Implementing learnerships: learner recruitment and selection lessons learnt from the KwaZulu Natal pilot projects

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Abstract
Since the Skills Development Act of 1998, the ‘learnership’ model of workplace training has been promoted in South Africa as a creative vehicle for addressing high unemployment rates and a scarce skills shortage. However, because learnerships are a recent innovation, the body of applied knowledge is small. This article aims to contribute to what is known through examining a series of pilot projects, implemented between 1997 and 2001 in KwaZulu Natal, with specific reference to the recruitment and selection of learners. This process is a critical ‘input’ into the establishment of any Learnership and should be carefully designed and planned if it is to be effective. Therefore we need to examine the process, identify lessons learnt and highlight emerging best practices for the future.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is experiencing a major unemployment crisis, placed by the World Competitiveness Report (2001; 2002) at 29,5 per cent, or 4,5 million people. Economic pressures and downsizing have resulted in many retrenchments, particularly in medium and large-scale enterprises. In addition, the economy has experienced a structural transformation away from activities based in the primary sectors of agriculture and mining, and towards more knowledge-based activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors. This has had far-reaching implications for employment patterns and the type of skills required by the labour market. A significant proportion of the population lacks the basic competencies or skills required to meet the new challenges. In 1999 only 4,2 per cent of the total population had a matriculation as well as some form of post-matriculation education and training (South African Institute of Race Relations 2001). Addressing the skills gap is therefore high on the national agenda.

The Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999, introduced by the Department of Labour (DoL), were designed to address this problem. For the purpose of skills development and quality assurance, the South African economy is divided into sectors. All companies and registered employers are required to pay an annual Skills Development Levy, based on their

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employee total remuneration cost, which from 1 April 2001 requires companies with an annual payroll in excess of R250 000 to pay 1 per cent of their salary bill. In addition, each of the defined sectors has to establish a Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA), whose role it is to formulate a sector skills development strategy and to disburse grants collected from the levies back to employers, for the purpose of approved skills development programmes. SETAs will be ‘measured on their success in transforming the skills base in their respective sectors, through the implementation of targeted learnerships’ (Vorwerk 2002a:2).1

The KwaZulu-Natal Pilot Projects of 1997 to 2001 provide a useful case study opportunity to learn more about learnerships and their implementation. This process has been facilitated by the production of review reports, which was an explicit requirement of the funders. The methodology used was to interview as many roleplayers as possible (Koch et al. 1999b:ii) and to capture lessons learnt in a series of technical reports. However, a real opportunity exists to disseminate findings in the academic domain – and this is the intention of this article.

**BACKGROUND**

The pilot projects were jointly funded by a Danish Funding Agency, DANIDA and the DoL, with the specific purpose of testing the learnership concept, focusing on the unemployed, and on job creation to promote self-employment within small-scale, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs). Phase I (1997–1999) consisted of four learnerships for unemployed people in the hospitality and building sectors. Phase 2 (1999–2001) consisted of a Venture Creation Learnership and a Skills Development project for rural women. A summary is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of the KZN Pilot Projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Focus and timeframe</th>
<th>Learnerships</th>
<th>No. of learners at start</th>
<th>No. of learners at finish</th>
<th>Retention rate (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 Building and</td>
<td>KwaZulu Natal unemployed (March 1997</td>
<td>Four learnerships: (1) Building sector: Face bricklaying; finishing carpentry</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>85,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>to April 1999)</td>
<td>(2) Hospitality industry: food preparation and cooking; food and drink service</td>
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Phase II was designed specifically to address this and focused on skills programmes and venture creation learnerships within the SMME sector (le Roux 2000:1–2), since current trends in the South African labour market indicate that this is where the most ‘new’ work opportunities are likely to emerge.

Although the target groups and project choices for Phases I and II were different, many of the ‘lessons learnt’ are relevant to all learnerships. These disseminate into four key areas: the use of selection criteria; the identification of appropriate applicants, the involvement of key stakeholders and understanding the reasons for low participation. Each of these factors has been found to have an impact on the level of participation and retention in learnerships.

**OVERVIEW OF THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESSES**

At the outset, it is important to draw attention to the differences that exist between standard recruitment and selection processes and those performed in the context of a learnership. Standard approaches tend to focus on ‘skills held’ by the candidate and generally seek to select the ‘best candidate’ for a particular position, based on existing qualifications and a set of criteria. In the learnership context, recruitment and selection is generally done in a developmental context. The focus is more on...
selecting candidates with the greatest potential to develop their skills in order to meet the stated objectives of the learnership. Many candidates do not hold formal qualifications and are currently excluded from formal employment opportunities. Furthermore, particularly where the unemployed learner is involved, considerable effort has to be made to ‘reach’ the desired target market, whereas access is not as much of an issue for standard recruitment and selection processes.

Based on the extensive learnership implementation experience accumulated by the German Technical Co-operation Agency (GTZ) over the past few years, de Jager, Hattingh and Huster (2002:17) have identified a five-step process for recruitment and selection, reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: GTZ Recruitment and selection process for learnerships

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prepare for learner recruitment and selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Develop a learner recruitment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Develop and implement a learner selection process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brief and sign contracts with the learners selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Provide assistance to learners not selected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, at the time of the pilot projects, very little was known about recruitment and selection in the learnership context and the project team had to ‘feel their way’ to a large extent. The initial phase of the project relied heavily on a set of ‘guiding principles’ rather than on clearly articulated processes. These principles included the use of appropriate selection tools; adequate distribution of selected learners in terms of gender, race and geographical area; sufficient transference of information to learners to ensure the making of informed decisions about their participation; adequate training given to DoL personnel to enable them to undertake their key performance responsibilities; the involvement of key stakeholders in the process where appropriate, and lastly, the setting of realistic and reasonable timeframes – all within a context of non-discrimination, fairness and transparency.

Phase 1 piloted a nine-step approach, which is detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Phase 1 Recruitment and Selection Process

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1:</strong></td>
<td>Identification of selection criteria (general, to ensure representivity, and sector-specific to each learnership)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2:</strong></td>
<td>Identification of the pool of potential applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3:</strong></td>
<td>Briefing sessions for potential applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4:</strong></td>
<td>Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 5:</strong></td>
<td>Assessment tools</td>
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An active recruitment approach was adopted, using advertising, the targeting of satellite labour centres by DoL personnel, networking with training providers, non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations. Although sufficient learners were recruited to participate in the learnerships, the overall response rate was low. Furthermore, the recruitment and selection process was both time-consuming and resource-intensive.

The design of the Phase II recruitment and selection process took these factors into account. Larger numbers of learners were included in the start-up phase and the process was seen as one of continuous selection. To reduce cost and time further, a simplified four-step recruitment and selection process was designed. The identification of selection criteria and of a pool of potential candidates (Steps 1 and 2 in Phase I) was regarded as part of the pre-planning process. Steps 5 to 8 of the Phase I process (assessment tools, interviews, selection panel) were combined into an assessment seminar. A comparison between Phases I and II is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Comparison between Phase I and Phase II Recruitment and Selection Processes**

| Step 1: Identification of selection criteria (general, to ensure representivity, and sector-specific to each learnership) | Phase 2: Pre-planning |
| Step 2: Identification of pool of potential applicants | Step 1: Raising awareness, providing information to target groups and inviting them to complete an application form |
| Step 3: Briefing sessions for potential applicants | Step 2: Assessing applications and pre-selecting for further assessment |
| Step 4: Applications | |

(Source: Bobat & Tandrup 1999:1)
Two additional guiding principles introduced in Phase II emphasised the role of learner, namely self-selection throughout the recruitment and selection process, and the referral of unsuccessful candidates to other relevant DoL unemployment support mechanisms.

Recruitment began in November 2000 and contact was made with about 3000 candidates through corporates engaged in retrenchments at the time; the databases of the DoL and Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF); the National Defence Force; a variety of unions and the Durban Chamber of Business. The learnership was also given media coverage through radio and newspaper advertising. In addition, contact was made with a training centre for disabled persons, in line with Employment Equity Act (1998) requirements that specify the need to include this group. The full recruitment process is shown in Figure 1.
Despite all of these efforts, only 150 applications had been received by February 2000, when the next stage of the selection process was scheduled to begin. As a general benchmark, a response rate of 50 per cent is regarded as acceptable in survey literature (Babbie & Mouton 2002:261) and 150 out of 3 000 is therefore indicative of a poor response. Although this did not affect the expected outcome of the project (60 learners were specified and a figure of 76 was achieved post-selection), it is nonetheless important to reflect on the recruitment and selection process to identify what else could be done to enhance its design and implementation, and whether there are other factors that might be influencing learner engagement and participation. It is important to address these issues if learnership interventions are to have their intended impact on reducing...
unemployment and enhancing economic growth. The ‘lessons learnt’ will be explored in more detail in the section that follows.

LESSONS LEARNT

Lesson 1 – Using selection criteria

Once the target group of learners has been identified, the appropriate use of selection criteria plays a major role in making sure that the ‘right learners’ are selected for the programme. As Bobat and Tandrup (1999:29) point out, the question is not so much getting ‘X’ number of learners, but getting the ‘right’ learners.

In Phase I, the primary target group was identified as: ‘vulnerable and marginal labour groups, ie unemployed and low educational level’. Furthermore, it was specified that a balance had to be found between various groups: (1) old and young (2) rural and urban (3) male and female (Koch et al. 1999a:32).

Criteria were applied ‘across-the board’ to the four learnerships and included length of unemployment; age, race, gender, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) levels and geographical distribution. However, a ‘lesson learnt’ is that it needs to be clarified in advance whether selection criteria should reflect the composition of the population in general, or of the unemployed. However, there is a considerable difference between these two groups (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:23).

One criterion used was that participants needed to have been unemployed for a minimum of six months. This helped to ensure that the long-term unemployed were given a chance (whereas selecting ‘best applicants’ would generally exclude this group). However, a lesson learnt is that people who have been out of work for a long time often have special needs. A recommendation for the future is that instructors should be trained in counselling and mentoring (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:4) to maintain the motivation and interest of this group. This touches on the critical role played by mentors in providing the ‘rich learner support’ that practitioners now advocate: within the paradigm of learnerships, the focus of learning shifts from the classroom to the point of application, with the goal being application in a real-world environment (Vorwerk 2002b:14). A key enabler for this shift is to support learners where appropriate with assessors, coaches and mentors.

An additional criterion was that candidates had to be at least 16 years of age. However, a lesson learnt is that a balance needs to be found between the needs of the youth and of the long-term unemployed.

Gender distribution in a learnership is also not always easy to achieve. In the building industry and hospitality learnerships, an effort was made to ensure that sufficient numbers of women were included. However, although there was a 50/50 split of men and women in the group as a whole, the final composition reflected a traditional gender bias: 85 per cent of learners in the hospitality learnership were
women and 85 per cent in the Building learnership were men. As Bobat and Tandrup (1999:4) point out, ‘if the objective is to ensure equal representation . . . this would require a substantial change in attitude, both among employers and also among learners’.

Racial distribution was also used as a criterion and the target was applied to the group as a whole, rather than separately within each of the four learnerships. However, a lesson learnt is that the objectives behind the selection criteria need to be carefully considered as part of the design process: ‘If the objective is to improve the opportunities of previously disadvantaged groups, one must also consider that Africans have a higher than expected ratio among the unemployed population and among those with poor schooling background’ (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:5).

Another ‘lesson learnt’ concerned the use of ‘geographical distribution’ as a criterion. Most training providers in KwaZulu-Natal live in the Greater Durban and Pietermaritzburg areas and with 50 per cent of the Province’s population living in the rural areas, practicalities around access to training can become an issue and can ‘skew’ the desired distribution. One solution would be to provide accommodation for learners who need it, but this can increase costs significantly. Again, issues of this nature should be considered ‘upfront’ when designing and costing a learnership (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:5).

ABET levels were also included as a selection criterion. However, a lesson learnt was that their inclusion does not always guarantee current competence – for example, significant time may have elapsed since the qualification was originally obtained. Furthermore, other learners may have the skills and competence required, but no formal qualification. As a general recommendation, ABET levels should only be used in conjunction with other selection criteria.

In Phase II, the focus of the learnership (venture creation) required specific criteria. Applicants had to live within greater Durban area; be newly retrenched or about to be retrenched; want to start their own business; be able to benefit from the learnership and have entrepreneurial potential (personal attitudes and qualifications, acquired skills and experiences, a viable business idea and other resources, e.g. savings, equipment and premises).

The indicators in the form of the participants’ success rate are positive and point to the validity of the approach taken. However, a major lesson learnt is that by targeting only the unemployed, many people with existing entrepreneurial aptitude were ‘selected out’. In future learnerships of this nature, ‘potential for entrepreneurship’ should be the central selection criterion and the currently under-employed and/or those who want to initiate their own businesses should also be included (PSDPP II 2002:3). Another lesson learnt is that the selection process should place a stronger emphasis on the psychological aspects of entrepreneurship, so that learners understand the reasons why they are being selected (PSDPP II 2002:3).

Phase II also yielded new insights into the fears and motivations of learners. For example, a contradiction was found to exist between the financial needs of the
potential learner and their openness about available resources (e.g. cash, investments, vehicle, tools, equipment). Learners are ‘often afraid that if they disclose fully, they may be considered as not being in need of the assistance and therefore would not qualify for the learnership’ (PSDPP 2002:3). Future learnerships need to find ways of overcoming this problem. Related to this is the importance of assessing the creditworthiness of a learner at selection stage – particularly in cases where there is a need to apply for start-up finance. A distinction should also be made between those who will qualify for loans and those who are unlikely to ever qualify (PSDPP 2002:3).

Phase II also found that more controls are needed on educational entry levels and recommended that in learnerships where issues like numeracy and literacy are important, those who do not qualify should be excluded at an early stage of the selection process (PSDPP II 2002:3) and referred to other DoL support mechanisms.

The lessons summarised above illustrate the critical importance of selecting criteria that support the objectives of a learnership. There are two major approaches that may be followed, both with major design implications (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:23–24):

1. To provide industry with a labour force with the necessary qualifications for ensuring that the industry remains competitive nationally and internationally. In this case, the focus of the learnership would be on the needs of the enterprises – the implication would be that only the best possible candidates should be selected, irrespective of other criteria. The learnership content would have to reflect the needs of the enterprises and actual background of the learners.

2. To provide unemployed persons with proper and relevant training to enhance their possibilities of obtaining gainful employment. In this case, the focus would need to be on the needs of the unemployed person. The target group for the learnership would have to be decided on beforehand, and a firm commitment to supporting this group would need to be made.

Lesson 2 – Identifying appropriate applicants

Phases I and II yielded important lessons about the importance of learner access to infrastructure; of recruiter access to adequate learner databases and of the need to set clear terms and conditions for participating in a learnership in advance.

For example, learner access to posts and telecommunications can constitute a major obstacle – particularly in the case of candidates based in rural areas. This can have serious implications for obtaining a geographically balanced group of learners (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:6).

It is also important that those responsible for recruitment should have access to a comprehensive database of work seekers. However, database categories do not
always support the objectives of a learnership. For example, the DoL’s distinction between ‘work seekers’ and ‘people registered for UIF benefits’ does not incentivise registering as a work-seeker. In future, the DoL could play a proactive role through identifying a larger group of potential candidates.

The need to set terms and conditions for participating in a learnership in advance was a major lesson from Phase I (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:24). Applicants usually have specific questions around costs, therefore those handling the initial sessions should be adequately briefed. Furthermore, if the aim of a learnership is to reach unemployed breadwinners, this group will be excluded if no provision is made for covering some of the expenses involved in participating in a learnership (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:26).

Lesson 3 – Involving key stakeholders

Learnerships are, by definition, ‘stakeholder-rich’ interventions. In both phases, stakeholder involvement was found to be critical for ensuring a successful recruitment and selection process (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:15). A wide range of stakeholders was involved – amongst others DANIDA, DoL, the community, the project management team, the service providers, the workplace providers and the learners. The importance of these stakeholder groups will be discussed in turn.

The role of the community

In KwaZulu-Natal, systems of traditional authority still exist and communities play an active role in informing work practices. However, in the building industry learnership, the importance of this stakeholder group was underestimated until the project was already underway. When the opportunity to participate in the learnership arose, only people who lived within the immediate community were deemed ‘eligible’ and applicants from other areas were not regarded as ‘acceptable’ (Koch et al. 1999a:4). This finding highlights the critical importance of engaging local communities at the outset, involving them in the recruitment process and encouraging them to take ownership for the effective implementation of a learnership (Koch et al. 1999b:14,27). Subsequent learnership implementation experiences also support this finding. As Brendan Pearce, CEO of the Manufacturing SETA (Merseta) has observed: ‘one of the most important elements of a learnership succeeding . . . is to have buy-in from all parties before the learnership commences’ (cited in de Jager, Hattingh & Huster 2002:5).

The role of workplace providers

Workplace providers can play a positive role in the recruitment and selection process. However, in Phase I, learners were selected before the identification of workplace providers had taken place, because the project had to adhere to an ‘ideal’ timeframe (determined by the project document). In addition, the number of
learners to be selected was determined not by real demand, but by the number specified in the project document. A similar tension between ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ existed in Phase II. The lesson learnt is that ideally, employers who will be involved as ‘hosts’ or workplace providers should be involved in decisions about timeframes and numbers of learners. They should also be involved in the selection process (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:21).

**The role of training providers**

In Phase I, it was found that training providers varied in their response to calls for names of potential candidates. This could have been because of a lack of adequate databases, or because informal networks – for example the local community – were not tapped into sufficiently (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:19). If these issues are addressed, training providers can play an important role in identifying learners. In addition, it is recommended that they are involved in the selection process so that relationships with learners can be developed at an early stage (PSDPP 2002:3).

**The role of DoL staff**

As a central roleplayer in skills development, the DoL is capable of playing a very proactive role in learnership implementation. This is supported by the Phase I learnerships, where the active participation of DoL staff of the provincial employment services in KwaZulu-Natal played an important part in securing learners. The staff also found the exercise to be personally meaningful (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:19).

**The role of industry structures**

Industry Training Boards (ITBs) have been superseded by the SETAs. However, Phase I illustrates the key role that a structure of this kind can play. In the case of the hospitality industry and building industry learnerships, both the Hospitality Industry Training Board (HITB) and the Building Industry Training Board (BITB) were viewed as key stakeholders. They were involved from the outset and provided input for appropriate selection criteria and industry-appropriate interview questions. They were also part of the final selection panel and participated during information sharing sessions.

**The role of employee representatives**

In Phase I, employee representatives were invited to sit on the selection panel. This was a success, but an important lesson is that their role should be clearly determined before the start of the process (Bobat & Tandrup 199:21). This is part of the general requirement for stakeholder role clarification throughout a learnership.

The lessons learnt in the area of stakeholder involvement suggest the importance of a ‘stakeholder mapping’ exercise as an integral part of the planning
phase of learnership implementation. This should identify who should be involved and what their roles should be. The process also helps to ensure that important roleplayers are not left out and that the final candidates are acceptable to the community. Consultations with the structures concerned should also take place at this stage and, where appropriate, stakeholders should be involved in the recruitment and selection process.

Lesson 4 – Identifying reasons for low participation

This final cluster of lessons centres around the critical issue of learner engagement and will be considered under the following headings: timing the invitation to participate; lack of access to finance; over rigorous ‘self-selection’ and the use of testing procedures in the South African context.

**Timing**

The timing of an invitation to participate in a learnership needs to be carefully thought through. Generally, the offer should not come at the same time as a retrenchment announcement, because the mental focus of the potential candidate is often on their perceived ‘failure’ and on getting another job as soon as possible. However, if the timing of the offer is left for too long after the retrenchment announcement, UIF benefits will be depleted and the potential candidate will have virtually no income if he/she joins the learnership.

**Lack of access to finance**

This was found to be the single most important obstacle to participation. Retrenchees often have a family dependant on their income – therefore ensuring an alternative income source as soon as possible is of paramount importance. However, engaging in a learnership is not likely to generate cashflow in the short-term and for this reason, many retrenched persons may be reluctant to participate.

**Over rigorous ‘self-selection’**

From the outset, self-selection was viewed as a natural ‘screening’ mechanism for Phases I and II and the process was found to be successful in selecting learners with the right ‘profile’ (PSDPP II 2002:3). However, self-selection can also be counter-productive if it is over-stringent, and this needs to be guarded against. Two possible reasons for this are examined below.

- Information overload: Although it is vital to supply learners with relevant information, a balance should be found between too much and too little. In Phase II, material was supplied on the demands and expectations of the project; the challenges, opportunities and drawbacks of being self-employed; a self-reflection questionnaire on typical entrepreneurial characteristics and a
comprehensive application portfolio. Some applicants experienced the volume as intimidating.

Relating to the ‘information overload’ example described above is the use of lengthy application forms. For Phases I and II, application forms were developed in English and isiZulu to ensure that the correct information was obtained. However, the length could have put off potential candidates. Bobat and Tandrup (1999:9) have suggested two alternatives: either to continue using a lengthy application form in a deliberate attempt to determine the interest and motivation of the applicants, or to make the form ‘user friendly’ by limiting the questions to biographical data; educational background; work history and work experience. Further screening in terms of ‘motivation’ and ‘interest’ could take place at a later stage.

- Lack of business awareness and role models: The ability to identify and visualise original and viable business opportunities is generally not widespread amongst potential learners. Although a large number of people in the Phase II target group had experienced some form of contact with small business in the informal sector, the tradition for starting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with growth potential in the formal sector is limited. The lack of appropriate role models is also an issue. This needs to be addressed if a culture of entrepreneurship is to be developed.

**The use of testing procedures**

The initial objective of using these in Phase I was to ensure that candidates were selected in a fair and unbiased way. However, in cases where the number of potentially qualified applicants is limited, the use of testing may be self-defeating, because it has the potential to scare away suitably qualified candidates (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:29). Motivation, commitment and enthusiasm are probably far more critical to the selection of suitable candidates. Testing is part of a bigger debate in South Africa about the use of instruments that are not perceived as ‘culture-free’, or that might have a bias towards the previously ‘advantaged’ segment of the population. At times it may still be appropriate to use assessment tools to evaluate a candidate against specific selection criteria (e.g. numeracy, English level). However, the tools should always be used in conjunction with other methods (e.g. interviews). As a general guideline, assessments should be relevant and meet the intended purpose of the learnership, i.e. work specification and requirement (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:11).

**Barriers to entry**

At a broader level, the lessons described above are relevant to the international body of work on ‘barriers to entry’ in training. One such study (Workforce
Development 2001:7–8) identified three barriers affecting the participation of employees in workplace training:

- Physical barriers, including financial and time constraints. In this context, the term financial constraints refers to the difficulties learners experience in paying fees, while time constraints refers to learners being too busy with family responsibilities.
- Structural barriers, including a lack of learning opportunities and lack of available work-related training.
- Attitudinal barriers, including a lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and negative attitudes to education and training, peer group culture and perceptions that no tangible benefits from training will accrue.

More work needs to be done on identifying the ‘barriers’ that exist in the South African context, with particular reference to learnerships. Ease of access to funding (a ‘physical constraint’) is probably one of the major issues for employers and employees. The Skills Development Levies Act (1999) rules that when an employer provides a Learnership, they can claim a grant per learner from the appropriate SETA. However, many employers find this to be a lengthy and bureaucratic process. For learners, the cost of funding their participation is also an issue. Omar (1999:19) has identified three main questions that require addressing. Firstly, what are the terms and conditions for the learners (e.g. allowances, how much, what they are supposed to cover; who will pay the allowance and whether there is a change over time; provision of tools and equipment; provision for insurance and industry during the institutional training and at the workplace)? Secondly, who will finance the costs involved (DoL; training provider; workplace provider or a combination of all three)? Thirdly, how will these allowances and costs be monitored?

CONCLUSION

This article has drawn together lessons about recruitment and selection from the KwaZulu-Natal Pilot Projects. A recruitment process needs to be carefully designed if it is to achieve the desired outcomes of the learnership. It should also be inclusive, involving key stakeholders where appropriate (Bobat & Tandrup 1999:21). A clearly defined selection process is also required, which should include identifying who could apply (keeping equity targets in mind), advertising of learnership positions and the components of a formal selection process’ (Meyerson 2002:9).

It has also been shown how recruitment and selection processes play an important role (intended or unintended) in influencing learner participation. In future, close attention needs to be paid to why learners fail to engage, and to overcoming these ‘barriers to entry’. An effort should also be made to find
proactive ways of increasing learner interest: firstly through raising general business awareness in the target group to promote the idea of starting a business; secondly through involving large companies in promoting ‘intrapreneurship’ internally (during a stage where there is no immediate threat of retrenchment) and thirdly through linking participation in a learnership with existing business opportunities and initiatives that could provide immediate business opportunities for learners. This will enable learnerships to fulfil their intended role as facilitators of skills development and economic growth in South Africa.

NOTES

1 A learnership is ‘a route to a nationally recognised qualification that relates to an occupation and consists of a structured learning component and practical work experience’ (de Jaeger, Hattingh & Huster 2002:21)

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