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NEWS RELEASE

APPEAL FOR INTERVENTION RE DPW DRAFT BILL 53 OF 2008

Addressing the outcomes instead of the inputs in the pipeline to develop built environment professionals for South Africa

SAICE states their concerns and views and appeal for intervention in this matter.

After the events and discussions at the Portfolio Committee SAICE firmly holds the view that the Bill is aimed at trying to correct the **outcomes** or symptoms at the regulatory level, instead of addressing the **inputs** or the causes of the problems, both real and perceived.

Appeal for intervention

Owing to the extensive involvement and experience of SAICE, and of Ms Lawless in particular, regarding the issues under discussion, SAICE is appealing for the facilitation of an in-depth and thorough discussion process before rescinding the current legislation. SAICE believes that this Draft Bill **will not have the desired effect** regarding transformation and development of a broad and sustainable skills base in the built environment cadre. In an environment where South Africa faces huge challenges regarding its skills basis, we need stability to allow the initiatives to produce results.

It is disconcerting that the information offered to the portfolio committee by the department did not seem to take into account what was **already legislated in terms of the current acts** and how far this has been implemented. Components of the current Acts, such as compulsory registration and compulsory continued professional development, were erroneously presented as "new" aspects to be covered in this Bill.

Unfortunately it seems that the current intervention by DPW does not recognize any trends regarding transformation, the progress that has been made with accelerated skills transfer and developments in capacity building.

Lack of thorough consultation

A serious concern is the fast tracking of the process and the lack of thorough consultation. The process only started in March 2008 with the publication of the policy document, based on a number of seemingly outdated statistics and erroneous perceptions, followed by a four hour "closed " meeting with the Department during which the majority of organizations expressed concerns. A public meeting followed, at which the majority of input was negative. The Portfolio committee public hearings took place in August, during which only 15 presentations of about 51 submitted documents were heard. Only 7 out of a potential 22 committee members attended the meeting on Wednesday 13 August, and for the other days even fewer members were present.

In spite of being thanked by some of the Portfolio committee members for the SAICE input and for facilitating understanding of the pipeline issues, there was no indication that this would have any influence on the outcome of the committee's deliberations.

Lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding

The drafters of the Bill displayed a serious lack of understanding of the **systemic problems** in the built environment professionals' production pipeline.

SAICE was concerned to discover that the Portfolio Committee members present, had very little understanding of the process involved in creating and maintaining competent professionals, including workplace training towards professional registration. In our view, the following aspects were not clearly understood:

- **Qualifications:**
  1. A BSc University engineering degree takes four years, covering a year of rigorous maths and science subjects and three years of engineering theory,
  2. The BTech degree takes 3 years
  3. The National Diploma only takes two years, covering one year of maths and limited science, and only one year of engineering theory.

  The committee was under the impression that all qualifications were equivalent and that National Diploma graduates were being discriminated against by not being registered as engineers.

- Annually only some 5500 black matriculants achieve an A, B or C symbol in Higher Grade maths, which is a **requirement for entering university degree studies**. A significant number of entrants into Universities of Technology are accepted with Standard Grade D, E and F in maths, which results in high failure rates or graduates who are poorly prepared if they are "pushed" through the system.

  This also results in many employers refusing to take these graduates on, especially from certain specific tertiary institutions, leaving graduates in a disadvantaged situation, having "wasted" many years to get a qualification, which seems "worthless."

  It must be stressed that in spite of the fact that the programmes are accredited by ECSA for example, it has little power from the statutory point of view, to control the OUTPUT or graduation process.

- The National diploma requires that students spend one year in industry doing their **'experiential training'** before graduating. It is said that this ensures they are more readily usable and practical than their degreed colleagues. Whilst they may gain some exposure to the profession, the level of work which can be given to students for their first year in practice, will hardly make them experts in that period. Furthermore, because these students have not even completed their theoretical studies, industry is generally loathe to take them on, for reasons such as substantial supervision requirements and a lack of capacity to mentor, and hence a substantial number never complete their studies.

- To be able to **become registered professionals**, subsequent to completing their tertiary education, graduates are required to register with ECSA, or other Councils, as candidates and follow a workplace training programme, developed by their employers, which will ensure exposure to the project cycle.

  ECSA has, for example, a Memorandum of Understanding and a Commitment and Undertaking agreement with many employers that is aimed at ensuring a **well structured period of training**. For this phase to be successful they need to be well supervised, coached and mentored. Being a costly process, many companies train their graduates up to a point where they become commercially useful in a certain aspect of work, and from there on, occupy them with the same activities, not developing them any further to handle complete projects on their own and ultimately becoming registerable.

This is the challenge which is being dealt with in the draft Bill - asserting that Councils are failing, rather than recognizing that it is industry which must be

assisted and encouraged to facilitate completion of education and training of graduates.

Years of experience in protecting public health and safety

The new model for registration, as suggested in the Draft Bill, seems to have been based on submissions from a minority of young graduates and individuals (some who have qualified abroad) who felt they had been wronged by failing the registration process, since they failed to prove competencies as recognised by their professional councils.

Of importance, however, is that these Councils have over the years developed a set of outcome criteria which tests for competence in all aspects of the project cycle, including the ability to solve problems and work independently, and to abide by the codes of conduct for professional practice which in essence protect public health and safety. Those who have not reached this level are not considered ready at the time of application and are requested to gain additional experience before re-applying in the interests of public health and safety.

Concerns regarding proposed new model of training and registration

One serious concern is that the new SACBE system seems to be considering changing the candidate training process and approach to registration. Apparently the new approach will be that after graduation, candidates will train in "training facilities" accredited by the Council, which will conduct examinations, qualifying the person for registration.

In no countries with internationally benchmarked engineering professions, and for that matter in any other profession, is professional training being carried out in a training facility. Engineering trainees require considerably more experience of actual engineering work than formal training to develop the competencies for registration and this real-life engineering cannot be provided in such a facility. Even pilots, although using simulators, require a certain number of hours in the air to become and remain licensed.

Given that, in engineering alone, there will be some 2000 engineers, 1000 technologists and 3500 technicians graduating ANNUALLY by 2010, this will require extensive facilities and a large number of 'supervisors'. Thus, the logistics of setting up such facilities, providing enough supervisors, during a period when the country is already **desperately short of skilled staff,** will be very costly and most probably impossible.

Furthermore, after several years of tertiary study, the graduate will still not be earning any income. At a time when there is a huge amount of work taking place in the country, it makes a lot of sense to rather create a more enabling environment for industry to handle workplace training more effectively.

Official recognition of Candidate Phase as training

Over the past six to seven years, ECSA, together with SAICE and other Voluntary Associations, have tried in vain to have the Candidate Phase recognized as a training phase, which would then qualify for funding by the SETAs. It is a great pity that many attempts to introduce a model and meetings with the Dept of Labour, SAQA and the SETAs, including submissions to JIPSA, have so far not led to any action.

Research concluded that, if companies could claim approximately R100 000 per graduate during the candidate phase, measured against agreed milestones, support and activities, they would be in a position to plan more comprehensive workplace training programmes and employ retired professionals as mentors to ensure that young employees were making progress.

If this model is accepted, costs could be in the region of about R200 million per annum per class of graduates. This model is much more viable and easier to implement without the delays due to

setting up new facilities, developing curricula, finding large numbers of supervisors and so forth. A further essential benefit is that the graduates will be **earning an income** during this phase.

In conclusion
SAICE appeals for assistance and facilitation of a process of possible change and intervention without embarking on a totally new system that in itself has serious implied implications and possible negative consequences in terms of the skills development scenario of today. There is just TOO MUCH at stake right now."

Thank you for your support in creating the necessary awareness for this crucial issue, please do not hesitate to contact us, should you have any further enquiries. Tel (011)805-5947 or e-mail us at comms05@saice.org.za.

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