

NEW BUSINESS PLAN “TAKES OFF!”

2007 was the year in which SASCE adopted a new business plan that would see SASCE taking on a more proactive role in profiling co-operative education as a model that significantly contributes to graduate employability. In 2007 alone over 21000 students graduated from UoT's and CU's with the benefit of work experience through their work integrated learning programmes.

The new SASCE Business Plan adopted at the Forum Meeting at VUT in March 2007 sets out a new operational and implementation plan with 4 Strategic Goals. The new strategy will position SASCE as the national convener and authoritative voice on Co-operative Education. SASCE will market Co-operative Education nationally through a representative membership database. SASCE will promote and build capacity, linking curriculum and quality management for work integrated learning. SASCE will also promote research capacity toward a body of knowledge on co-operative education practice.

One of the negative impacts of the institutional mergers has been that the gains made by co-operative education in the Technikon era have been diluted and fragmented in the new UoT's and CU's. New senior management and at many of the merged institutions have had new challenges to contend with and this has shifted the focus away from the importance of co-operative education. This all at a time when skills development, graduate unemployment and job creation have become a top priority for the Government, in addressing the skills shortage and wanting to grow the economy.

SASCE's contribution over 21 years has kept the passion alive, and given our established partnerships with commerce and industry, the new business plan will ensure that co-operative education will increasingly become the strategy that will enhance and develop partnerships. These partnerships will ensure that the supply and demand side of graduate placements into the economy is quantitatively and qualitatively enhanced.

It is not always appreciated and recognized that co-operative education is alive and well in most of our institutions. While acknowledging some areas of decline due to lack of resources and no subsidized funding from the state, many programmes at institutions still deliver good practise models through hard work by commitment passionate staff.

This in turn enables our students to have a successful and meaningful work integrated learning experience as part of the undergraduate programme.

SASCE's Business plan will specifically showcase and promote these successful partnerships between institutions and industry at a national level to key stakeholders in Government and industry. At the same time SASCE, representing the national membership can identify gaps, areas of need and support to take co-operative education to a new level in line with the new qualification structures for HE and FET's.

At the SASCE Forum meeting in February 2008 in Bloemfontein, Convener and Task teams were constituted at all the member institutions. These Task Teams, consisting of academic staff, co-op practitioners, industry representatives and students, will form branches at a regional level. These branches will serve as an information supply conduit that will provide a wide range of news, events, student and industry success stories, employability trends and related research data that will be put out there at a national level. In this way we are sure that Government and Industry will increase their support, resources and funding on a par with other forms of teaching and learning pedagogies.

Another exciting development from the Forum meeting is that SASCE has agreed to set up a full time National Office with the appointment of a CEO and administrative support staff to ensure that SASCE can provide a continuous service to our membership. At the Forum Workshop the membership formulated key recommendations for improving the role of SASCE through the national office. These recommendations have been translated into objectives and deliverables, as part of the broader KPA's aligned to the goals of the new business plan.

So watch this space, the SASCE new structure is about to take off, hopefully by June 2008 when the new office should be established. SASCE will then be able to energize Co-operative education activity and priorities in our member institutions and in industry. This will ensure that co-op and work integrated learning continues to be the main service delivery driver that can bridge the gap between the demand and supply side of skills development and graduate employability.

Brian Forbes:
SASCE
Vice-President

