

Tertiary education takes steps to meet market needs

By [Abram Molelemane](#) and [Anton Ressel](#)

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Globally, nine out of ten businesses will hire someone with relevant work experience over someone without any. Many international education institutions are aware of these findings, and have made internship and workplace readiness training an essential and compulsory part of their syllabus.

Puzzlingly, this model in South Africa is still quite rare; most of our graduates leave colleges and universities with no work experience related to their course or degree whatsoever. For employers, this is a challenge. Too many first-time jobseekers lack the most basic work readiness skills they require. This is problematic, not just for the almost 400,000 unemployed SA graduates looking for work, but for the nation as a whole.

Fortunately, local tertiary institutions are starting to increase the work readiness and on-the-job training component of the courses and degrees they offer, with a special focus being placed on internship as a viable and mutually beneficial solution to improving graduate employability. This increased focus on workplace experience is borne out by a number of facts:



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1. More and more tertiary institutions are conscious of the importance of helping their graduates find work placement, and many have dedicated career centres for this purpose.
2. The market has changed radically over the last two years, and increasingly FET colleges require industry-related work experience as a criteria for qualification.
3. All institutions recognise that graduate employability is important, and many have instituted work readiness programmes to try and improve success in this area.
4. Whilst there is a recognition that education needs to be more responsive to the needs of the market (employers), in practice too few are proactive in this, and course content still often lags well behind actual market requirements.
5. Many institutions struggle to get grads to 'give a damn' about employability, until they graduate and can't find a job.
6. Internship helps bridge many of these gaps - one local initiative, the Graduate Asset Programme (GAP) has reported that a staggering 69% of internships that they have facilitated have converted into longer-term employment.

Bridging the gap

Initiatives such as [GAP](#) and [Harambee](#) offer not just work placement and internship opportunities, but also access to training, resources and tools. The GAP site helps businesses find interns across the country, and offers free tools, tips, templates and an online work readiness programme called Bridging the Gap, with a view to increasing graduate employability and offering more value to the prospective host business. GAP also works directly with education institutes to enhance placement strategies, and provides valuable market information for matching qualifications and course content with market needs.

Harambee works mostly with school-leavers and matriculants, and offers comprehensive work readiness and other training for selected candidates, as well as job placement support.

Research from abroad and feedback from local employers suggests that it is absolutely critical for SA's future for learning institutions to focus on helping their students access internship programmes, work-placement initiatives and experiential learning opportunities, in order to get hands-on working experience.

Ensuring that tertiary qualifications meet the needs of the market (employers) will further ensure that our next generation of

graduates is not just educated, but employable as well.

ABOUT ABRAM MOLELEMANE AND ANTON RESSEL

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