The Printing Industries Federation (PIFSA) has been committed to training since its inception as a federation in 1916. This commitment has been demonstrated in a variety of ways, the chief of which has been our financial support of the Cross Media Training Centre since MAPPP SETA stopped any form of funding of the college. Since 1993 the CMT (College) has provided practical and theoretical training to over 10 000 young people, the majority of which were historically disadvantaged and unemployed.

When the College was set up, our industry agreed to channel a portion of our training levies towards it, partly because the cost of providing practical training on expensive equipment necessitated a full-time staff of lecturers. Until the Industry Training Board was replaced by MAPPP SETA this arrangement worked perfectly, and PIFSA’s subsidy was negligible. After 2000 however, the advent of the SETA system, and the creation of MAPPP SETA in particular, led to a series of court cases by the CMT to get the SETA to honour the letter and the spirit of what the printing and packaging industry employers had agreed with the old ITB. The courts decided in favour of CMT but this apparently aggravated a deep-seated animosity towards the College and PIFSA amongst certain MAPPP SETA stakeholders and staff, and further funding of any nature was blocked in various ways.

For some time, PIFSA has been working on a new training dispensation to meet the needs of our industry. MAPPP SETA has dismally failed to adequately administer apprenticeships, the exam system, the updating of course content, mandatory grants and virtually every other area of its statutory responsibilities to our industry. We have failed to get MAPPP SETA to improve and have received only empty promises of improvement, none of which has materialised.

PIFSA can no longer afford to subsidise the CMT, and as a consequence the College will be retrenching its staff. Operations in their current form will cease with effect from the end of February. The effect on loyal and dedicated staff and on long-term training and development in our industry cannot be quantified.

In consultation with our industry however, PIFSA will drive a new training dispensation which includes updated and internationally accredited material, and which will be delivered in a cost-effective way. We are also examining ways to accommodate those apprentices still progressing through the current system and will make every effort to continue with the provision of TT blocks until a new system is finalised. PIFSA will be approaching the Department of Labour to move our industry out of MAPPP SETA. The new training model will be endorsed and underwritten by PIFSA, and the qualifications will be recognised internationally.

Once the Federation’s property in Honeydew is sold, the introduction of the new training model will accelerate, however the process of change has already started.

PIFSA is committed to the ongoing development of our industry and the ongoing provision of appropriate training and development to ensure that the highest quality of skills is available to our industry.