Skills development

FETWater – Building the bridge between capacity building and sector sustainability

When developing capacity building and training programmes, aligning these programmes with sector occupational and professional requirements is key to sustainable skills development. Article by Dr John Zvimba, Programme Manager for FETWater.

FETWATER
Framework Programme for Research, Education and Training in the Water Sector

The lack of coordination of capacity building and training initiatives in the South African water sector has resulted in poor knowledge management, ineffective planning, duplication of effort and low return on investment. In addition, uncertainty over the link between qualifications and available career paths in the sector limits the uptake and thus the sustainability of capacity building initiatives.

The relevance and quality of capacity building and training programmes therefore remain questionable as the water sector has yet to develop appropriate mechanisms for standardisation and quality assurance. Currently there is a plethora of education and training programmes which lack currency and portability, with qualifications and certificates obtained often receiving no recognition with regard to career progression or skills enhancement.

One of the significant efforts in dealing with capacity building challenges in the South African water sector has been the introduction of the framework programme for research, education and training in the water sector (FETWater). The programme was originally developed as a response to a 1998 study by the then Department of Water Affairs & Forestry, UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organisation which revealed a marked lack of human resources and competencies in the local water sector.

This deficiency not only jeopardises the implementation of the National Water Act, but also potentially hampers the country's ability to conform with, and take advantage of, global trends in integrated water resource management. FETWater Phase I ran from 2002 to 2005, followed by FETWater Phase II which ran from 2007 to 2010, with more than a thousand professionals receiving training during Phase II of the programme. FETWater Phase III, which is running from 2014 to 2018, currently focuses on six thematic areas, with the major objective of achieving sustainability beyond 2018.

Although the previous FETWater training initiatives covered essential elements of capacity building for the sector, uptake has been limited. This is because the FETWater courses were not linked to sector skills planning and delivery systems for professional and career development.

In order to improve currency and sustainability of FETWater offerings in the capacity building environment, an occupationally-directed focus, aligned with professional body and Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) requirements, is imperative for course planning and registration. On this basis, presentations, discussions and deliberations at the FETWater Phase III National Planning Workshop held from 22-23 January 2015 called for closer links with Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) and sector skills planning initiatives, highlighting the need for improved curriculum development and quality assurance protocols to ensure currency for occupational and professional development.

The National Planning Workshop therefore resolved that support be provided to each of the six networks for qualification development within the SETA and QCTO frameworks to ensure currency and sustainability of FETWater training initiatives. It was resolved that network capacity be developed to participate in, align and implement FETWater initiatives within the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA), QCTO and SETA environments, providing a foundation for network sustainability through ensuring that:

- Networks have qualification development facilitators that understand the QCTO process and are able to facilitate the development of occupational qualifications and continuing professional development

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(CPD) courses in areas of critical and scarce skills with a community of expert practitioners;
- Expert practitioners in networks work with WISA to ensure standards are maintained by participating in the Assurance Quality Partner (AQP) processes and professionalisation processes; and
- Networks participate in skills planning with the Water and Sanitation Sector Leadership Group (WSSLG) and SETA to ensure uptake and funding of FETWater initiatives as part of the National Water Resources Strategy 2.

In order to consolidate the alignment requirements for FETWater Phase III network activities, a follow-up workshop, the FETWater Phase III Network Coordinators – WSSLG Partnership Workshop, was held on 14 April 2015, further reiterating and resolving that:

- Networks identify occupational clusters which are endorsed by WISA, SETA and QCTO for Development Quality Partner support;
- Network activities be properly aligned to WSSLG and QCTO processes with regard to milestones and scheduling;
- Network learner Qualification Development Facilitator and expert practitioners develop and register qualifications;
- Networks develop learning material, participate in AQP processes and implement qualification in accordance with the QCTO delivery system; and
- Networks market offerings and receive funding from SETA mandatory and discretionary grants to sustain capacity building and training initiatives and continue working with WISA on professional development and quality assurance mandates.

As a way of supporting the FETWater Phase III networks to achieve the above requirements for their CB&T moving forward, a series of workshops on network capacity development and linkages will be facilitated. These workshops will include, inter alia:

- Workshop on critical and scarce skills – SETA Skills Planning process & DQP status;
- Learner QDF induction workshop – SETA QDF meets networks to plan the development of occupational qualifications;
- WISA workshop on AQP roles and implementation process – WISA outlines AQP business plan and CEP roles in accreditation and certification;
- Upscaling and sustainability workshop – confirming network training delivery mechanisms, targets, accreditation and certification; and
- WISA conference workshop and roadshow regarding targets and grants with regions – grant applications to SETAs.

It is hoped that such a partnership framework for FETWater Phase III with SETAs, WISA and WSSLG will significantly leverage funding, expertise and activities for the benefit of FETWater, thereby providing the necessary foundation for programme sustainability beyond 2018.

Students during a FETWater field visit.

Delegates at a FETWater workshop earlier this year.