JET bulletin

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FOCUS: Improving students' performance in TVET colleges

THE COLLEGES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IN BRIEF

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) initiated the Colleges Improvement Project (CIP) in 2011. The aim was to improve the capacity, functionality and performance of, initially, eight technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in the Eastern Cape and, from the start of 2012, a further seven TVET colleges in Limpopo.

While addressing specific challenges within the colleges, the initiative also spoke to the national challenge of untenably high levels of youth unemployment and the related concern of equipping college students with skills aligned to the needs of industry and a growing economy, so that as graduates they would be employable and ready to enter the world of work.

The project's beneficiaries included: the 15 colleges, with 52 campuses, 52 campus managers, 15 education management information systems (EMIS) managers, 45 student support services (SSS) managers or officers, 2 210 lecturers and, directly or indirectly, the students. (In 2012, a total of 108 000 students were enrolled in the project colleges.)

JET Education Services was appointed to manage the project, running over three years to the end of 2014. At inception an initial rapid assessment of the 15 colleges was conducted to identify core areas of weakness. The findings provided a basis for the conceptualisation of the project model and informed the programme interventions which were designed to address those weaknesses. A parallel process of monitoring and evaluation was put in place to track implementation and ensure that the project was responsive to emerging concerns while staying true to the overarching objectives.

With a view to building the long-term sustainability of the colleges as well-managed and -resourced institutions delivering sound education and training programmes, the original broad framework encompassed six areas for improvement: »

contents

JET **Bulletin**—The purpose of the *JET Bulletin* is to share some of the knowledge and insights that are gained through various multifaceted projects in which JET is involved. JET is very active in education development and evaluation and we see a wide range of new learnings emerging which we believe would be of interest and value to other stakeholders in the sector and to education and training more broadly. We trust you will find the content of this edition of value. Each edition will share new ideas and new learnings around a chosen topical focus. The *JET Bulletin* will be distributed primarily online, with a limited number of copies available in print.

Governance and Management; Human Resource Management and Development; Finance and Risk Management; Teaching and Learning; Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), including data management and data for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning; and Infrastructural Planning.

As the project evolved and changes in the DHET saw the transfer of responsibility for the colleges from the provinces to the national department, the scope of the project was revised. As a result JET was in a better position to concentrate on improving teaching and learning in the colleges and building the institutional systems and capacity to support improved performance in teaching and learning.

The project model

The project model developed by JET encompassed four thematic areas in which improvements in college functions and operations could be made:

- Governance and management (including strategic planning and operational planning and management);
- Education management information systems (EMIS) (including data management and monitoring and evaluation);
- Teaching and learning; and
- Workplace-based experience (WBE).

These areas of intervention were not addressed in isolation as they are essentially interrelated and interdependent. By implementing the interventions in a synergistic way, JET sought to optimise the integrated impact of the project.

National and provincial teams

The project team at JET's head office, working with the DHET, provided overall guidance and direction. JET appointed technical advisors in each province to work directly with the colleges and campuses to develop and implement improvement plans in each thematic area.

The work of the technical advisors was intended to provide the DHET with appropriate and practical approaches and tools for college improvement that could be used nationally. To ensure a degree of replicability, some generic policies, systems and processes were implemented across the 15 colleges. However, unique challenges in individual colleges called for flexibility. In some instances more tailored solutions and hands-on support were required to establish and institutionalise the various interventions.

Developing systems, building capacity

In its approach JET aimed to make incremental changes by developing systems, building capacity and providing monitoring and support to generate and sustain improvements in the colleges' performance.

Stakeholder liaison

During the course of the CIP the TVET sector was in a state of considerable flux. A number of colleges were placed under administration and student protests disrupted operations on some campuses. This raised the need to add a stakeholder liaison component to the project, reaching across multiple levels – from campus to college and from provincial to national offices within the DHET structures. While the various stakeholders sometimes held differing priorities which presented some challenges to implementation, at all levels the goal and agenda remained constant: to improve the functioning of the colleges.

Outputs

The various programmatic interventions were able to gain some traction and some substantial gains were made in establishing a more stable, integrated operational platform on which the colleges can build and grow. In support of the systems and capacity developed to sustain the college improvements going forward, the CIP produced a number of manuals, guidelines and templates which the DHET can use in other TVET colleges as improvements are implemented more widely.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation was a critical component of the project, tracking implementation, noting issues and obstacles as they arose and providing feedback to the project teams and the DHET through quarterly reporting meetings. This provided for programmes to be adjusted and extra support introduced where it was needed. Baseline, midterm and summative evaluations were conducted by JET's Monitoring and Evaluation Division and the DHET commissioned an external evaluation at project closure to ascertain the extent to which the project achieved its intended purpose. These reports are available from the DHET on request. □

BASELINE STATUS IN THE PROJECT COLLEGES

The initial rapid assessment of the project colleges identified core areas of weakness. While there were some differences between colleges in the Eastern Cape and those in Limpopo and intervention programmes were modified accordingly, the core concerns included the following:

- Weak curriculum planning, inappropriate mix of study programmes and qualifications;
- High enrolment levels, not linked to available resources;
- A low proportion of appropriately qualified lecturers;
- Lack of experience, capacity and confidence among lecturing staff;
- Lack of mentoring support for staff within colleges;
- Limited use of support and capacity building mechanisms within colleges;
- Limited student support services and limited workplace-based learning;
- Overcrowded classes with students of widely differing ages and abilities;
- Poor student attendance levels and poor pass rates.

THE COLLEGES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
A DHET PERSPECTIVE

The *JET Bulletin* spoke to Gerda Magnus, Chief Director: Programmes and Curriculum Innovation at the DHET, about the impact of the project, lessons learnt and how these may be taken forward.

The CIP was a significant intervention in the TVET sector – in size, scope and complexity. It was a multi-dimensional project which responded to challenges on many fronts.

From the DHET's perspective, the project has been, overall, a valuable intervention; it has had direct influence and impacts in the project colleges and on specific systems, and developed useful materials. Some programmes in some areas proved more successful than others, as would be expected in a project of this scale, but overall, important lessons were learnt and these will help to strengthen colleges and the TVET sector further.

At a systems level

Specific positive impacts were seen, for example, in the operational planning work conducted with the colleges, the enrolment monitoring and management processes introduced and the development of systems and structures to support work-integrated learning (WIL). However, there was a lot of work done during the project and it is not easy to isolate specific elements within the project as a whole. It is also important to note that the intervention processes worked together, such that improvements in data management, for example, informed improvements in strategic planning, curriculum development, teaching and learning and workplace-based exposure, as well as supporting improvements in overall college governance and management. Nonetheless, the above positive impacts are highlighted as being among those that will have a significant long-term impact. The DHET has already seen some systemic changes in this regard which will support the sustainability of the improvements made.

Practical programmes

There were also positive impacts achieved in very practical terms. For example, the development of occupational health and safety (OHS) systems and guidelines for the project colleges, the training provided and the OHS toolkit developed address an important aspect of college and campus management.

The peer tutoring programme that JET introduced for students in mathematics is another example of a very practical, workable programme. As one aspect of the broader intervention to improve teaching and learning, it was well received by most of the project colleges and could work at other colleges and campuses too. The peer tutoring programme benefited students directly. It opened a door to make mathematics more accessible and raised enthusiasm for the subject.

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Supporting materials

Some of the materials developed alongside these programmes – in the form of guidelines, templates, training manuals and similar – have already been taken up by the DHET and extended to colleges nationally. The enrolment manual, for example, developed as part of the programme to support the student enrolment and registration process, has already been adopted by colleges nationally.

The OHS toolkits, including checklists for OHS compliance, the documentation developed to support the integration of workplace-based experience (WBE) into the TVET curriculum and the manual developed to guide peer tutors providing extra mathematics tuition to their fellow students could all be extended to other colleges to support college improvement more widely.

The templates developed for strategic plans, annual performance plans and college improvement plans have also been used nationally and have since been adapted by the DHET for this purpose. »

A wealth of documentation was produced over the course of the project and the department plans to use more of the materials at other TVET colleges. However, it is important that this should be done systematically and with the appropriate support to ensure that the materials and the ways in which they can assist colleges are understood and will be well used.

At departmental level

For the DHET the CIP also offered lessons relating to the structuring and management of a project of this size and complexity and, importantly, it highlighted how policy at government level and operations on the ground need to connect, to talk to each other and work together. The department recognised that it needs to be mindful of day-to-day operational practicalities and that it needs to make space for operations to inform policy and not only for policy to direct operations.

Another factor that made the implementation of the CIP more complex was that the TVET system itself is changing. Policy changes had moved the locus of control of the colleges from provincial to national level. This was part of the department's drive to ensure that TVET graduates are employable and ready for the working world. The CIP has shown that the colleges need to work more closely with local businesses and industry. The DHET is also looking at potential synergies with the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to boost practical skills training and artisanal skills and to integrate vocational training with the needs of identified market sectors.

Adding to the complexity of the CIP was that both the provinces in which it was implemented were facing difficulties and some of the colleges themselves were under administration. It must be said that, subsequent to the CIP intervention, the colleges are certainly now more stable.

From the DHET's perspective JET's approach was appropriate. The conceptual structuring of the project model, the focus on developing systems and capacity and the tiered approach all supported a constructive intervention. JET worked with the department at national and provincial levels and then at college and campus levels, engaging with college and campus management and faculty as well as support staff and students. The key outcomes over the short term can be seen in the systems, capacity and supporting structures and materials now in place in the colleges to sustain the improvements gained and to build on these further. Over the longer term, these will inform and guide policy changes going forward.

The TVET colleges still face enormous challenges. Even though the system does not nearly match the scale of the schooling sector, with about 1 million college students versus 12 million learners in schools, it is very diverse, dynamic and demanding.

The college turnaround strategy, championed by the DHET, will take forward specific lessons learnt in the CIP. □

TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES TO ACCELERATE STUDENTS' SUCCESS

The improvement of teaching and learning was a central focus of the CIP. As well as providing support to lecturers and curriculum managers, the project sought to strengthen students' performance directly. The introduction of peer tutoring in mathematics proved successful at most colleges.

Executive Manager, Youth and Community Development Division: Kedibone Boka
Specialist Coordinator: Teaching and Learning Programmes: Alice Msibi

The improvement of teaching and learning was foregrounded in the CIP model. The findings of the initial rapid assessment had revealed that teaching and learning, the core function of TVET colleges, was not receiving the level of attention and resources needed for it to be carried out effectively.

One of the main concerns identified was the high level of repeated failures among students in the core subjects of mathematics and English. This was reflected in overall failure rates and affected student throughput and certification.

Students' poor performance in the core subjects is in part a consequence of poor mathematics and English language teaching and learning in the schooling system. It is also a result of the fact that colleges, in the drive to increase enrolments, do not consistently apply admissions criteria. There are no standard entry-level requirements for students entering TVET colleges, nor for any of the study programmes offered. Even in purely engineering colleges, such as Lovedale in the Eastern Cape, there are no admissions restrictions. This means that students of widely differing abilities may be together in one class (and that there is little consideration given to students' aptitude for whichever study programmes they choose to pursue).

Informed by these findings and responding to the overarching objectives of the project – to improve the capacity, functionality and performance of the project colleges – JET sought to reinforce the position of teaching and learning as the core focus and function of TVET colleges.

Hence, the project teams worked towards making teaching and learning central to all aspects of college planning and operations through focused systemic interventions. Concurrent CIP programmes which brought in specialist technical input to improve the governance and management systems of the colleges as well as data management, monitoring and student support, were all directed towards supporting teaching and learning.

The example of the annual planning process for teaching and learning for the year ahead illustrates this approach. Instead of the administrative exercise that had been routinely conducted in a two-day workshop at the end of the academic year, the project facilitated a college-level examination of each college's operational plan, informed by data from the newly implemented education management information system (EMIS). From this, faculty-level teaching and learning plans were developed. Thus, planning for teaching and learning was not just replicated from the previous year, but took account of real changes in student numbers within departments and pass rates and retention rates, among other factors. Reciprocally, the teaching and learning plan informed the overall college plan, including requirements to be considered by other functional units such as human resources, finance and student support services.

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PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

The project teams in the two provinces worked initially at college level and then at campus level to develop and implement practical plans to improve teaching and learning. Specific programmes and activities carried out within the teaching and learning intervention are outlined below.

Systems development

- College improvement planning and campus improvement plans;
- College and campus performance committees (including academic registrars at central offices and heads of departments at campus level);
- Integrated curriculum management, monitoring and support systems;
- Support programmes for: peer tutoring, study skills, mathematics revision classes for students.

Capacity development

- Lecturer development and induction, encompassing best practices in lesson planning, teaching strategies and facilitating lessons;
- Training for curriculum management, including providing induction resources and workshops for curriculum staff;
- Training in assessment and moderation and the use of subject and assessment guidelines (essential to improving pass and certification rates);
- Mathematics workshops for lecturers.

College monitoring and support

- Classroom observation and feedback sessions, offering support to lecturers in their teaching practice;
- Support and mentoring of curriculum managers in implementing plans.

JET's teaching and learning intervention, in line with the broader project model, was structured with the aims of:

- Building systems and capacity to contribute to the long-term improvement of students' performance and employability;
- Improving institutional capacity through better, integrated planning for teaching and learning practice; and
- Improving the competence of the teaching staff.

In order to be sustainable, systemic changes require an enabling institutional environment. The project colleges in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo were at varying levels of institutional development and this affected the pace of change and the colleges' capacity to assimilate and sustain the teaching and learning intervention's activities.

Lecturer development

Training and support for lecturers formed an important component of the programme. Over the longer term a solution to the concern around college lecturers' qualifications is required and the DHET is in the process of developing professional level qualifications and a full qualifications pathway for college lecturing staff. Looking at the short to medium term, JET addressed this concern with a number of interventions to strengthen lecturers' capacity and teaching practice as well as providing support to curriculum managers.

Student performance

As the project progressed JET increasingly focused on student performance and success with the aim of improving pass rates and thus students' employability – enabling more students to complete their qualifications within a reasonable timeframe and equipping them to compete confidently in the labour market. Across the broad scope of the project – from student enrolment planning and management to teaching and learning in the classroom, from curriculum management to academic support to workplace-based experience – different aspects of the project were channelled towards informing and supporting improvements in students' performance.

Extra mathematics classes

The CIP first sought to address students' weak performance in mathematics by providing mathematics revision and extra classes on Saturdays and during college holidays. The extra lessons programme involved college staff and/or suitably »

qualified students from nearby universities, where feasible, to provide the extra tuition. However, this programme raised costs for the colleges – in payment for services and supervision among other things – and the extra classes were not well attended by students. Issues of transport and the additional time demand are often cited as problematic when it comes to extra lessons outside of the core curriculum.

Students and college staff interviewed during the summative evaluation of the CIP perceived the Saturday classes – which were directly supported by JET – as valuable, although sustainability was seen as being uncertain. A few colleges, at JET's suggestion, introduced 'winter school' which took place when the colleges closed for the holiday period. The winter school focused on providing extra mathematics classes and the lecturers were paid by JET. Interviewees also indicated that they have since introduced other interventions to improve academic support.

The peer tutoring programme

The idea of using Level 4 National Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) students to tutor Level 2 NCV students who were struggling with mathematics evolved during the course of the project and proved to be a welcome and successful intervention at most of the colleges.

Peer tutoring offered important advantages in that:

- It allowed for college and campus ownership of the programme;
- The students were already on-site, making it easier to schedule extra lessons during the college day or, as happened in some cases, into the college curriculum, rather than over weekends or holidays;
- Teaching venues were available on campus so neither tutors nor their students needed to travel to attend tutorials;
- Peer tutoring therefore required few extraneous resources; additional costs were limited to payment of stipends for the tutors and, in some instances, costs of refreshments for the tutorial classes;
- At some colleges, where all learners were in residence and did not have to travel between home and campus, tutoring sessions could be run after dinner or on Saturdays.

The CIP's concept of peer tutoring was discussed with all colleges as a way to tackle the common stumbling blocks in mathematics and English. Most of the colleges took up the programme. Generally, the colleges and lecturers were very honest about their own capabilities; they recognised their weaknesses and valued the input and technical support that the project offered. Among these colleges, some implemented the programme successfully and will carry it forward.

The colleges nominated tutors who were selected from the top mathematics students at Level 4 and who were also seen as students who would step up to the responsibility of tutoring when assigned to the task. The student tutors had to be willing to give their time and support to junior students after hours.

JET provided support in designing and structuring the tutoring programme. At each campus this involved the senior curriculum manager and the student support services manager. A peer tutoring committee was formed with peer tutoring coordinators and the peer tutors appointed. The programme was structured to provide for oversight/supervision, timetabling for tutorials and the monitoring and recording of attendance and progress.

JET also developed the materials for the programme and provided training to the tutors on how to conduct tutorial sessions. The materials addressed basic mathematics concepts, which is where the gaps in understanding were found to be, and gave students a clear and sound foundational understanding, making it easier for them to move on to the higher levels of mathematics required in TVET courses – particularly in engineering, accountancy and other such studies.

As with all other materials developed in the CIP, the mathematics tutoring workbooks are available to the DHET to be reproduced for use in other colleges. The workbooks' focus on foundational mathematics supports their widespread use.

Successes

It is important to consider the successes of the peer tutoring programme within the broader impact of the CIP overall. The project succeeded in regenerating and promoting a culture of learning. Among students JET witnessed a renewed enthusiasm for learning and for wanting to do well and college principals, staff and lecturers generally responded positively in discussions on the proposed interventions and their implementation. College staff were responsive to suggestions from the project teams, open to new possibilities, new ways of doing things and

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the challenge to do better, rather than just repeating what they had been doing in previous years. For many, simply the fact that the colleges were receiving attention and were the focus of the improvement programme was a strong motivating factor. In the summative evaluation of the CIP, interviewees considered the adoption and expansion of the peer tutoring programme to be very positive, although there continue to be certain implementation challenges.

Unmeasured impacts

As much as improvements in the colleges cannot be attributed to a single factor within the overall programme of interventions and amidst contextual factors affecting student performance and certification rates, it is important to recognise that interventions may not show immediate results. The impact may only become evident later in students' performance. Impacts also may not fall within the framework of measurable indicators, but may be seen in, for example, an improved attitude to learning or in the willingness of students to stay longer and work harder. Even to have lecturers volunteering to supervise the mathematics tutoring programme when it entailed extra time from them for no extra reward was a positive step. Anecdotal reports and expressions of appreciation from the students, tutors, lecturers and principals can also be considered indications of the programme's success.

Planning for peer tutoring

Specific successes were noted when the project team saw that some colleges included peer tutoring for mathematics in their annual operational plans for the year ahead, with the required budget provision, assigned personnel and timetable scheduling. This signals that the peer tutoring programme has been incorporated into the curriculum rather than being seen as an add-on. Where it is embedded into the college system in this way, it will benefit more students over time.

Sustainability

Sustainability was an important consideration in the CIP as a whole. In the peer tutoring programme, the systems put in place, the simple operating structure (requiring four to 10 tutors per campus, depending on student numbers and demand), the material developed and the tutor training provided, all supported the continuity and sustainability of the programme.

English language tutoring

A sound understanding of English language and confidence in reading and writing in English are fundamental not only for students to perform well at college, but also for their success in the working world. While mathematics was the focus of the CIP peer tutoring programme, English language is also often a serious stumbling block for students. This challenge is exacerbated where, especially in more rural colleges, some lecturers conduct their lectures in the vernacular, even if English is the prescribed teaching medium. This is problematic when it comes to examinations because even if students have understood their lectures – in mathematics, engineering, physics, or whatever the subject may be – in their home language, they do not understand the same material when it is presented in English in examination papers.

A positive spinoff of the peer tutoring programme in mathematics was that one college, King Hintsa TVET College in the Eastern Cape, introduced peer tutoring sessions for English as well. □

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Where the peer tutoring programme proved successful, a number of factors supported this success:

- The availability and commitment of lecturing staff or career guidance officers to manage the programme;
- Good quality facilitators;
- The systematising of processes for implementation of the programme;
- Inclusion of the programme in the academic calendar or the teaching and learning timetable;
- Interest from students and regular attendance;
- Optimum use of resources available;
- Support from college management and staff;
- Good communication links between units within colleges and between colleges and provincial officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION

Looking to the continuing success of the peer tutoring programme, it is recommended that:

- The programme should be included in colleges' operational plans, with due budget provision and assigned personnel, otherwise it may fall away;
- Ideally, it will be included in the timetable, rather than being separated as a programme of extra lessons;
- It is important to have an internal monitoring mechanism to monitor tutors' and students' attendance and performance;
- Within each college it is important for student support and academic support functions to work together to achieve best results. At the start of the CIP it was found that little attention was given to academic support and, where it was considered, it tended to be bundled up with student support services. However, as the project progressed, colleges came to recognise that student support services staff, because they were not involved directly in the curriculum, were not aware of the kind of academic support that students needed. The peer tutoring programme and other CIP interventions demonstrated that academic support should be recognised as a dedicated function and resourced appropriately. It also demonstrated how important it is that these units work together to ensure that students are supported inside and outside the classroom.

WORKPLACE-BASED EXPERIENCE FOR TVET STUDENTS CONSOLIDATING THEORY WITH PRACTICE

The programme of support to strengthen and scale up workplace-based experience in colleges, one of the four core areas of the CIP, was essentially about creating a mind-shift and creating the systems, processes and structures to enable and support that mind-shift.

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Technical Advisor: WBE: Chris Murray

The purpose of workplace-based experience (WBE) for TVET students is to improve their academic achievement and enhance their employability. It gives students an opportunity to take what they have learned in the classroom and apply it practically in a real-world work environment and so to understand their course content better in terms of actual practice.

The programme of support for WBE in colleges, as one of the four core areas of the CIP, was essentially about creating a mind-shift – among students and lecturers, across colleges and campuses and among employers – positioning WBE as an integral component of teaching and learning and fundamental to colleges' success in training students for the world of work. At the same time the WBE programme contributed to creating the systems, processes and structures to enable and support that mind-shift.

JET's approach in this key thematic area, as in the CIP as a whole, was to build on what was already in place, adopting the principle of taking small steps towards progressively developing, implementing and strengthening WBE. The programme was carefully structured to engage with role players at national, provincial, college and campus levels.

The strategic and conceptual thinking behind the intervention and the development and coordination of WBE support to colleges was systematically organised through a national coordinator. This provided for consultation and collaboration at national level with the DHET and other implementing partners in the field.

At provincial level technical advisors in each province coordinated WBE activities across all the colleges in the respective provinces. Over the course of the CIP the technical advisors coordinated quarterly training, planning and best practice workshops and provided on-site support and guidance to develop WBE processes, systems and structures at college and campus levels. The technical advisors assisted colleges to engage with employers and monitor students in the workplace with college and DHET officials.

Broadly, the WBE programme of support to the project colleges was guided by the overarching principles of the CIP: to develop college systems, improve college capacity and provide on-site support and monitoring.

Small steps, slow-build, a developmental approach

The design and development of the WBE support programme was informed initially by the findings of the rapid assessment that was conducted at the start of the project. At the time, in 2012, WBE was seen almost entirely as a student support services (SSS) function and solely the responsibility of the SSS manager.

Initial activities in 2012 were therefore framed by the need for support and development of the SSS function of colleges. The emphasis was on improving on-course academic support and on-course workplace-based experience. Meetings and discussions were held with senior college management to find out what was in place and training, guidance and support were then provided to assist the colleges to incorporate WBE into their strategic and operational planning and budgeting processes. Once again this approach was aligned with JET's broader CIP intervention and the integration of all functions into colleges' strategic planning processes. It enabled the project to position WBE and raise its profile within the college system.

In training workshops with college staff, WBE was presented as an essential element of student learning. Colleges' action plans for WBE were reviewed and staff were assisted with the placement and monitoring of students in the workplace and encouraged to integrate WBE into the academic curriculum of every programme. Project staff also assisted with the development of WBE teams in the colleges.

In 2013 the emphasis moved to implementation. Listening and learning were important in JET's developmental approach. By listening to the different role players and learning how things were being done and where the obstacles lay, support and guidance were developed responsively and at an appropriate level to build the necessary capacity, structures and processes. Implementation entailed assisting the colleges to place on-course Level 4 NCV students in the workplace for five days during college holidays. To facilitate the scaling up of WBE activities, JET expanded its involvement to offer support to a broader team. The invitation to participate in the continuing quarterly workshops was extended to include not only WBE coordinators and student support staff but academic managers and lecturers as well. This marked a further step towards integrating WBE into colleges' academic programmes. The workshops provided a forum for reflection on best practices and discussions on planning and systems and possible solutions for challenges that had arisen during previous WBE placements.

WBE IN THE WIL CONTINUUM

The terminology in the field of work-integrated learning (WIL) is evolving and, for the purposes of the CIP, JET sought to clarify the language used across the WIL continuum.

According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), WIL 'is a characteristic of vocational and professionally oriented qualifications that may be incorporated into programmes…' and '… may take various forms including simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and workplace-based learning', while WBE is specifically 'exposure and interactions gained through being in the workplace'.[1]

The CIP defined WIL as:

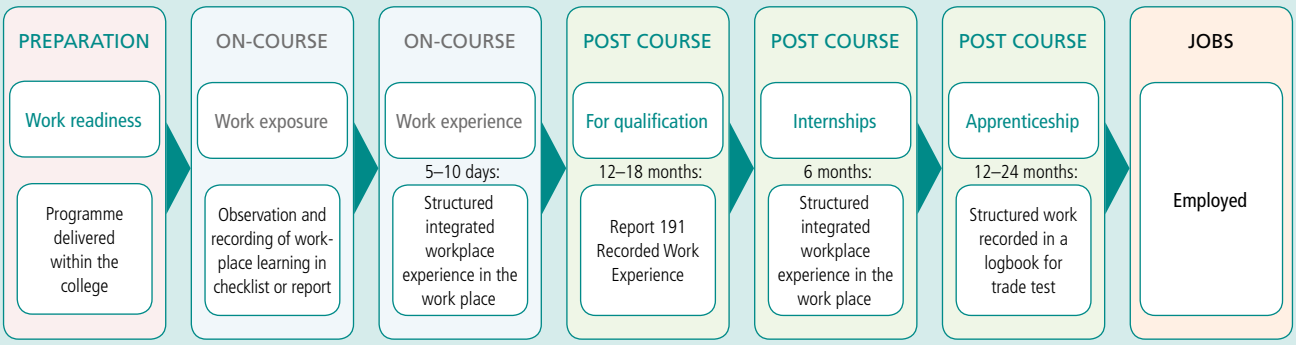
An umbrella term for any purpose-designed learning programme that integrates theoretical knowledge with authentic practice in the workplace. The purpose of WIL is to improve employability and develop competence, that is, the ability to apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills to the demands of the workplace.

And WBE is defined as:

A short period of workplace learning and experience (typically five to 15 days) in a 'real-world' workplace that forms part of an institution-based programme of study. A key feature of WBE is that the student does authentic work which is assessed, and does not merely observe others at work. The work done is recorded in the student's log book, signed off by the workplace mentor, discussed in the classroom and recorded on the college database. For NCV students it will be 'on-course' during college holidays and for NATED (N) students it will be 'between course' between N4 and N5.[2]

The CIP recognised that WIL can be seen as a continuum, beginning with a preparatory work readiness programme provided by the college, moving to on-course work exposure and/or work experience, then post-course work experience, which may be required for a student to qualify. Once qualified, a student may do an internship or, in the case of a technical qualification, a longer more structured apprenticeship leading up to a trade test. The WIL continuum leads to employment.

Figure 1: Work-integrated learning continuum



The CIP focused on preparation in college and on-course WBE as the starting points for building the systems and processes needed.

1 South African Qualifications Authority. (2014). *Standard Glossary of Terms: Terms Related to the South African Qualifications Framework*. Pretoria: SAQA. [http://hr.saqa.co.za/glossary/search_widget.php?id=138]

2 JET Education Services. (2014). *Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Terminology. Module 1 on Management of Workplace-Based Experience at FET Colleges*. Johannesburg: JET Education Services.

JET developed a WBE manual as a simple, practical reference for college and campus staff, as well as a process flow diagram outlining the steps to be taken when implementing WBE. These simple, workable guidelines made it easier for college staff to get to grips with WBE and to implement it.

The technical advisors worked with college staff to support target setting for WBE and with the CIP data management function to improve the capturing of WBE data for reporting.

Students as catalysts in WBE

At an open debriefing session following one of the college workshops, the growing level of interest in WBE among students became clear. Students flocked to the debriefing, despite it being held on a Friday afternoon; they were eager to know when they would be given an opportunity to participate in WBE. During the session both staff and students demonstrated that they appreciated and understood the value of on-course WBE.

This is just one example of the way in which students at a number of colleges became the catalysts in accelerating the implementation of WBE. Given their enthusiasm and hunger for work experience, lecturers and colleges were obliged to respond.

In some instances students themselves took the initiative and set up their own opportunities for WBE. At one Eastern Cape college a group of students due to participate in WBE during their coming holiday period took it upon themselves to visit the workplace beforehand. They travelled there, some distance from their college campus, met with the employer »

and arranged with the employer to take them on for 10 days instead of the prescribed five days, with no extra pay for the extra time they would work. This is another illustration of students' enthusiasm for real work learning and their recognition of the value of on-course WBE.

When students recognise in the workplace what they have learned in class, it is enormously motivating for them – and when they have the chance to share that in class, they boost fellow students' motivation for WBE and for their studies as well.

Bringing lecturers on board

Although lecturers were initially found to be generally resistant to taking any responsibility for arranging WBE, they were encouraged through the WBE support programme – by means of discussions and a gradual opening up of opportunities – to incorporate the concept of WBE into their lectures by using examples from the working world in their lecturing materials and preparing students for their WBE placements. Making time in the classroom for WBE debriefings from students enabled students to share the lessons and experience gained from their placements with their peers and the lecturer.

Sometimes students shared information that showed up a lecturer's lack of knowledge. This was not entirely unexpected as workplaces are dynamic and frequently introduce new technologies or new machines with which lecturers may not be familiar. Lecturers were encouraged to see such incidents in a positive rather than a threatening light and to use students' WBE feedback to incorporate new information or insights into their lectures, thus developing the knowledge of the class as a whole.

> The purpose of workplace-based experience for TVET students is to improve their academic achievement and enhance their employability.

Building systems for sustainability

Through 2014 the focus shifted to providing increased support at campus level and building on the successes of 2013 with the aim of increasing the numbers of students placed in WBE.

Support to the campus WBE teams was directed at improving systems and processes, preparing for students' placements during college holidays, improving data capturing, management and reporting and supporting colleges to monitor students in the workplace. Project staff assisted with the development of coordinating structures for WBE at campus level. WBE committees were formed, involving student support staff, lecturers and the campus manager. On some campuses a WBE coordinator was assigned to coordinate all WBE activities at campus level.

At college level four additional training modules were delivered through the quarterly training workshops. Aimed at further strengthening capacity and implementation, these covered: work readiness preparation; finding placements/workplaces; examples of best practice and systems sustainability; and monitoring workplace learning.

In addition the technical advisors engaged with provincial officials to set up provincial WBE monitoring and coordinating structures – WBE Coordinating Forums – which would provide ongoing support to the colleges.

Engaging with employers

The process of engaging with employers was a critical aspect of the WBE support programme and entailed advising employers on the aims and expectations of WBE placements, making arrangements for the placements, providing for monitoring of the participating students and holding debriefing sessions with the employers, all the while being careful not to take up too much of the employers' time. It is important that the college staff responsible for WBE build long-term relationships with employers and provide an appropriate level of support so that the employers do not feel burdened by taking on WBE students. The WBE guide developed by the CIP took account of these considerations.

In the Eastern Cape and Limpopo most TVET college campuses are in rural areas, where access to more conventional, corporate businesses or industries is limited. Colleges and students need to recognise that WBE does not have to take place – and for most students studying at rural campuses probably will not take place – in a conventional corporate environment. Rather, students in rural areas have the opportunity to learn about the real world of work in small, local businesses: the local spaza shop, or the local car repair workshop, for example. While these businesses are often informal, they offer students authentic work experience and the further benefit of exposure to entrepreneurial enterprise and the kind of small businesses that can build local economies and the South African economy as a whole.

One of the few formal employers in rural areas is often the local district municipality and colleges should be aware of the potential for WBE placements across the range of municipal services and departments. Placements may not be at the municipality's head office, but at the local clinic or waterworks, for example. The placements could involve administrative, bookkeeping or secretarial work in a municipal department or maintenance work in municipal buildings or municipal workshops. WBE placements have also been run successfully at correctional services centres where agricultural students have worked alongside prisoners on the prison farm. WBE opportunities are manifold, even in rural areas.

Improving employability

The debriefing sessions with employers following students' WBE placements revealed some significant indicators for employability. In most instances, employers noted that the students placed with them had sufficient skills and knowledge:

- To be useful in the workplace, and
- To be trainable.

This means that the students were seen as employable.

While these employers knew that in taking on students they were not engaging fully skilled artisans, the fact that they recognised the students as useful and trainable is positive and can be used to encourage other employers to participate. The WBE focus on NCV Level 4 students should be noted, since students at this level have already acquired a fair amount of knowledge, are more mature and better equipped to contribute to the workplace during their placements.

Successes in the WBE support programme

The integration of WBE into teaching and learning and the college system more broadly was achieved at different levels in the different colleges and across their campuses. Some colleges, for example, are now looking at incorporating WBE into the campus calendar for all NCV students at Levels 3 and 4. On some campuses WBE has been scheduled into the academic timetable with one or even two weeks of the academic year dedicated to on-course workplace placements. In other cases campuses are keeping to the five-day WBE placement during college holiday periods.

There are also plans at some colleges to enable students to spend time on site visits to businesses or industries on a regular basis within the timetable (every Friday afternoon from 12 noon, for example). This kind of work exposure – a chance to observe how different workplaces operate – enables students to develop a level of familiarity with the working world which can make their transition to the world of work easier.

At other colleges WBE activities are dealt with only during the student induction process and through quarterly briefings before placements.

However, across the project colleges WBE is now generally recognised as an important component of teaching and learning and more colleges have a stronger commitment, together with the systems and capacity, to organise WBE placements for their students.

A significant positive spinoff of the WBE intervention is that it indirectly encouraged dialogue and information-sharing among campus staff and across different functions within each college. This has resulted in stronger internal relationships and a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the students and the college.

Placement numbers

While the reporting and verification of data and the consolidation of information between campus and college levels remain a challenge, JET developed a standardised template for the recording of WBE placements and worked with this at all the colleges. The colleges' reports at the end of 2014 indicated that most colleges achieved a significant increase in the number of students placed in WBE. In many cases placement numbers more than doubled from 2013 to 2014 and in some instances the numbers increased 100 fold. In total, across all the project colleges, there was an increase of close to 30% in the number of students placed in WBE.

The JET cycle of quarterly planning and training workshops followed by on-site support facilitated the programming of WBE placements during the March, July and October holiday periods. The colleges were able to learn from best practice and improve each time. They were encouraged to learn from each other and challenged to aim at placing 100% of their Level 4 NCV students in the workplace over the year. The target was broken down into the holiday periods, affording the colleges time to work towards achieving the target by preparing students through work readiness programmes and identifying and confirming suitable workplaces.

Although some colleges were faced with student unrest during 2014, which resulted in zero placements during some holiday periods, most of the colleges succeeded in placing more than 50% of students and some managed to place more than 90% of students over the year.

Going forward

The CIP's WBE intervention demonstrated that WBE needs to be brought into the classroom and recognised as part of the teaching and learning process. It also demonstrated that WBE needs to be integrated into mainstream college activities and supported by academic management, campus management and student support services.

Over the three years of the CIP, the WBE support programme built up considerable momentum to sustain the implementation of WBE in the project colleges. Going forward strong and consistent support from the DHET will be needed to strengthen WBE further and to institutionalise it in the project colleges as well as more broadly in TVET colleges nationally. □

BULLETIN BOARD

It's happening at The Education Hub

JET moved into its new premises at The Education Hub, 6 Blackwood Avenue in Parktown, at the beginning of April and we have settled in well.

As we intended when we purchased this building, we will be leasing some space to other non-governmental organisations and development agencies involved in the education sector. We welcomed BRIDGE at the beginning of June and the Zenex Foundation will be joining us soon.

BRIDGE is a non-profit organisation that drives collaboration and cooperation among education stakeholders to increase their collective impact in improving the education system. It facilitates the sharing of knowledge, working practice and resources within the education community to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the country.

The Zenex Foundation is an independent, non-profit donor organisation that focuses on supporting mathematics, science and language education in South African schools. It works with government and other education development agencies to co-design and implement programmes to effect systemic change and to improve education primarily in these subject areas.

Space is also leased to Indaba Travel, the agency that manages all JET's travel arrangements across the length and breadth of South Africa.

Acronyms – in this edition

CIP	Colleges Improvement Project
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EMIS	Education Management Information System
JET	JET Education Services
NCV	National Certificate (Vocational)
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SSS	Student Support Services
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WBE	Workplace-Based Experience
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

JET's Annual Meeting

We hosted our first function, our Annual Meeting, in our new premises on 25 June and Nathan Johnstone, Chairman of the Board, officially opened The Education Hub. Our 2014 Annual Report was presented and is available on our website. The 2015 Annual Meeting was also our first function to be addressed by James Keevy, our new CEO.

New to the JET team

JET has welcomed a number of new staff members over recent months.

- Andrew Paterson has joined JET in the position of Innovation and Research Specialist and will work across the different JET divisions.
- In the Education Planning and Research Division, Lwazi Morake has joined the team as an Intern and Raymond Matlala has been appointed as Research Officer.
- JET has also set up a unit to work specifically with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). Charlene Deacon has been appointed Education Project Director and Nkosinathi Chonco as Programme Manager in the new NECT unit.
- In the Finance Department, Octavia Seleke and Tsepo Duma have been appointed as Bookkeepers.
- Fundiswa Mossie was appointed Executive Personal Assistant to the CEO and COO in November last year.
- Zenobia Petersen joined the Monitoring and Evaluation Division as a Junior Researcher.

And promoted

Our warmest congratulations go to the following staff members who have been recently promoted.

- Jabulile Hlophe, formerly Project Bookkeeper, has been promoted to the position of Accountant in the Finance Department.
- Cynthia Moeng, formerly Project Manager, has been promoted to the position of Specialist Manager: Student Support Services, in the Youth and Community Development Division (YCD).
- Also in the YCD, Kedibone Boka, previously Acting Executive Manager, has been formally promoted to the position of Executive Manager of the division.

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