



**ON THE RIGHT TRACK:** European Rail experts and PRASA representatives inspect facilities at OBB, the Austrian railway system.

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**J**OBs are changing, and changing fast. New technology is accelerating the rate of change faster than ever before, although other factors, like changes in public policy, rising human rights and shifting economic trading conditions, also have a strong impact.

The challenge for educators and trainers is how to keep up. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has been working on this question for some time, and when they learned of the European Union (EU) planning methodology, "New Skills for New Jobs", developed within the context of the "Europe 2020 Strategy", they wanted to learn more.

They asked the EU's Delegation to South Africa if they could help. The answer was a firm "yes", and the vehicle for the help that was offered was that of a "Social Dialogue".

### Social dialogue

A Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement was entered into between South Africa and the EU in 2004 (and updated in 2009). The agreement provides the basis for comprehensive cooperation between South Africa and the EU.

In addition, in 2007, SA and the EU agreed to establish a strategic partnership and they have adopted a Joint Action Plan for achieving this partnership.

In this context, the EU Delegation to South Africa prepared, in collaboration with the South African Department of International Relations, the Dialogue Facility Programme.

It was signed in 2009 and extended until August 2016. This programme seeks to support the strengthening of policy dialogue between the EU and South Africa.

Since 2009, a total of 31 dialogue-related projects have been funded in South Africa covering 12 different areas of cooperation. The "New Skills for New Jobs" project became one of these projects.

### The project partners

Rather than approaching the issue of "new skills for new jobs" in a very abstract way, the DHET decided to partner with agencies that were facing such challenges right now.

Attention turned to the 18 Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs), under the National Infrastructure Plan (itself a foundational pillar of the National Development Plan), where change is the order of the day.

Two of the SIP projects put up their hands to participate: SIP 7 and SIP 14:

- Sip 7 focuses on developing integrated urban space and public transport systems in seven major South African cities. It is led by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) which has signed very large contracts for signalling and communication infrastructure, rolling stock and new locomotives.
- SIP 14 deals with Higher Education Infrastructure. It is overseen and supported by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). This SIP is responsible for the two new universities and 12 new college campuses that are being built as well as a range of lecture rooms, student accommodation, libraries, laboratories and ICT connectivity at other campuses. It is also addressing the maintenance of these new and refurbished assets.

The DHET, together with individuals appointed by PRASA and the CSIR, were supported by the EU Delegation to identify people with whom to "dialogue" in Europe. And after some frustrating delays, work began in earnest in 2015.

Each leg of the dialogue took the same form of visits by South Africans to Europe guided by European experts in their respective fields.

These study visits were followed by the European experts coming to South Africa to participate in workshops with their South African counterparts to discuss and further refine their thinking on good practices.

The project ended with a wrapping-up session in December where broad lessons

## NEW skills for NEW jobs

and forward-looking plans were discussed, as elaborated below.

### PRASA: Rail and infrastructure modernisation

PRASA set out to learn about the skills needed for the manufacture and maintenance of the new railway coaches and signalling systems into which it was investing – and how best these might be developed.

Moving from the policy – and strategy-makers in Brussels to policy-makers, transport authorities and agencies, operators, maintainers, academia, transport consultants, rail operators and training institutions in Central Europe (Germany, Austria and Czech Republic), the team was able to see examples of how skilling and the introduction of new technology and work procedures were managed together at "ground level".

Many of the rail companies in Central Europe have undergone major restructuring over the last 20 to 30 years.

This has resulted in a reduction of the workforce through a policy of non-replacement of those that leave the industry. Upskilling, reskilling and redeployment has been the order of day for those that

remained, generally resulting in increasing average productivity per worker.

The elements of "standardisation", "integration" and "partnerships" were common themes throughout the trip as the EU has necessitated streamlining of systems between new and old member states.

The South Africans were shown how new qualifications and curricula are developed to meet new challenges by joint teams under the umbrella of broad national frameworks – with the employers and unions playing a key role alongside education and training providers.

They also saw how the delivery of these programmes frequently used the "dual system" model – where learners move between the training institution and the workplace for the acquisition of the required skills and competencies.

Central to the success of this model is the social partnership between government, private sector and unions. All three parties own the process and the outcomes of it.

### DHET and CSIR: Maintenance of the built environment infrastructure

This leg of the project took place in the context of the Department of Public Works and its agency the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) introducing a major new strategy – the National Infrastructure Maintenance Strategy (NIMS).

The strategy sets out a wide range of new standards and procedures aimed at better maintaining state assets in the built environment.

The South African team was interested to learn how partners in Europe (Germany in this case) addressed the challenge of ensuring that those responsible for the implementation of such a strategy might be skilled or reskilled for the task.

The study tour focused on four core functional areas:

- Strategic and operational planning at government level

(national, provincial and municipal) for maintenance and/or expansion of public infrastructure;

- The management of facilities at institutional level (focusing on educational facilities);
- The design and delivery of qualifications to underpin maintenance and expansion via Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training facilities (including e-learning); and
- The maintenance of buildings, human resource management and competence in construction companies (a best practice example).

Many significant lessons were learned during this exchange that will be integrated into the planning and implementation of NIMS. Overall, however, the centrality of social dialogue between government, business and labour was again emphasised.

### Taking the lessons forward

At a wrap-up seminar held at Transnet on 3 December 2015, a number of follow-up steps were agreed.

Among these were an undertaking by PRASA and Transnet to work together on the design and development of a set of priority occupations that both need for the rollout of their respective rail mandates, using the "dual system" model localised by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations.

Meetings have since been held, facilitated by the Transport SETA, to take this forward.

The CSIR will be working with DHET and the CIDB to design and run a pilot project on Technical and Vocational Education and Training College maintenance, informed by lessons learned in Europe as well as those drawn from their own experience.

More broadly, this project has illustrated again the benefit of such policy and experience exchanges and the value of the Dialogue Facility Programme between the EU and South Africa.

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