

Equipping graduates for the new world of work

The Rhodes University Information Systems (IS) Department Advisory Board meeting took place at BSG's Johannesburg offices in Houghton on 30 May 2018. This two-decade long partnership between Academia and Industry continues to equip graduates to be as work-ready as possible for their first formal job in Industry.

Stakes for graduates are higher than ever, as employment opportunities are limited and potential employers shop around for the best candidates at a range of different universities.” says Stephen Flowerday, Head of the Department of Information Systems at Rhodes University. “Universities have an obligation to ensure that their curricula adequately prepares graduates for the working world, allowing them to not only compete with their peers, but excel.”

Over the years, South Africa's top universities have attempted to realise this through regular and open consultation with Industry. Rhodes University, recognising the need to align the curricula more closely with the needs of Industry, assembled the Information Systems Department Advisory Board almost two-decades ago. It meets biannually and is made up of Industry professionals with the experience to effectively advise the Faculty on critical areas of the curricula.

“Ensuring graduates have the skills they need.”

As a patron of education BSG Exec Chair, Greg Reis, has represented BSG on the Board for more than 17 years and has had the honour of being the chair of the board since 2005. Reis, who started BSG in 1997, has watched hundreds of IS and Computer Science (CompSci) graduates enter the working world, often without essential skills as a result of misaligned curricula. “By ensuring graduates leaving university are better equipped to handle the requirements of Industry, Board members have access to a higher calibre of graduate when it comes to hiring.”

At the Board meeting, Reis said, “It's the perfect partnership; we're in a position to ensure that graduates applying for positions in our organisations are armed with the skills they need to maximise their impact.”

Board member, Raymond Plotz, Chief Information

Officer (CIO) for Mediclinic Southern Africa echoed Reis' comments, “We experience challenges around the appointment of appropriate ICT skills to our organisation. We have a high unemployment rate in South Africa, but a large vacancy rate within the ICT discipline. This is indicative of a mismatch in the skills that job seekers have and what prospective employers are looking for.”

South Africa has continued to languish around the bottom of the class in mathematics and science education in World Economic Forum reports – skills vital to the ICT industry.

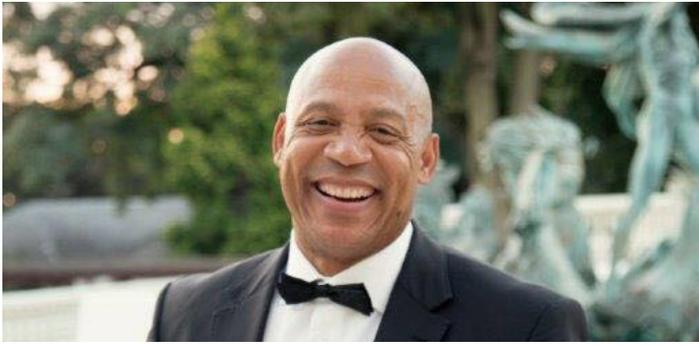
Board member for over 4 years, Strategic Advisor to the Group CEO at Southern Palace Group of Companies and former public sector CIO, Rodney de Koch, agrees, “We are seeing higher drop-out rates among tertiary students who are inadequately prepared by subjects like Maths Literacy. Dropping the pass rate makes it challenging for universities to get quality students. Maths Literacy is allowing learners to complete their matric, but not preparing them adequately to enter tertiary level. School leavers are now increasingly in a position where they are not getting accepted into university and, as a result, find getting a job ever more challenging. We as Industry need to be smart to assist here.”

Flowerday agrees, recognising faltering educational outcomes for students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.



Greg Reis, BSG Exec Chair and current chair of the Advisory Board

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Rodney de Koch, Strategic Advisor to the Group CEO at Southern Palace Group of Companies and former public sector CIO

“Increasingly school leavers struggle to meet university entrance requirements for mathematics.”

Bridging the STEM gap is of crucial concern to the Board. Flowerday warns against extending the duration of tertiary degrees without careful consideration. “Though this will allow us to spend more time with students to instil the necessary skills, this will increase the financial burden as they will need to pay for an extra year.”

“Stakes for graduates are higher than ever.”

“To solve this, we need to go back further. Government and Industry need to work together to recognise the importance of STEM education at basic education level. A lot has been done by government thus far, but much can still be done.” proposes de Koch.

“The main purpose for serving on the Rhodes Advisory Board is to provide collective strategic input and guidance to the faculty and give an industry perspective to balance and align Rhodes students for an active and productive work and business opportunity.” de Koch explains.

With members from all facets of the ICT industry, Boards like this one are uniquely positioned to assist and guide. The Board advises continued consultation between Government, Industry and Academia to ensure solutions can be found. We could all benefit from better equipped school leavers, who would be more likely to succeed at tertiary level and beyond.

BSG performs a vital role on the Board says Reis, “From a capability perspective, given BSG’s leading position in the South African professional services sector, we are able to provide pragmatic insights to the department as to how their curricula and teaching methods need to adapt to best prepare IS students for the work place. We use guest lectures (in person and virtual), mindful time spent thinking and reflecting with student groups on campus, funding support for research and academic prizes, as well as hosting Honours-level internships to help make a difference for education at Rhodes University.”



Stephen Flowerday, Head of the Department of Information Systems

Stephen Flowerday believes that the input of these Industry thought-leaders is invaluable to Rhodes University when shaping highly relevant curricula. Thanks to the input of Board members, Rhodes University’s IS graduates are a sought after commodity in the ICT industry. With this in mind, BSG has recommitted itself to the continued knowledge sharing and skills transfer facilitated by its involvement on this, and similar advisory boards.



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