



Together, we make a difference

# BUSINESS TRUST

Number 2

## Learning Series

# Reskilling the Tourism and Hospitality Sector

**A Case Study of the Tourism Learnership Project**

The Business Trust Learning Series was established to enable the Business Trust to reflect on the lessons learnt from its work. While its primary purpose is to enlighten the Business Trust, it is hoped that the lessons captured in the series will be useful to others.

The Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) have agreed to help the Business Trust extract these lessons in a systematic way, and the Business Trust has agreed to make the material available for teaching purposes.

The case studies, written by Business Trust management and others close to the Business Trust, do not replace the formal external evaluations conducted as part of its extensive evaluation programme.

The Business Trust welcomes feedback on this publication. Please contact Lorna Pisanti at +27 11 612 2000 or send a fax to +27 11 612 2004. The Business Trust's email address is [info@btrust.org.za](mailto:info@btrust.org.za).

This case study was compiled by Carmel Marock for the Business Trust. It was edited by Helene Perold & Associates, Johannesburg, with design and typesetting by Manik Design, Johannesburg.

# Reskilling the Tourism and Hospitality Sector:

A Case Study of the Tourism  
Learnership Project

Compiled by Carmel Marock for the Business Trust  
September 2006

# Contents

<b>Prologue</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Business Trust and the genesis of the Tourism Learnership Project</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Project conceptualisation, strategic partnerships and governance</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The effect of the changing policy context for education and training on the Tourism Learnership Project</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Recruitment of employers and learners</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Procurement of service providers</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Selection of learners</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Key challenges during the implementation phase</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Outputs and impact of the project</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Lessons learnt during implementation of the project</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Postscript</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Definition of learning programmes</b>	<b>39</b>

# Prologue

Sandile<sup>1</sup>, a young man living with his mother and brother, considered himself fortunate to have a caring and supportive family. His brother had started a photographic business on the Durban beachfront and Sandile had no hesitation in volunteering his services to support him in the business. He believed it was his duty. It was 2001 and many changes had taken place on the beachfront. One of the most significant was that following the banishment of apartheid, the beaches were no longer segregated. Black people now moved around freely and there were no longer racial restrictions to owning and running a business in South Africa. However, even though opportunities were growing, it was still not easy for a young person to find employment. Employers wanted people with the right qualifications and relevant experience, which made it difficult to find work.

**It's about real people.**

Tourists from all over the world were flocking to the beachfront. The fruits of South Africa's democratic transition were becoming a reality. In the 1990s, expectations of a "post-apartheid dividend" were high and experts argued persuasively about the strong potential of the tourism sector. Today, it is clear that the dividends have indeed materialised: whereas less than a million foreigners visited South Africa per year before 1990, the figure had grown to 5.8 million tourists by 1999.

Sandile had many reasons to be optimistic as he walked along Durban's South Beach, canvassing clients for his brother's business. However, he also had many reasons to temper his optimism. He was unemployed. His many efforts at finding employment had not delivered any positive results. These thoughts must have weighed him down as he contemplated the latest misfortune to confront the family: his mother had been retrenched from her commercial cleaning job in the city. She had told him that the retrenchment was effected to create opportunities for younger people who were participating in a commercial cleaning learnership (although this was not an intention of the Skills Development Act). It would be difficult for the family to make do without

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandile, although not his real name, is based on a person that did in fact participate in the Tourism Learnership Project. The story, while adapted, is based on his experiences relating to the programme.

her income. Ironically, she had been retrenched to create opportunities for younger people. Clearly, she was a victim of re-distributing a limited pool of jobs to create opportunities for new entrants into the job market. “Wouldn’t it be better to create more jobs so that older people did not have to make way for younger people in the job market?” was the question on Sandile’s mind. As he walked along South Beach, an advertisement by the Starfish Bay Group for the Tourism Learnership Project caught Sandile’s eye. Someone was thinking about creating more jobs, someone was doing something about the situation! He wasted no time in sending in an application for a learnership, and was rewarded by being admitted into the Tourism Learnership Project. He commenced his learnership<sup>2</sup> towards the end of 2001.

---

<sup>2</sup> The terms used in this case study to describe learning and skills development programmes are explained in Appendix 1.

# Introduction

The Business Trust initiated the Tourism Learnership Project in 1998. Its objectives from 1999 to 2004 included the following: to register 5 000 unemployed young people for learnerships in the tourism sector; to see 6 000 people already employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors undertake skills programmes; to assist 3 000 people already employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors to achieve qualifications through learnership programmes; and to help 12 000 people employed in the tourism and hospitality industry receive training in hospitality standards. The primary aim of the Project was to improve significantly the supply of skilled people to the tourism and hospitality sectors, in response to projected labour market demands. The approach adopted for the Project rested on two key pillars: first, strategic partnerships were built with relevant role-players/agents for the implementation of the Project; and second, the skills development programmes used in the Project were developed in compliance with the emerging skills development legislation and policies. The motivation for applying the two pillars was to accelerate skills development in the sector, while improving the institutional capacity of the role-players to ensure sustainable improvement of skills development processes.

**The primary aim of the Tourism Learnership Project was to significantly improve the supply of skilled people to the tourism and hospitality sectors.**

## The Business Trust and the genesis of the Tourism Learnership Project

The country's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 stands out as one of the most remarkable events in recent world history. In strong contrast to the long duration of oppression, change came about swiftly, taking almost everybody by surprise. The necessary process of reconstruction and development was daunting. The policy environment was undergoing fundamental change. The demands for spending on social services and infrastructure were extremely high and far beyond the capacity of the economy. There was no doubt about what was needed: robust and sustainable economic growth and employment growth. The urgency and

clarity of these priorities are what prompted the emergence of the Business Trust – a partnership between the democratically elected government and leading business – to engage in key strategic initiatives that would promote and catalyse the country’s development goals.

**The Business Trust is not merely a conduit of project funding; it carefully selects areas for investment and projects to stimulate development, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and institutional capacity in the country.**

The Business Trust mobilises resources which can be applied strategically to key interventions, and which have the potential to impact the development goals of the country. Areas for investment and projects are carefully selected to ensure leveraging of and creation of enabling conditions for stimulating

development, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and institutional capacity in the country.

This approach is made possible by a clear mandate and a strong consciousness that the Business Trust is not merely a conduit of project funding. The Business Trust operates with a small secretariat. Instead of implementing projects itself, it seeks strategic partners for this purpose. The secretariat, therefore, focuses on “steering” projects as opposed to the actual implementation, which is the role of the strategic partner. As an interviewee at the Business Trust explains:

*We don’t get proposals ... we make decisions about where we want to work. It was found that tourism had a high potential for growth compared to other sectors, and so we agreed to work in tourism in support of job creation.*

There is a two-fold motivation for following this approach. First, the flexibility of using strategic partners allows the Business Trust to extend its scope of operation without having to create internal capacity that straddles the many sectors it works in. Second, and more importantly, the Business Trust’s mandate seeks to support the growth and strengthening of institutions in the public and private sectors. The approach of forging strategic partnerships allows the Business Trust to actively support the strengthening of the strategic partner in delivering on the outputs and objectives of the Project.

## Why tourism?

The Business Trust selected tourism as an economic sector in which it sought to promote growth and job creation through skills development. It identified tourism as an area with immense potential for growth, given the pent-up demand during the international isolation of apartheid South Africa. In addition to the novelty factor of the country, various compelling attributes – such as culture, political history, good infrastructure, kind weather, attractive and diverse flora, fauna, beaches and topography, and good value-for-money – combined to establish SA as a beguiling destination. Analysis undertaken by the Business Trust confirmed that the tourism industry had a high potential for growth, and produced more jobs per unit of economic output compared with other industries. Given the country's twin priorities of economic growth and job creation, these findings made tourism a particularly attractive option for South Africa to pursue.

Three inter-related interventions were formulated by the Business Trust to promote the tourism industry: the Tourism Marketing Project aimed at promoting the country as a tourist destination; the Tourism Enterprise Project intended to support enterprises in the Spatial Development Initiative areas and to nurture small tourism-related businesses around anchor projects; and the Tourism Training Project (now called the Tourism Learnership Project) aimed to accelerate skills development within the sector.

The rationale for having the three interventions was that skills development on its own would not lead to economic growth or job creation.<sup>3</sup> Business Trust documents highlight that there is a critical need for skilled staff with the right approach to sustain growth by ensuring that tourists have a positive experience. Of the three interventions, Tourism Marketing is arguably the most important because of its ability to stimulate demand. In this context, it was understood that a key risk of the Tourism Learnership Project was that if the international marketing campaign

**The country's twin priorities of economic growth and job creation made tourism a particularly attractive option for South Africa to pursue.**

---

<sup>3</sup> It has been noted that while these interventions were conceptualised as different parts of a strategy to support growth in the tourism sector, they were implemented as separate projects and are therefore documented as distinct programmes.

was unsuccessful and the growth of the tourism sector insignificant, then the industry would be unable to support unemployed learners participating in the learnership programme.

## Project conceptualisation, strategic partnerships and governance

In 1998 the Business Trust board approved an investment of R80-million in the Tourism Learnership Project. The Department of Labour contributed another R35-million to the Project, bringing the total endowment of the Project to R115-million for a five-year period. The next step was to formulate a clear set of output targets. This was done taking into account the imperative that there had to be a discernable impact on employment and the supply of appropriately skilled people available in the market, while falling within the means of the responsible institutions' projected capacity and the financial resources available.

The careful conceptualisation of the intervention and the clear formulation of outputs made it possible for the Business Trust to seek an appropriate strategic partner to implement the Tourism Learnership Project. In October

**The total investment in the Tourism Learnership Project was R115-million.**

1998, the Business Trust had requested the Hospitality Industries Training Board (HITB) to prepare a concept proposal for the implementation of a learnership programme in the tourism and hospitality sector, in support of the Business Trust's human-capacity development component of its strategy.<sup>5</sup> Following extensive interaction between the organisations, which included a due diligence process as well as interactions between the Business Trust and the Department of Labour, a contract was signed between the Hospitality Industries Training Board and the Business Trust on 21 January 2000. Although a five-year business plan was developed, the contract was entered into on an annual basis, in order, as Saguna Gordhan (Chief Operating Officer at the Business Trust) explains, that:

<sup>4</sup> Learnerships (a new education and training programme to support the development of occupational competence amongst employees and the unemployed) were legislated in the Skills Development Act, 1998, and piloted by the HITB in KwaZulu-Natal in 1998.

*... we can then as a board review and see where we are. Our approach is that we feel responsible for the success of the programme, as they are implementing it on our behalf.*

## Outputs identified for the project

The engagement with the Hospitality Industries Training Board proposal resulted in the Business Trust defining the following outputs (as reflected in the schedules attached to the contract):

- Learnership provision for 3 000 employees in the sector, skills programmes for 6 000 employees in the sector, and training for 12 000 employees in existing hospitality standards.
- The training of 5 000 unemployed people through learnerships, against the new national qualifications; it was anticipated that 3 000 of these learners would attain the full qualification and the other 2 000 would attain credits towards a qualification.

To create the necessary conditions for the achievement of the above, the following outputs were also determined for the Tourism Learnership Project:

- To develop all key national qualifications for the sector,
- To upgrade the capacity of training providers by training 1 000 practitioners, and training on-the-job instructors and assessors.<sup>5</sup>

Much effort was invested in the project conceptualisation and the formulation of outcomes, and in the engagement of an appropriate strategic partner to implement the Project. But how would the Project respond to the circumstances and further the ambitions of learners like Sandile? The aim was to create training opportunities that people could access. Sandile and other learners would acquire skills that would enable them to be employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors. They would be able to render services of high quality, thus improving the key ingredient of

**The aim was to create training opportunities that people could access.**

<sup>5</sup> This was part of a number of activities to support providers to be able to deliver against the new qualifications and standards.

success in the industry: the quality of experience afforded to patrons. The skills acquired were intended to improve the productivity and quality of service rendered by those trainees already in employment and – for trainees who were unemployed – to enhance their income-generating capacity and opportunities for employment.<sup>6</sup>

The Hospitality Industries Training Board was facing restructuring at the time of the launch of the Tourism Learnership Project. The restructuring was part of a wider transformation process brought about by the newly enacted skills-development legislation, in terms of which the Hospitality Industries Training Board was to be transformed into THETA (the Tourism, Hospitality and Support Education and Training Authority). The Business Trust and the Hospitality Industries Training Board agreed to establish separate operational and managerial systems within the emerging THETA for the purpose of implementing the Tourism Learnership Project. This was done to ensure dedicated focus and to achieve results. It also protected the Tourism Learnership Project from any adverse implications that might arise during the period of restructuring and transformation. Nevertheless, the Business Trust had no reason to doubt that the Hospitality Industries Training Board had functioning systems, including information technology and quality assurance systems in place, and it was anticipated that these could be successfully translated into the THETA environment and these systems would then assist with the implementation of the Tourism Learnership Project, while the Project, in turn, could augment the scope and efficacy of the systems.

**THETA came about as a result of the amalgamation of the Hospitality Industries Training Board and the Travel Education and Training Authority of South Africa.**

THETA was formally established on 20 March 2000 (through the merging of the Hospitality Industries Training Board and the Travel Education and Training Authority of SA). A project management committee was established within THETA to manage the Tourism Learnership Project and as a mechanism for reporting into the relevant THETA management processes. The Tourism Learnership Project was thus integrated into THETA, but as a separate administrative

---

<sup>6</sup> It is suggested that the design of the Tourism Learnership Project carried a built-in bias towards formal employment, making any substantial impact on self-employment unlikely. The Business Trust has confirmed, through interviews, that self-employment was not intended as an explicit output of the project.

entity. The Chief Executive Officer of the Hospitality Industries Training Board continued as project manager for the Tourism Learnership Project in his new role as chief executive of THETA.

A project steering committee, comprising the Business Trust and THETA stakeholders, was also established. The Business Trust succeeded in securing senior management from key companies and senior representatives of labour organisations to serve on the project steering committee. The Business Trust's Saguna Gordhan reports that the project steering committee engaged thoroughly with matters pertaining to the Tourism Learnership Project and provided substantive feedback. She also suggests that the THETA board was unable to grapple with the issues with the same level of attention, probably because it had a wide range of issues to address.

## The effect of the changing policy context for education and training on the Tourism Learnership Project

Even though the primary objective of the Tourism Learnership Project was to provide training, it could not commence with this until the new qualifications had been developed and approved. Consequently, the Project focused on the establishment of Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs)<sup>7</sup>, in order to develop necessary qualifications and standards. This was achieved mainly through voluntary contributions from the industry, estimated at about 50 000 person hours (as reported in the *Mid-Term Review of the Tourism Learnership Project*). Several independent consultants were also appointed to support the Standards Generating Bodies, assisting with the development of the standards and qualifications, and ensuring that the standards and qualifications were benchmarked against international standards.

---

<sup>7</sup> Standards Generating Bodies are independent structures that guide the development of unit standards and qualifications in different sectors. They are supported by Sector Education and Training Authorities.

The first phase of the qualification development took place in the primary functional areas in the tourism sector: reception, guiding, conservation, special events, sports and recreation, and car rental. These qualifications were submitted to SAQA (the South African Qualifications Authority) in October 2000, about nine months after the start of the Project.

The *Mid-Term Review of the Tourism Learnership Project* notes that the process of developing the qualifications and standards turned out to be extremely complex and took much longer to complete than originally anticipated. The *Review* comments that the standards-generating process was found to have a high developmental component and the industries were undergoing significant change, such as revision to the guiding legislation, which had to be accounted for in the development of standards and qualifications. Although these factors delayed implementation, it was noted (and this view was supported by interviewees) that the process would have taken much longer had it not been for the Tourism Learnership Project's active contribution to the establishment of the Standards Generating Bodies. In the end, the evaluation report highlights that there was general agreement that the qualifications developed were of a high standard and the process was generally seen to be a success.

The quarterly reports from THETA indicate that a further delaying factor, even after a substantial number of qualifications were generated, was that the

**The process of developing the qualifications and standards turned out to be extremely complex and took much longer to complete than originally anticipated.**

South African Qualification Authority's registration of the qualifications was far slower than expected. In fact, only after strategic intervention by the Business Trust at the highest level was SAQA induced to speed up the registration process. This was in part because the Tourism Learnership Project was testing new systems that had not yet begun to function. The

intervention from the Business Trust was seen as crucial, and interviewees from the Tourism Learnership Project suggest that any further delay may have dissipated the momentum required to retain the interest and investment mobilised through the Project.

With many of the qualifications developed<sup>8</sup>, attention could now be shifted to the implementation of the learnership programmes. One respondent observes that much more could have been done to implement other components of the programme, even while the standard-generating process was underway:

*... in the first year much emphasis was placed on the qualifications, but not enough on the other components of the work; too much linear stuff in a way, and it only really focused on other aspects of the Project after the first year ...*

Seven learnerships were submitted to the Department of Labour for registration in March 2001. In anticipation of a quick turnaround in the registration process, and because of a strong desire to accelerate implementation, the following press release was issued on 8 March 2001:

*Most South Africans have had cause to grumble about the levels of poor service experienced while holidaying somewhere in the country – indifferent, incompetent and ill-informed are just some of the words used to describe our tourism industry. The list is an indictment of our tourism service standards. Now, at last, a much-needed infusion is being prepared for the industry, in the form of a new training and development initiative, known as “the first 5 000” – the next phase of the Tourism Learnership Project.*

However, the apparent optimism regarding the Tourism Learnership Project was again subverted

by the shortcomings of the institutional mechanisms for skills development. This time, the shortcomings arose from the newness of the learnership registration system. The learnerships were registered on 8 June 2001, which was before the release of the regulations governing learnerships. These learnership regulations were, in fact, only released on 26 June 2001 – several months after THETA submitted the learnerships for registration. As Brian Whittaker (Chief Executive of the Business Trust), observes, this once again emphasises the extent to which the Tourism Learnership Project was trail blazing and, in fact, testing systems as they were being developed.

**Further delays arose from the newness of the learnership-registration process.**

---

<sup>8</sup> These were developed for occupations across the tourism sector. This was consistent with the decision taken by the Business Trust to ensure that the Tourism Learnership Project supported skills development for the tourism sector and not to limit this to a few sub-sectors.

## Recruitment of employers and learners

The delay in the registration of learnerships meant that the initial marketing was premature, as efforts to secure employers had to be deferred. A dinner was hosted on 2 August 2001 to mobilise employer participation in the Tourism Learnership Project and was addressed by Mohammed Valli Moosa, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism at the time. The dinner was followed by road shows that took place from August to October 2001, to explain the learnership process to employers.

The road shows revealed a new and somewhat unexpected challenge. In contrast with their strong commitment to, and participation in, the standards-generating processes, many employers were reluctant to participate in the learnership programmes. They expressed concern about the onerous paperwork and other responsibilities related to compliance and quality assurance, particularly in respect of the assessment requirements. Despite their commitment to training, employers were faced with a policy context that was still uncertain; while the regulations had been published, the Department of Labour was yet to provide national guidelines specifying critical issues pertaining to employment conditions. These guidelines were necessary to clarify the legal implications likely to accrue to employers who accepted learners.

Thus, while steady progress was being made with the registration of qualifications (12 qualifications had been registered by October 2001), much less progress was being made in securing employers for the Project. In response to this problem, the Tourism Learnership Project introduced a range of instruments to accelerate implementation of the learnerships. By October 2001, Learnership Implementation Agencies had been set up regionally and were responsible for the marketing of learnerships, recruitment of trainers, sourcing of employers and for making sure that learners were being looked after. As a result of these initiatives, some learners were registered in learnerships by the end of 2001. This process was given further impetus early in 2002 with the introduction of ten Skills Development Contract Brokers and Skills Development Facilitation Agencies. In terms of their agreement with the Tourism Learnership Project, the contract brokers and the facilitation agencies would be paid a commission for each learnership agreement registered with THETA.

The lack of employer take-up of the Tourism Learnership Project posed a serious threat to its success. Nevertheless, the strategies employed and instruments created to address this problem appear to have delivered growth in numbers. However, interviewees that were employed in the Tourism Learnership Project have cited a number of undesirable and unintended outcomes.

The strong emphasis on numerical targets, which were linked to financial reward and performance assessment, led to a practice of “hard sell” in which the benefits to employers may have been overplayed, while employers’ responsibilities and the systems they needed were underplayed. Interviewees from the Tourism Learnership Project, as well as the evaluation report<sup>9</sup>, suggest that this resulted in many employers taking on unskilled and unemployed labour, ostensibly with the aim of training them, but in reality because it represented an opportunity to decrease labour costs in the firm.

However, an interviewee who was employed in the Tourism Learnership Project suggests that, in some cases, workplaces took on more learners than they had the capacity to effectively supervise or mentor. Some employers reportedly did this as part of their social responsibility ethos because they felt pressure from THETA to take on high numbers of learners. One notable example, cited by an interviewee, is the case of a small hotel in Durban, which took on 250 learners. The extremely high ratio of learners to experienced staff at this hotel made it difficult for the learners to be given adequate support. However, the interviewee claimed that this was not due to a lack of commitment on the part of the hotel, as evidenced by the fact that the hotel often ended up bankrolling learnership costs because THETA systems for payment had virtually collapsed.

**The emphasis on numerical targets led to a practice of ‘hard sell’ to employers, which led to a number of unintended and undesirable outcomes.**

It was also suggested that the recruitment of learners was not linked to demand in the regional labour market. The evaluation report suggests that the method of selecting providers/employers resulted in lower employment absorption, as the provider-led emphasis at times failed to consider labour

---

<sup>9</sup> All reference to the evaluation report in the text relates to the *Tourism Learnership Project Phase Two Evaluation Report* (March 2005).

market demand. Thus while all the learnerships did involve employers, as per the requirements of a learnership, the evaluation report states that this led to low rates of placement for learners across learnerships and across provinces, and there appears to have been a disproportionately high number of learners in KwaZulu-Natal when compared with the number of jobs available in the sector in the province.

While some cases of learner placement in workplaces were unsatisfactory, there appears to have been some positive examples. The example of Storms River Adventures, cited in the evaluation report, highlights positive results achieved for both learners and the workplace. The report states that they ran an excellent learnership placement that reached into local communities, making

a real difference to the communities in terms of skills development. An interviewee that was employed within the Tourism Learnership Project commented that Storms River Adventures had a realistic appreciation of the hard work that would be required, and of how much they could give without jeopardising normal operations. In this way, they were able to avoid a situation where the demands of the learnership were competing with

**The method of selecting providers/ employers resulted in lower employment absorption, as the provider-led model failed to take labour-market demand into account.**

operational demands. The interviewee indicates that the employer built the learnership into its operational and business model by purposefully using the learnership to develop skilled individuals that could be employed in the business. It was suggested that some of the key issues that made this case a success was the passion of the owners for their area of operation; an understanding of the role and importance of skills development in their growth plan; and their passion and regard for the community in which they operate.

The Tourism Learnership Project was introduced to improve skills and skills development processes in the tourism industry. Thus far, we have reported that the Business Trust formed a partnership with THETA to provide skills development to learners. It was the advertisement by the Starfish Bay Group that initiated young Sandile into the Tourism Learnership Project. We have reported on five major role-players in the Tourism Learnership Project processes, namely, the Business Trust, THETA, learners, providers (the Learnership Implementation Agencies) and employers. However, it is useful to focus on how these providers and learners were selected, to understand the possible implications on the Tourism Learnership Project.

## Procurement of service providers

Efforts to secure appropriate providers for the Project took place in parallel with the recruitment of employers. An open and transparent process was adopted for the procurement of providers to promote fairness and competition. The procurement process was a key part of efforts to promote good governance and clean administration. However, interviewees who were employed in the Project claim that, in practice, the providers who were selected tended to be part of an established network, sometimes referred to as an “old boys club”. Other interviewees suggest that this might have been a result of the requirement for accreditation, and the fact that the providers who were accredited were those who had historically been providing competency-based training under the Hospitality Industries Training Board.

## Selection of learners

In terms of the original conceptualisation, it was suggested that the Department of Labour would assist with the recruitment of learners, using their existing selection tools. However, in practice, reports suggest that employers or providers recruited the learners, using a range of different processes. The learner recruitment process appeared, in many instances, to lack sufficient rigour and standardisation. This gave rise to a situation where the learners entering the programme had widely different competencies and skills. More than two-thirds of the learners admitted to the programme were unemployed learners. For them, the Tourism Learnership Project represented their first real induction into the world of work. Furthermore, for the majority of the employed learners, the Project represented their first formal on-the-job learning programme. The wide variation in competencies and skills of learners before the start of the training had important implications for the curriculum. In many instances, basic foundational and learning skills, which would ordinarily be assumed to have been acquired before taking up a learnership, had to be included in the curriculum.

**The learner-recruitment process appeared to lack sufficient rigour and standardisation, and the learners entering the programme had widely different competencies and skills.**

**The Project had managed to remove most of the blockages, making it possible to commence with the learnerships.**

In particular, the need to develop literacy and numeracy skills within the learnership proved to be a challenge, as the additional time required had not been planned for in the learnership design and budget. In the case of unemployed

learners, the development of values and orientations compatible with the world of work had to be included in the curriculum.

The report has focused on the genesis and preparation phases of the Project. Many challenges, some of which could not have been anticipated, had to be navigated during these phases. Nevertheless, the Project had managed to remove most of the blockages, making it possible to commence with the learnerships. The implementation phase, which we now turn to, tested the system in other ways and various new operational challenges emerged.

## Key challenges during the implementation phase

The implementation period coincided with several management changes within the Project and in THETA. Within two years of its introduction, the manager of the Tourism Learnership Project left abruptly. The deputy was promoted to manager, but worked for just over a year in this capacity before leaving as well. During this period, a number of concerns were uncovered through an extensive quality management process. A new manager was appointed and tasked with ensuring that the issues that had been identified were addressed in the final stages of the project. The manager was also responsible for closing the project in a manner that ensured that the achievements were properly documented, and for handing it over to THETA effectively.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Note that there were a number of irregularities discovered pertaining to providers not fulfilling their obligations, with the result that one of the larger contracts was ultimately terminated, but not before causing tension within the project team.

Further operational challenges relate to the capacity problems faced by providers. In the absence of materials, they struggled to implement learning programmes that met the new qualifications and standards. In some instances, the implementation was further confounded by an apparent lack of understanding and/or reluctance to comply with the new policy frameworks.

**In the absence of learning materials, providers struggled to implement learning programmes that met the new qualifications and standards.**

The following statement by a provider illustrates how learnerships were erroneously perceived to be separate and a diversion from their normal training activities:

*They (training materials) should come from the 'shelf' and not in the process of development. The learnership was time-consuming; 60 per cent of our time was spent on it and we forgot about our own training.*

This quote raises questions on whether providers had bought into the new delivery model or simply saw it as an additional revenue stream outside of their actual training work. Further, it could be argued that as accredited providers, they should have had the ability to develop training materials. Nevertheless, the evaluation report observes that, given the newness of the qualifications and approach, the availability of materials was seen as an important support to enable providers to deliver within the new framework. This was an issue anticipated by the Project, and the Victoria University of Technology (TAFE Division) was appointed as early as 2001 to develop learning materials. However, interviewees employed in the Tourism Learnership Project report that the appointment of providers and their quality of work was contentious. Interviewees claim that the materials produced required substantial re-working, at additional cost, to make them relevant to the South African context. The result was that the materials were available much later than expected. The evaluation report claims the Tourism Learnership Project was directed by THETA to use this provider for material development despite its stated reservations, but the reasons for this selection process were not made explicit.

In 2002, about half way through the implementation of the learnership, THETA released a more detailed implementation guide for workplaces. The evaluation report suggests that this reflected poor planning on the part of THETA. However, this may have been indicative of the complexity associated with implementing large-scale learnerships in an uncertain policy environment. As indicated previously, the Department of Labour had not yet developed its guidelines and wanted sectoral guidelines to be consistent with the national guidelines. Further, the Department of Labour and the South African Qualification Authority were insistent that the learnerships marked a definite change in the way that things were done (as compared with the old apprenticeship system and the previous modular-based training used by the Hospitality Industries Training Board). Consequently, THETA had no option but to develop new systems. This represented a significant change for the Project, as it was originally assumed that the existing systems would support the implementation of the learnerships.

Further, in addition to management changes within the Tourism Learnership Project, it appears that THETA was also beset by other leadership problems. A report to the Business Trust, dated 13 June 2002, states that the THETA CEO had been suspended and had consequently left the organisation. A new CEO was subsequently appointed, but soon fell into dispute with the organisation and also left. In response to “the continued absence of administrative procedures, quality assurance systems and on-going internal personnel disputes”, the Business Trust suspended the flow of funding to the Project for four months in 2003. A new acting CEO was appointed, and by March 2004, after 10 months, was appointed as CEO.

## Outputs and impact of the project

The final report on the *Verification of the Achievements of the Tourism Learnership Project* presented to THETA in December 2004, provided the following figures pertaining to the outputs achieved by the Tourism Learnership Project:

- 30 qualifications were registered with SAQA by April 2003;

- 528 people undertook practitioner training and 942 people undertook assessment skills training;
- More than 21 000 employees were assessed as competent against the Hospitality Unit Standards;
- A total of 6 147 employees completed skills programmes against unit standards that were generated through the Tourism Learnership Project;
- 2 983 employees were registered on learnerships and 1 418 people had qualified at the time of the audit;
- 5 934 unemployed learners were registered on learnerships, 3 602 learners had completed these learnerships, and of these 1 723 learners had terminated their learnership agreements at the time of the audit.

In terms of the broader impact of the Project, the members of the Review Panel generally agree that the Business Trust provided the necessary influence to put tourism on the national agenda (Ebony Consulting International and Tourism Enterprise 2002). By focusing on three projects in key areas of the industry, the Business Trust had ensured that the preconditions for success were in place, and that these would have positive “spin-offs” on the other aspects of the industry.

In terms of the impact of the learning programmes, the following was found (note that these findings are based on a limited sample and may not be fully representative):

- Thirty per cent of the people who were already employed in the industry attained a vertical promotion after completion of the learnership, and 66 per cent of these learners received a wage increase after completing the learnership.
- Sixty per cent of the learners who had been unemployed had attained some form of employment after completing the learnership. However, of the sample interviewed, 71 per cent of these learners were no longer employed at the time of the evaluation. Disturbingly while this is in part attributed to the cyclical nature of the industry, 80 per cent of these learners stated that their dismissals were linked to allegations of theft.

- The research did not identify significant numbers of people who have started their own business or who are currently doing volunteer work. However, this was not a primary objective of the Project, and support for small business development does not appear to have been provided to learners in the Tourism Learnership Project.

## Lessons learnt during implementation of the project

*Lesson 1: The transition the strategic partner was undergoing proved more complex than anticipated and exposed institutional capability shortcomings that raised important challenges for implementation.*

Skills development in South Africa had undergone far-reaching reform. However, while much progress had been achieved in establishing the required frameworks in policy and law, the maturation and coherent functioning of the complex set of institutions required to give effect to the policy and law was yet to be achieved. Compounding this situation, the institution selected as the strategic partner to the Business Trust for the purpose of the Project, the Hospitality Industries Training Board, was in the process of fundamental transformation to THETA.

It was widely held that the Hospitality Industries Training Board was a well-run enterprise that had established business processes and systems with proven operational effectiveness. This view inspired confidence in the Board to deliver effectively on its mandate in the Project. However, the transition, coupled with the need to adjust to a new and evolving statutory and policy environment, exposed serious shortcomings in the institutional capability and human resources of THETA. The approach of creating a “ring-fenced” capability for management of the Tourism Learnership Project sought to mitigate the impact of institutional weaknesses within THETA.

While this may have neutralised potential negative consequences arising from the institutional shortcomings, it created other problems. On one level, the

Tourism Learnership Project part of THETA was perceived as “privileged” by certain people within THETA. Worse still, some key interviewees in this study suggest that the “ring-fenced” component of the Project was used as a convenient repository for people who were less effective or not wanted in THETA. While Business Trust management reports that a due diligence of the Hospitality Industries Training Board was undertaken, the full impact the transformation of the structure and the requirements of the Department of Labour and the South African Qualification Authority would have on these systems, appear to have been underestimated.

***Lesson 2: A dynamic policy environment demands a flexible definition of scope (what the Project does and gets involved in) and a pragmatic approach to project implementation.***

The transition process necessitated the establishment of new governance structures, institutional structures and mechanisms, and business processes in response to a new legislative mandate. To embark on an institutional development process within a context that is as dynamic as the one described above, is to multiply exponentially the attendant levels of complexity and difficulty. It is therefore not surprising that the Business Trust had to intervene at various points, and had to create conditions for learnerships and institutional governance – tasks that would not ordinarily have required direct intervention in a project of this nature. In terms of the Business Trust’s developmental mission, the option of waiting until conditions were optimally in place was not tenable. Nevertheless, this approach allowed the Business Trust to actively contribute to the establishment and development of institutions and systems that have had a profound impact on skills development in the tourism sector.

***Lesson 3: Governance structures work better when members have appropriate expertise and are focused on the oversight and stewardship of the organisation for which the governance structure was established, rather than focused on representing the interests of the organisation they originate from.***

The THETA board was the main governance instrument of the Tourism Learnership Project. In many respects, the board reflected the structural shortcomings that have plagued governance structures in almost all SETAs (sector education and training authorities). This was recognised in the NSDS II which explicitly creates opportunities for the development of skills among

**“Some board members failed to prepare adequately for meetings and did not thoroughly scrutinise reports from management.”**

the members of the SETA boards. More recently, a report of the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA)<sup>11</sup> provides a case study of three SETAs. The report highlights the extent to which boards often become sites of negotiation on wider stakeholder interests, rather than bodies that play a strong governance role and focus on

direct skills planning. This report, as well as the learning from the TLP, suggest that the governance issues pertain to capacity as well as structural issues. The board membership criteria explicitly emphasise stakeholder representation, but ensuring the competence of board members to discharge their governance responsibilities rarely receives the attention it deserves. In the instance of THETA, the evaluation report notes that some board members failed to prepare adequately for board meetings and did not thoroughly scrutinise reports from management. As a result, implementation challenges were not identified early enough. Further, interviewees suggest that many of the representatives were removed from the industry they purported to represent, claiming this compounded the leadership challenges within the board.

To complement the role of the board, the Business Trust required the creation of a project steering committee. The committee was part of THETA, but was not part of the formal management structure. It comprised senior leaders in industry, labour representatives and individuals with specific and deep understanding of the requirements of the industry. In contrast with the board, which has a very broad mandate, the project steering committee was established to guide the project, focusing on the details of its implementation. This strategy proved to be more effective in monitoring progress and troubleshooting implementation challenges than had been the case with the THETA board.

<sup>11</sup> The Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), established by and reporting to the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA) was formally launched in 2006.

***Lesson 4: While results-based planning is useful, its power is considerably enhanced and risks minimised where it includes target indicators on important outputs (including quality indicators), and where it is applied in a manner that is sensitive to the implementation context.***

The Business Trust adopted a results-based methodology for the Tourism Learnership Project. The primary motivation for this methodology was that if the specified outputs expected in the Project were clear, then all parties would understand what was expected of them, which would facilitate monitoring and accountability. This approach has won widespread support across the world, especially in countries like Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and many donor agencies have adopted this approach to improve the credibility of planning, accountability, and monitoring and evaluation. However, the growing body of literature on the shortcomings of New Public Management (which results-based planning is derived from) claims that the application of the methodology has produced varying results in different contexts.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that the application of the methodology in the Tourism Learnership Project may have run into significant problems. The dynamic and evolving nature of the context described earlier; the institutional weaknesses of the key strategic partner; the fact that key institutional mechanisms required for implementation of the new training frameworks, such as registration of qualifications and accreditation of providers were not in place; and the weaknesses in the provider market, all combined to create a context that was unpredictable. This level of unpredictability made it difficult to determine numerical outputs, in terms of the learner numbers to be trained, with any accuracy.

The emphasis on achieving the specified numerical targets resulted in an implementation culture that was preoccupied with achieving the numbers – at the expense of quality, sustainability and relevance.

Some interviewees identified the “chasing of numbers” as a strong perverse incentive in the Project, which resulted in a “hard-sell” approach to employers and little scrutiny of whether the numbers of learners recruited related to the

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Frederickson and Johnston (1999), Hood (1991), Maor (1999) and Pollit and Bouchaert (2000).

potential demand for employment in a geographic area. Questions pertaining to whether an institution had the capacity to manage such large numbers of learners were also ignored, resulting in unrealistically high learner-staff ratios within workplaces.

A key lesson arising from this situation is that numerically specified outputs need to be more comprehensive, focusing on a few key dimensions of the desired outputs, if they are to be effective. Furthermore, a level of

**The emphasis on achieving the specified numerical targets resulted in an implementation culture that was preoccupied with achieving the numbers – at the expense of quality, sustainability and relevance.**

flexibility is necessary regarding adherence to the specified outputs, especially in environments that are less predictable. The tension between numbers and targets, and quality and relevance, is reflected in the way SETAs are governed, and even more so in the service level agreements between the Department of Labour and SETAs, which are largely determined by the overarching targets within the National Skills Development Strategy, rather than by what is needed

in the relevant industry. An important lesson in the context of the Tourism Learnership Project is that while results-based planning is useful, its power is considerably enhanced and risks minimised if it includes target indicators on important outputs (including quality indicators) and if it is applied in a manner that is sensitive to the implementation and learner context.

***Lesson 5: Recognition of the utility of training, on the part of employers, emerged as a powerful predictor of success in the Project.***

Recognition of the utility of training, on the part of employers, emerged as a powerful predictor of success in the Project. However, not all the employers involved in the Project demonstrated this recognition. While this is unfortunate, it is not surprising in view of the dynamic nature of parts of the tourism sector. The recognition of the utility of training requires a long-term vision and relies on an appreciation of the reciprocal influence between a strong tourism sector and the individual enterprises that constitute it. Training makes enterprises more competitive, which in turn grows the tourism sector and increases demand for the tourism products generated by individual enterprises. The relationship between training and impact-

on-performance needs to be emphasised in order to change employers' perceptions of the utility of training. Showcasing enterprises that use training to support increased productivity and/or growth will encourage employers to become involved in skills development in a meaningful way.

*Lesson 6: The attributes that individual learners bring to the training are the most powerful predictors of a successful outcome. Learner attributes relating to commitment, orientation and prior skills contribute to the successful completion of training programmes, as well as to the outcomes of training.*

Another important factor is the particular requirements of unemployed learners. By explicitly targeting unemployed people for recruitment into the Tourism Learnership Project, the Project sought to make a positive impact on employment levels in the country. In addition, the model formulated for the Tourism Learnership Project strongly emphasised competencies and an orientation relevant to seeking salaried employment within the tourism sector.

General exposure to the tourism environment increases trainees' understanding of the dynamics and demands of the sector and the world of work. The extent that the programme was able to balance the technical skills with the need for increased literacy and numeracy skills has been questioned, and the manner in which a balance can be found in addressing these skills remains a challenge. It is also unclear whether sufficient attention was paid in the learning programme to developing the values and ethics required to contribute effectively in the workplace.

The evaluation report notes that roughly 10 per cent of learners who completed the learnership were unemployed after declining work because the wages offered were too low. The evaluation report also indicates that a high proportion of learners who managed to gain employment were subsequently "let go" because of disputes related to theft or attitude in the workplace. This disturbing finding warrants careful analysis and appropriate responses. One such response might be a stronger focus in the curriculum on values and ethics pertaining to the world of work.

**A high proportion of learners who managed to gain employment were subsequently 'let go' because of disputes relating to theft or attitude in the workplace.**

Furthermore, workplace culture in South Africa has been shaped by numerous historical and current factors. For many of the learners who participated in the Tourism Learnership Project, this workplace culture was foreign and sometimes alienating. The evaluation findings suggest that this had a significant impact on the success and impact of training. Such cultural factors are subtle, difficult to define and challenging to address. For some learners, compliance with certain issues that are critical in a work environment, such as punctuality and time-on-task, proved difficult. Basic workplace expectations need to be addressed when training people who have little or no prior work experience.

Linguistic and cultural issues also present challenges. These matters require careful consideration and need to be addressed through training. It is critically important that the approach adopted is based on the recognition that both the learner and the employer should be the subject of training, reciprocal sensitisation and reciprocal adaptation. The emphasis on the development of these values, alongside the development of occupational skills (including the development of foundational skills, where necessary), raises the question of whether the one-year duration of the typical learnerships is sufficient. The scope of what needs to be achieved provides a compelling reason for extending the duration of certain learnerships to beyond a year and this needs to be considered in the setting of targets and the funding modalities.

High levels of unemployment and difficulties encountered by new job seekers are prominent realities in the country. Faced with this situation, some learners tend to access learnerships based on what is available or what programme they are accepted into, even if it is in a vocational area that they are not keen on. The evaluation report states that 88 per cent of the learners would have undertaken another learnership had they been given the chance (although when they were probed further, this finding was found to reflect learners' aspirations to study at a higher education institution).

Other learners have accessed more than one learnership, apparently in the hope of boosting their chances of finding a job. In the case of the Tourism Learnership Project, about 10 per cent of learners were concurrently

involved in another learnership or training programme. The reasons for this situation should be addressed with prospective learners during the recruitment process.

**Linguistic and cultural issues also present challenges; they require careful consideration and need to be addressed through training.**

There is evidence that the attributes of individual learners are the most powerful predictors of a successful outcome. Commitment, orientation and prior skills contribute to the successful completion of training, as well as to achieving the outcomes of training (such as whether or not the learner obtained and sustained employment after completing the learnership).

*Lesson 7: Formal qualifications are necessary but not sufficient for securing sustainable employment.*

Significantly, unemployed learners recruited into the Tourism Learnership Project had, on average, more post-matriculation formal qualifications than their employed counterparts. This supports the view that formal qualifications on their own are not enough to secure sustainable employment, and provides validation of the learnership model. A process to match the compatibility of the programme with the attributes of potential learners should, however, be incorporated into the recruitment process.

*Lesson 8: Using learnership programmes to increase the number of learners who successfully pursue self-employment raises a number of complex challenges.*

The challenges of self-employment demand a whole different set of attributes, skills and orientations that require explicit attention in order to make a discernable impact on a learner's ability to create and exploit self-employment opportunities. The complexity of designing a project that could contribute to self-employment outcomes would have compounded the already immense challenges confronted in the Tourism Learnership Project. The prudent direction and clarity of focus adopted in the conceptualisation of the Project was evidently the best option to follow in the circumstances. Learnership programmes with an objective of self-employment, run in other sectors, confirm the complexities involved, and highlight the factors that need to be considered if any success is to be achieved.

For example, the FIETA Shinsta (Singizi 2005) project highlights that, in order to succeed, the following factors need to be addressed: the selection process must ensure that learners have previous work experience; individuals require sufficient skills to make running an SMME viable (therefore they either need to enter the programme with the relevant skills or the programme needs to run for a longer duration); learners must have certain entrepreneurial qualities and must make a conscious choice to embrace entrepreneurship; and there must be strong after-care support built into the programme for a minimum of two years. These factors highlight the additional difficulties that would have been experienced if self-employment had been built into the Tourism Learnership Project model.

However, the possibility of linking the Tourism Learnership Project with other Business Trust interventions, particularly the Tourism Enterprise Project, may have created pathways that would have supported increased levels of success in enabling the Tourism Learnership Project to directly support

**Additional difficulties would have been experienced if self-employment had been built into the Tourism Learnership Project model.**

small business development (including enabling learners that complete the learnerships to seek employment in an SMME that is supported by the Tourism Enterprise Project). This could have improved the likelihood of employment and provided an injection of skills into these SMMEs.

*Lesson 9: The rapidly burgeoning training market, coupled with significant institutional weaknesses in areas of procurement and quality assurance, has contributed to the emergence of a number of training providers of dubious quality.*

The vocational training environment was comprehensively transformed in a short time. A key objective of this transformation was to improve the impact of skills development programmes on economic outcomes by improving the relevance of education and training. A further objective was to redress the demographic distortions of training under apartheid. The levels of financial resources available for training increased manifold, on the back of years of under-investment in training, in a determined effort to address the huge training backlogs accumulated during years of apartheid.

While increased availability of funding led to a rapid increase in the demand for training, the supply of training provision capacity lagged behind the levels required. The resulting situation was one of “too much money chasing too few goods”. The rapidly burgeoning training market, coupled with significant institutional weaknesses in areas of procurement and quality assurance, saw many providers of dubious quality enter the market. The provider market has significant shortcomings, and a greater level of competition and effective benchmarking is necessary to ensure the effective functioning of the market. Further, the need to grapple with the complexities of building quality providers is paramount to the success of skills development initiatives.

## Conclusion

High levels of fluidity and dynamism were the defining features of the context within which the Business Trust sought to implement the Tourism Learnership Project. The tourism sector had been undergoing rapid growth, fuelled by pent-up demand that was suddenly released with the demise of apartheid. The huge injection of tourism spending created strong supply-side pressures, which saw many new players entering the market. Typically, supply-side constraints characteristic of a rapidly growing and/or new market, were evident: a relatively large proportion of enterprises emerged with short or non-existent track-records, and the availability of managers and the depth and breadth of their experience were in short supply. In essence, the Business Trust was seeking to make a positive impact on supply-side measures (by increasing the number of skilled personnel available to the industry and improving levels of productivity of personnel within the industry, resulting in improved efficiency and quality of the tourism experience).

The outcome of this Project was contingent on a number of key variables operating within the implementation context, and exerting significant influence on the outcomes. This case study has focused on how the Business Trust’s institutional objectives, driven by vision and mission, converged with a dynamic and unpredictable context in the implementation of the Tourism Learnership Project. The Tourism Learnership Project must be measured against its stated objectives and outputs. The findings show that it has been successful in terms of these objectives. However, the process of

implementation, especially regarding how various challenges were addressed and the way in which difficult processes were transacted, has provided valuable lessons and insight into the skills development environment of the tourism and hospitality sector.

## Epilogue

Sandile completed the Tourism Learnership Programme successfully. Reflecting on his experience four years after he commenced his learnership, Sandile reports that the learnership was often challenging; the work demanding; and having to use English, which he did not speak very well, was difficult. However, he indicates that his English improved significantly and he acquired many important skills through the learnership. His most abiding lesson was that it is “up to each individual to get the most out of the learnership”.

Sandile did not end up working in the hospitality industry, opting instead to follow his brother’s lead and start a beachfront photography venture. He registered a close corporation to retail Kodak products and obtained a permit to take photographs of tourists on the beachfront. His new wife sells photographic products while he takes the pictures.

Unlike many of the learners who entered the Tourism Learnership Project, Sandile entered the programme with an understanding of entrepreneurial skills. His family background was one in which these skills had been encouraged and supported, and this gave Sandile a basis on which to pursue entrepreneurship rather than seeking full-time employment. Sandile believes that the skills he acquired through the learnership were invaluable to his career as a small business entrepreneur:

*Prior to the learnership I did not have any skills. Even though I am not working in a kitchen, the principles of dealing with customers are the same. I have to be customer-oriented and treat my customers well. The learnership has changed my life. Not only do I have my own business, but I also met my wife at training. She was on the fast food learnership programme. We now have a daughter.*

## Postscript

On 16 October 2006 the Tourism Learnership Project case study was discussed at a round table meeting convened by the Business Trust at the Gordon Institute for Business Science and attended by critical readers who had commented on the draft. Participants were drawn from the following sectors: government, business, policy research, tourism, civil society, education, SETAs, training and the press. Nine themes emerged in the discussion. They amplify the lessons learnt through the Tourism Learnership Project experience and signal a number of issues that will require attention in the complex area of skills development. The themes emerging from the round table discussion are summarised below.

### Supply-driven system

Questions were raised as to what extent the case study suggests that skills development initiatives are supply-led. Originally the 1996 draft framework that was amended through Nedlac was strongly critical of a supply-led strategy: it was felt that the new approach to skills development had to be demand-led and had to be actively driven by labour market policy. The case study highlights, however, that during the period in which the Project was operating, a shift had taken place towards a supply side strategy.

Round table participants commented that the supply and demand question in skills development is more dynamic than originally conceived and indicated that the Tourism Learnership Project case study helps explore this dynamic. In discussion, a tension between two approaches was identified: the first approach tries to predict demand for skills tightly and accurately; the second emphasises training that can broadly supply a sector in which there is likely to be growth.

Another question was raised about why there has been a shift away from skills development for employed workers towards unemployed people, and it was noted that this has had an impact on the incentive for employers to be involved in the skills development system. It was suggested that unemployment is a public interest matter and that while there may be a role for the private sector in reducing unemployment, this cannot be the primary role of employers in supporting skills development.

## Selection processes

The case study notes that learners jump from one learnership to another, and this prompted round table participants to reflect on whether learners understand what they are letting themselves in for: are they clear about the content, process and outcomes of various learnership programmes?

It was suggested that considerable emphasis should be placed on proper selection procedures, which should include some assessment of whether prospective learners are interested in the field in which the learnership is being implemented. It was also emphasised that there needs to be more careful selection of talent in the recruitment of learners since picking the right people for training increases the chance of success.

## Preparing for employment

It was noted that the case study highlights the point made in the Project evaluation that, once employed, some learners were fired because they stole from their employers. The case study also points out that some learners were involved in more than one learnership at a time. Round table participants suggested that this issue relates to the need for improved selection processes. It was argued that there is a need for learnerships to support the development of work ethics and do more to inculcate an understanding of the workplace amongst learners.

## Preparing for self-employment

The case study indicates that the focus of the Project was on access to employment in the industry, not on preparing individuals for self-employment. Although there were some Tourism Learnership Project learners who did start an SMME, round table participants agreed that if a learning programme wishes to prepare learners for self-employment after the programme, then learners need to be selected in terms of their potential for self-employment as well as their capacity to engage with the learning programme. Ideally learners should have sufficient learning abilities, foundational skills, and the relevant attributes and values for self-employment. It was further emphasised that people need to have a particular level of skill in order for self-employment to be feasible, but round table participants provided a number of examples of learners who were already in SMMEs and were able to develop skills to support these small businesses.

## Complexities of promoting learning in the workplace

The case study raises a number of difficulties pertaining to integrating learners into the workplace and these were discussed at length. It was noted that employers are concerned about committing themselves to learnerships in the absence of clear guidelines on requirements for conditions of employment, insurance, etc. This highlights the extent to which uncertainty reduces the likelihood of employers engaging with the skills development strategy. There was also a concern raised that employers sometimes elect not to train people in cases where qualifications are linked to job grading since there is a perception (among employers) that this increases the mobility of the employee and could work to the detriment of the employer.

Suggestions were made as to how the workplace learning component could be improved:

- There should be clearly articulated standards for workplace learning which facilitate an integration of key performance areas (job descriptions) with key performance indicators.
- The scheduling of training needs to take into account the requirements of the workplace in terms of when it is possible to release individuals and how this can best be done in a manner that supports learning as well as workplace productivity. It was stated that there is a need for flexibility in the work environment so the work continues and learners are integrated into the workplace.
- It should be recognised that workplaces do not always have sufficient time to support the learning process and so there must be an opportunity for learners to acquire practical learning prior to entering the workplace. (In the case of self-employment the emphasis was placed on the importance of an incubator programme.) These practical skills can then be further developed in the workplace under the guidance of a supervisor.
- Further, learners need to be prepared for the workplace component of their learnership and should not go into the workplace thinking of themselves as 'learners'. They need to be ready to contribute to workplace outcomes. It was also emphasised that learners need the skills to be able to navigate a complex work environment.

- Workplaces should be prepared (through induction) to take on certain responsibilities in respect of learners; this includes understanding the role of the supervisor and considering how learners can receive coaching and support in this context.
- It was also stated that an important lesson learnt from the Tourism Learnership Project was that employers should only take on learners in terms of their capacity to support these learners. It was recommended that there should be ratios in place with regards to the number of full-time employees to learners.
- There is a need to locate the skills legislation as an integral component of other legislation that is intended to transform the workplace (such as employment equity).

A final point was made that the climate is right for increased workplace learning as the balance scorecards will serve to encourage workplaces to increase their support for training and development. These opportunities should be used well so as to increase the support for learning in the workplace.

Linked to this, a question was raised pertaining to the extent that the Project became supply-led: Were there more incentives in the Tourism Learnership Project for the learning providers to achieve the targets set by the Project than there were for the employers to achieve these targets? This issue was not concluded and is one that requires further consideration.

## Duration of the learnership

Individuals suggested that if a learnership is to address these different issues, then in addition to the focus on numbers of learners involved in learnerships, there should also be a greater focus on the level of skills required, as well as the development of the values and attitudes highlighted previously. Further, the importance of a structured workplace experience component needs to be factored into the design of the learnership.

For these reasons it was suggested that there is a need to question whether a one-year learnership can achieve all of this and produce competencies of a particular quality. What can be done in the course of one year? Does this provide sufficient time to develop the quality and level of skills required by industry?

## Implementation of large scale programmes

Participants noted that the case study discusses the conditions required for the successful implementation of learnerships. However, some questioned whether it was reasonable to expect that THETA would have the requisite experience to manage this at scale, and whether it would not have been better to pilot the learnerships before moving to scale. Other participants expressed the view that the Project had been piloted and that there was a real imperative in the country to see the implementation of policy (in this case skills development policy) at a larger scale.

## Institutional issues: the provider

There were a number of issues raised as to how the quality of provision could be improved and what lessons emerge from the Tourism Learnership Project pertaining to this. Of particular concern was the observation that the emphasis on the numbers of learners involved in the Project meant a reduced emphasis on quality. It was suggested that in future numbers of learners are linked to improved quality by widening the base of providers, and by supporting providers to develop their capacity to deliver quality learning programmes.

## Institutional issues: the SETA

Participants stressed that change is a complex process and must be viewed from a developmental point of view. Policy implementation is slow and uneven, and is often filled with moments of real distress and resistance to change, as shown in the case study. It was therefore suggested that the management of the transition from the current state of the Hospitality Industry Training Board to the future ideal state of the emerging THETA should have been factored into the project to a larger extent.

## Conclusion

In summary, the questions that were raised in the round table discussion include:

- What is needed to ensure that employers don't see training only in terms of cost, but also see it in terms of increased productivity and growth?
- Which quality issues require emphasis in the design of learnerships?

- How can selection processes be improved?
- What elements are required in a learnership and what does this mean for the duration of the learnership?
- How do learnerships differ in relation to projected exit opportunities e.g. employment or self-employment?

The round table concluded that these insights should encourage the key actors to implement changes in learnerships, and that the case study should inform the work of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA).

## References

Business Trust and THETA (2005) *TLP Phase Two Evaluation Report*, Compiled by Prodigy Business Services (unpublished).

Business Trust quarterly reports, minutes of meetings, as well as schedules of agreements.

Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) UCT. *SETAs – a vehicle for the skills revolution?* An external report on the role of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in contributing towards skills development in South Africa, JIPSA.

Ebony Consulting International, Tourism Enterprise (2002) *Mid-Term Review Report of the Tourism Programme for Business Trust*, Business Trust: Johannesburg.

Frederickson G and Johnston J (eds) (1999) *Public Management Reform and Innovation: Research, Theory and Application*, University of Alabama Press: Alabama.

Hood C (1991) “A Public Management for all Seasons?” in: *Public Administration*, Vol. 69, No. 1, pp. 3-19.

Maor M (1999) “The Paradox of Managerialism”, in *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 5-18.

Pollit C and Bouchaert (2000) *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Singizi (2005) *Impact evaluation of the FIETA Shintsa Project and Guidelines on Enterprise Development*.

Thornton G (2004) *Final Report on the Verification of the Achievements of the Tourism Learnership Project*, Presented to THETA.

# Appendix 1: Definition of learning programmes

In order to contextualise this case study, the following explanation is provided of the terms used pertaining to learning programmes.

There is a range of different types of learning programmes, and there is a need to determine what type of learning programme is appropriate for the particular programme that will be offered. Some examples of different types of learning programmes are the following<sup>13</sup>:

## Learnerships

Learnerships are learning programmes that aim to strengthen the linkage between structured learning and work experience, in order for learners to obtain a registered qualification on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Learnerships include both structured work experience and structured institutional learning. Many Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) use a formula of approximately 70 per cent structured work experience and 30 per cent institutional learning. Learnerships must lead to a full qualification on the NQF. Learnerships are seen as a mechanism to bridge the gap between the worlds of education and work. Thus, the workplace component of the learnership is critical. This means that if there are no employers to enter into learnership agreements with providers and learners, then there are no learnerships!

## Skills programmes

As defined by the Skills Development Act, skills programmes are occupationally-based and must constitute at least one credit towards a qualification on the NQF. Skills programmes should be provided by an accredited education and training provider, and should comply with any other prescribed requirements.

---

<sup>13</sup> There are clearly a number of other learning programmes that are not listed here, including apprenticeships which are also work-based and require a formal contract with employers. These are regulated by Schedules and provide one route to the achievement of artisan status. Besides apprenticeships, there are also programmes available that do not lead to formal credits, but are invaluable in the workplace.

Skills programmes could encompass education and training in all fields and sectors. They may be located within the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) band, the Further Education and Training (FET) band or the Higher Education and Training (HET) band. The programmes could be run for any of the target groups, including people who are unemployed, self-employed or employed, and could be run for competencies required for SMMEs and social development programmes.

## Learning programmes that take place within an institution and culminate in a qualification

There are many learning programmes that lead to qualifications which are offered by learning institutions such as the Further Education and Training institutions or technikons. These programmes may not have a workplace component, but should have an experiential learning component. The programmes assess the learning against a qualification.



The Business Trust Learning Series was established to enable the Business Trust to reflect on the lessons learnt from its work. While its primary purpose is to enlighten the Business Trust, it is hoped that the lessons captured in the series will be useful to others.

*Reskilling the Tourism and Hospitality Sector: A Case Study of the Tourism Learnership Project* is the second case study in the series. The Project was implemented by the Tourism SETA (THETA) and funded by the Business Trust and the Department of Labour, and was the first attempt to run a large-scale learnership programme for the unemployed. It was launched in 1999 just as the National Skills Development Strategy came into operation and provided training for some 5 000 unemployed people. The case study offers lessons about the management of such programmes and raises questions about the implementation of learnerships.