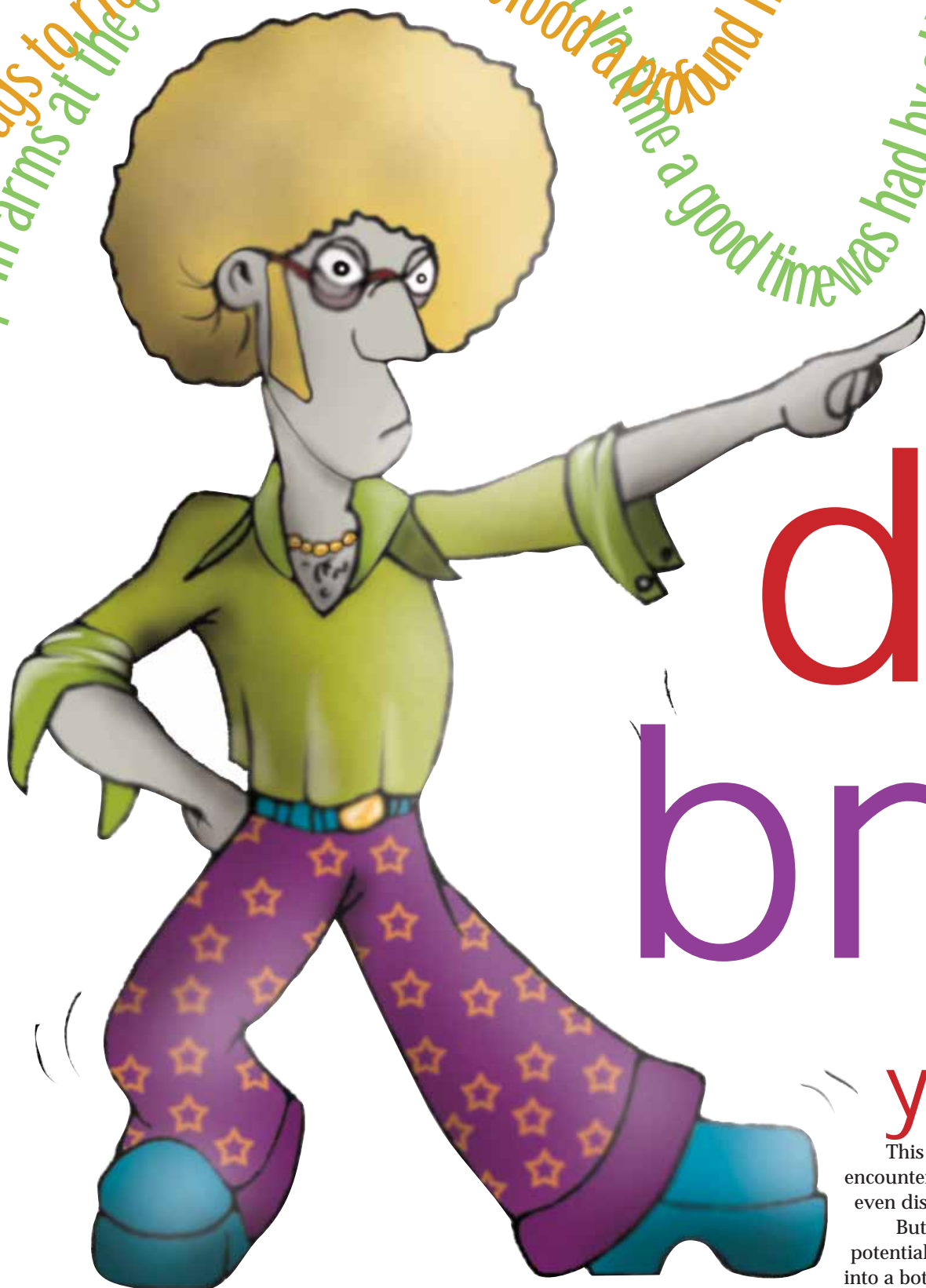


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Take a deep breath

OKAY. WE'VE GOT THE POINT. TRAINING IS IMPORTANT, SPEND MONEY ON TRAINING. BUT DOES TRAINING WORK? DOES IT FIX WHAT'S AILING? IN THIS SECTION PADDI CLAY ASSESSES THE BIG OVERARCHING NATIONAL STRUCTURES PUT IN PLACE TO PERSUADE COMPANIES TO PUT MONEY INTO TRAINING; COLLEEN LOWE-MORNA TAKES STOCK OF THE EFFECTS OF GENDER TRAINING ON HUNDREDS OF SADC JOURNALISTS; AND STEVE WROTTESELEY, GWEN ANSELL AND CAROL CHRISTIE REVISIT "THE BASICS".

You are about to plunge into a sea of South African acronyms provided by the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).

This is where you'll find the MAPPP SETA, SAQA, and the NQF; you'll encounter ETQAs, SDFs and WSPs. If there is enough space allocated, you might even discover SDLs and the little known SIC code.

But it's probably not the acronyms that are the most off-putting for the potential reader. It's likely your overriding fear is that you may just be diving into a bottomless, unmoving Sargasso Sea of lost ships.

On 23 June 2003, at a workshop for the MAPPP Sector Education and Training Authority's Advisory Committees, it certainly seemed as though we had even slipped back three years. The workshop was to help us understand what our imminent transformation from a committee to a chamber would mean. As the new responsibilities of the chamber's members were enumerated, with no indication of what support would come from the SETA, the volunteer representatives grew angry and gave vent to their frustrations. This has been happening fairly frequently recently at meetings hosted by the MAPPP SETA and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). It's also been happening at other SETAs and where red tape has outmanoeuvred efforts to deliver, improve and expand skills training.

But is the situation bleak enough for us to give up on the process?

Has journalism gained nothing from the NSDS and the three laws; the SAQA Act of 1995, the Skills Development Act (1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (1999), that enable it?

Three years ago we were optimistic but confused about the new legislation that would see companies having to pay over 1% of their salary bills to the newly formed SETAs. **We were excited but ignorant** about the National Qualifications Framework and the hope it held out for so many who had never had the chance to get the full education they wanted or needed.

Today we're not so confused or ignorant, nor are we so optimistic or excited. The **overwhelming emotion is frustration** and the only thing keeping education and training people going are the original visions held up by the



training providers and practitioners together to hammer out a common view on what makes a journalist or broadcaster competent. This view may not have been completely captured but we do now have some objective, shared criteria with which to assess people and curricula and to manage performance. Five Unit Standards have been produced by the Journalism SGB and in the registration pipeline, 49 have already been registered by the Audio-Visual SGB covering film, television, radio and new media.

Another plus is that media companies have begun to pay attention to training once again. Even if their motivation is entirely pecuniary, it does mean that education and training has moved up the agenda. And companies are also co-operating in the skills development arena.

Journalism's method of "proving" entry-level journalists with internships has been recognised sufficiently to qualify for two years of grants from our notoriously tight-fisted SETA.

The companies who pay levies, submit workplace skills plans and quarterly reports on training to the MAPPP SETA, have been getting what amounts to 52% of their levy back for the past couple of years.

But surely there should be more to the NSDS than mechanistic levy collection, rebates and reimbursements? And the South African National Editors Forum could probably have done the job of bringing journalism practitioners and trainers as well as the SAQA together with a little help from funders.

The almost negligible delivery in the skills development sphere is not necessarily the fault of the SETA itself, bound as tightly as any government department with regulations and in fearful thrall to the Public Finance Management Act.

The blame lies more squarely with the unwieldy nature of the system itself and the current funding model and with its almost total dependence on industry employers and employees to give it shape and substance in a labour of love.

Many companies already regard the Skills Development Levy as just another tax to be paid over and forgotten.

But some are paying levies, putting in the extra administrative work required to make claims for the mandatory grants and "donating" vast chunks of employee time to try to make it workable.

Having painted such a negative picture, how can people concerned with journalism be persuaded to stay in the process; how can newcomers to the process be expected to dive in?

Theoretically, the SETA and SAQA Quality Assurance processes present a way of eradicating rip-off training providers, and useless training. Research for the Sector Skills Plans required by the SETA could provide us with invaluable information that would help us **make more informed, cost-effective decisions** about who to train, in what and when, and even for the first time, give us a national picture of how many people are working as journalists in South Africa.

Careful identification and design of Learnerships and work skills programmes and accreditation of short courses could help us overcome skills shortages and reassign rather than retrench employees in the sector.

The Print Media Chamber could be a vital forum for partnerships between providers and industry, for the exchange of information relating to the development of journalists.

Assessment skills and Unit Standards could be put to use to improve the quality of entry-level journalists, to manage the performance of employed journalists and by giving us objective means of assessment, assess the way we cope with diversity in our newsrooms.

In my opinion we have no choice but to push on through the red tape and ever changing demands of the system. There are some important tasks ahead.

We need to look closely at the issue of Learnerships for journalists. The SETA has promised the government it will deliver 700 of these by 2005. It's up to us to decide how many, if any, will come from journalism and the media.

These much-vaunted Learnerships could be as simple as the combination of substantial chunks of a three-year technikon course provided by the technikon, some additional in-house training and a substantial internship period at the contracting workplace. But the

Department of Education and the Department of Labour.

There's no doubt they're great visions.

Companies would pay a levy that would go towards education and training in their sector; the quality of the training being delivered in their sector would be checked and assured, they'd even get money back for training and retraining people through new types of apprenticeships; and if they were prepared to be a bit more organised and forward thinking on their training they'd be able to claim back most of the levy.

In the parallel NQF vision, people would be able to earn credits for what they had learned on the job; if they could meet certain standards of competence they would get credits that would go towards qualifications, and they could enter the education stream at almost any stage of their life without having to check out of their jobs and into full-time study. These standards would be agreed by groups of academic and industry experts and they would dovetail so well with industry's needs and wants that the "learners" would have no trouble finding a job once they qualified.

Many journalism educators and trainers thought the monetary incentives had great potential in the face of editorial staff cutbacks and continual raids on training budgets. Inspired by these visions we accepted nomination to the SETA Full Authority, to Advisory Committees, the National Standards Body 04 for Communication Studies and Language (NSB04) and last, but not least, the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) for Journalism and Audio-Visual Production. **But scores of meetings and workshops and reams of reports, minutes and memos later we find ourselves almost where we started.**

It's time to take stock of what, if anything, we've gained through all this expenditure of time and effort and to try to calculate the return on our sector's investment of approximately R10 million per month in skills development through its levies (SDLs).

The government is also beginning its own review of the NSDS before **formulating its next five-year plan.**

On the positive side, the Standards Generating Bodies brought

process of organising and registering all this is complex and difficult **and may be more effort than it is worth.**

It is particularly important for us to agree that we will in practice recognise these Learnerships or the new qualifications that emerge from the SGB and that is only going to be possible if we have all had a hand in their creation and management.

Unit Standards should become functional tools and be put to use in whatever way we can in order to assess their usefulness. Assessment skills themselves **are worth acquiring** for operational use even if they will never be used in formal assessments as envisaged by the SETA and SAQA.

But perhaps most challenging and urgent of all the tasks that needs doing, is the formulation of a skills plan for the sector.

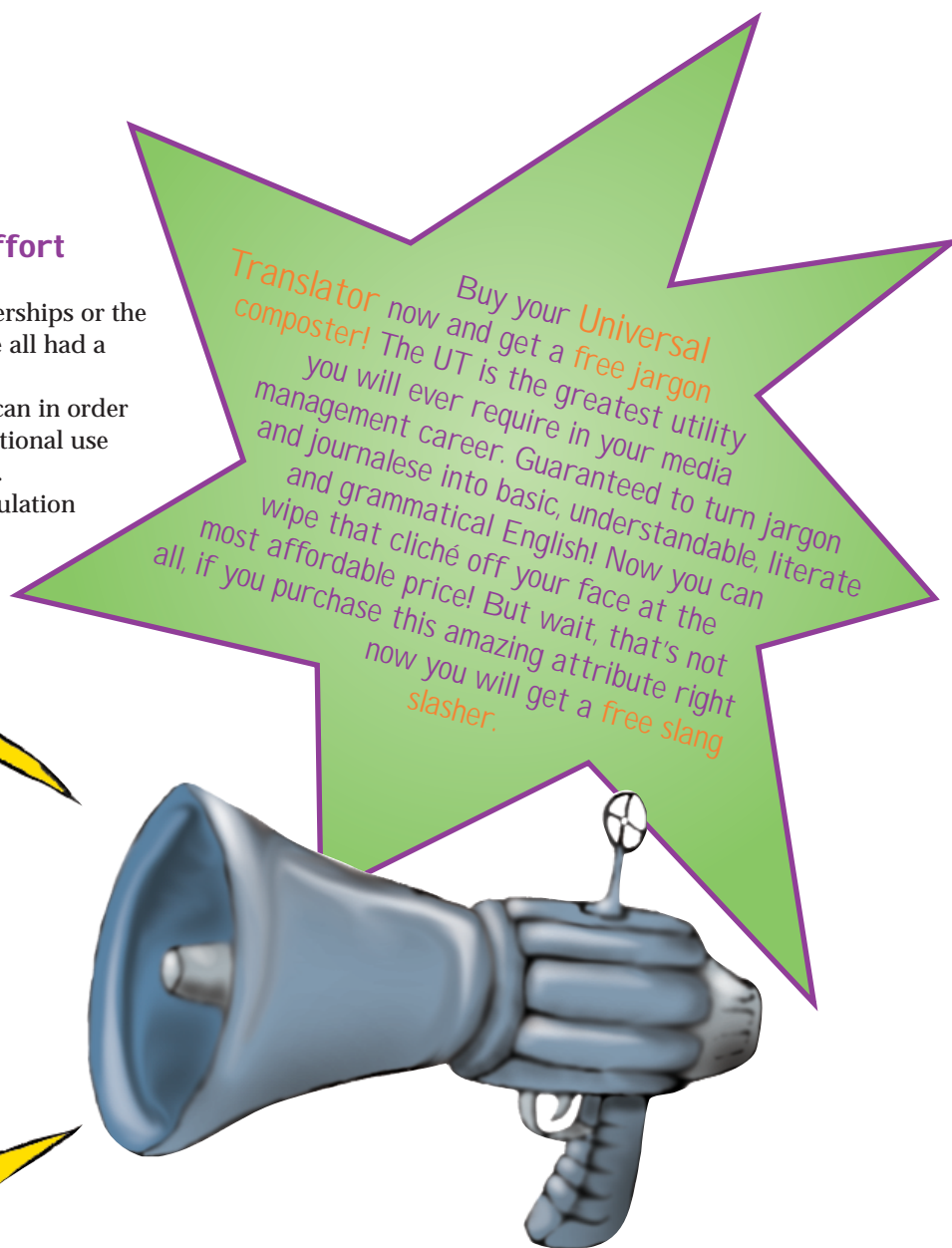
It will focus on the skills needed by the core areas of media businesses over the next five years, 2005 to 2009, and will provide the motivation for the release of the millions in the SETA coffers.

The SETA has to deliver this plan in September 2004 and this time round, it is imperative that stakeholders take an active role in drawing it up. The one we are working under currently had little or poor input from media.

We were ignorant of what was needed, we didn't have much information to draw on and we were still trying to find out what a Work Skills Plan was all about.

If we let this new opportunity to shape the process go by again, we have little hope of escaping the current skills development doldrums.

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Buy your **Universal Translator** now and get a **free jargon composer!** The UT is the greatest utility you will ever require in your media management career. Guaranteed to turn jargon and journalese into basic, understandable, literate and grammatical English! Now you can wipe that cliché off your face at the most affordable price! But wait, that's not all, if you purchase this amazing attribute right now you will get a **free slang slasher.**

A simple guide to skills development

The MAPPP SETA covers media, both print and electronic, advertising publishing, printing and packaging. It was established by the Department of Labour, and is governed, it is intended, by a Full Authority comprising representatives of employers and employees and professional bodies. These stakeholders are grouped in six sub-sector specific Advisory Committees, soon to become Chambers. The Chambers' functions, powers, resources and budget are still a work in progress.

Companies pay a 1% levy on the salaries they pay to employees. They pay this over to the South African Revenue Service, which pays it over to the SETA.

20% of the total levy goes into the National Skills Fund to train South Africans generally.

10% is to cover SETA administration costs. 10% goes into a Discretionary Fund and the remaining 60% can be claimed back by employers provided they've submitted a Work Skills Plan and quarterly reports of training.

At present there is no quality assurance involved in the process and no way of matching training plans with actual training.

If a company falls into the SME category and has fewer than 50 employees it must also pay a levy but can claim 60% of it back if it submits a copy of an external training provider's invoice.

The SETA acts as the facilitator and governing body for learnerships that must be registered with the Department of Labour. No learnerships in journalism have as yet been registered.

Learnerships are structured learning programmes that combine compulsory workplace learning and assessment with theoretical learning and assessment and lead to a qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework where all Unit Standards and Qualifications are registered.

To be party to a learnership, both the training provider and the workplace provider must be

accredited with a SETA.

Apprenticeships that currently exist are being phased out in favour of learnerships.

Internships equate to only one part of a learnership and cannot be used as a synonym for learnership.

The SETA will pay companies grants of set amounts for learnerships offered and completed but it is unlikely they will cover the entire cost of a learnership.

For instance, it has only budgeted R285 000 for 30 proposed learnerships in sub-editing. Companies providing learnerships would have to pay training costs and stipends to the contracted learners up front. Companies will also get tax rebates for learnerships registered and successfully completed.

Joint Implementation Plans (JIPs) have been agreed between the SETA and SAQA to fund some of the work of the Electronic Media Production SGB and Journalism SGB. This is because a) SAQA which governs SGBs does not have any money to fund them in their work of writing Unit Standards and Qualifications and b) Learnerships, work skills programmes and short courses and the education and training Quality Assurance bodies that fall under the SETA all need Unit Standards and Qualifications.

SAQA's role is to ensure the Unit Standards and Qualifications are up to the national standard required.

ETQAs established under the SETA will vet training provided to the sector by external providers and workplace providers. They will accredit assessors and providers and require that stakeholders use only accredited people and institutions.

PS: If you are still curious – the SIC code 32420 identifies companies publishing newspapers, journals and magazines, while the SIC code 96200 identifies those engaged in news agency or distribution activity. What SIC stands for has not yet been revealed.

the official version issued by the MAPPP SETA is contained in a booklet called "Skills Development: How it benefits your business".

Understanding the acronyms

DoL – Department of Labour
 ETQA – Education and Training Qualifications Assurance body
 ICTs – Information Communication Technologies
 IT – Information Technology
 JIP – Joint Implementation Plan
 MAPPP SETA – Media Advertising Publishing Printing and Packaging Sector Education and Training Authority
 NIZA – Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa
 NSDS – National Skills Development Strategy
 NSJ – Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre
 NQF – National Qualifications Framework
 NSB – National Standards Body
 SAMTRAN – Southern African Media Trainers Network
 SANEF – South African National Editors Forum
 SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority
 SDL – Skills Development Levies Authority
 SETA – Sector Education and Training Authority
 SGB – Standards Generating Body
 SIC Code – Standard Industrial Classification
 WAP – Wireless Application Protocol
 WSP – Workplace Skills Plan