guidebook on guest lecturing and college-industry staff exchanges.
