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Rhodes Business School addresses critical skills shortage



“Much needed and critical skills in South Africa are being addressed through Rhodes Business School’s Certificate in Sustainable Business Analysis. Selecting its intake from talented, historically disadvantaged South African graduates, this programme produces exactly the kind of high-quality Business Analysts that Standard Bank and industry urgently requires.”

These are the words of Standard Bank CEO, Sim Tshabalala, following the announcement at the end of July 2014 that Standard Bank hired all 28 graduates from the 2013/14 SAP Banking Specialist Learnership.

The learnership is part of the six-month Business Analysis programme offered by Rhodes Business School. The programme was launched in 2012 and this is the second intake of graduates on the programme, from which Standard Bank has hired 100%.

400 graduates trained and employed

The programme has, to date, trained approximately 400 Business Analysts in South Africa, who have taken up a range of specialist posts in banking and business throughout the country.

“Historically, South Africa has relied heavily on foreign nationals to fulfill this vital role. Business Analysts play an instrumental part in defining the ‘blueprints’ for our future operations, identifying business improvements as well as supporting IT initiatives,” says Tshabalala, a Rhodes BA LLB graduate with an LLM from the University of Notre Dame.

“Partnering with Rhodes Business School academics has proven to be a true win-win situation and we have already made significant inroads into addressing the local busi-

ness analysis skills shortage. This programme is one of the most compelling reasons why I'm proud to be an Old Rhodian."

Developing skilled graduates and addressing unemployment

Rhodes Business School, with its focus on 'leadership for sustainability', is highly conscious of its role in South African society and its role as a bridge from academia to the business community.

"We conceived this programme in partnership with business to achieve two key objectives: to develop graduates in much needed skills areas and to address the major unemployment problem in South Africa," says Professor Owen Skae, Director of the Rhodes Business School.

"Our focus at Rhodes Business School is 'Leadership for Sustainability' and the development of graduates to take their place in the economy is a very important part of this."

Business Analyst Olwethu Mtirara

Mr Olwethu Mtirara grew up in Qunu in the Eastern Cape and has a BA in Business Management and Anthropology from the University of the Western Cape:

"God has blessed me in so many ways in my short career. One of these blessings is the Business Analysis course, which has given me a great opportunity at Standard Bank, followed by Nedbank, two of the biggest banks on the continent, to further my skills and my knowledge as a fully-fledged Business Analyst."

"I love what I am doing and I would like to emphasise that this course is doing a great deal to advance young black graduates in South Africa. Some day I would like to reciprocate and use my qualifications and experience to help other young, aspiring graduates to become Business Analysts."

Such is the success of the certificate programme that Rhodes Business School is currently developing it into a one-year postgraduate diploma, which it intends to launch in 2016. It will be the equivalent of an Honours qualification and will invariably further populate the Rhodes Business School's flagship MBA.

Rhodes Business School and Barifor

The Business Analysis Programme is a partnership between Rhodes Business School and Barifor, a business performance and consulting services company.

The founder and CEO of Barifor, Cedric Tyler, a Rhodes BCom alumnus, and a Visiting Fellow at Rhodes Business School, jointly developed the programme with Professor Skae.

It is based on Tyler's 'Business Genetics' approach, described in a book of that name which he co-authored with Stephen Baker whilst living and working in the United States. He returned to South Africa three years ago.

"It's all about developing convergent and integrated approaches to assist companies in understanding how they operate and how to implement broad-scale, improved performance across the business," Tyler explains.

The 5 Ws method

“Essentially what I’ve designed is a more complete, expanded approach to business processes, based on a thorough ‘5 Ws’ investigation method that analyses what the bank or company requires: who does what, where, when and with which information.”

He and Prof Skae matched this method to the escalating pool of unemployed graduates. They looked at the economic impact of South African banks hiring 300-400 foreign nationals per bank to do this work, and immediately recognised where they could make a difference.

“It was an innovative and exciting opportunity for us to take Cedric’s work that has had a profound impact on business modeling and business processes in leading United States organisations, and jointly academise it for the South Africa context,” says Skae.

Immediate appeal

The Business Analysis Programme immediately appealed to Standard Bank’s head of Business Performance Improvement, Ian Weir, and Standard Bank’s head of Business Design and Implementation for Core Banking in South Africa, Wally Fisher.

Standard Bank is currently migrating from the legacy system to SAP software in what is currently one of the largest banking SAP deployments in the world. It needs large number of astute business analysts to achieve this.

“Rhodes Business School offered exactly what we wanted and needed, and partnering on this programme has been one of the best decisions we have ever made,” says Fisher.

The growth of the graduates

“The growth of the learners on the learnership is exceptional. In their first week they were insecure youngsters, full of worries and doubts. They have since matured into highly professional, fully-fledged Business Analysts and Standard Bankers. Not only has this supported a key business objective of ours, it has helped people grow and find good employment, which flows back to their families, communities and the greater South African context.”

Weir, a Rhodes University BCom LLB graduate with an MBA from Cranfield (UK) adds: “Countless tasks are executed by computer systems, staff and customers daily in banks. The challenge globally is around getting process right to ensure that customers consistently have a great experience despite the complexity of these tasks.

“Put this together in the context of a bank like Standard Bank, which processes 25%-30% of the money in the South African economy, and you begin to understand the key importance of the Business Analyst. This is the person who translates what business needs and a wants into a language that IT understands and can precisely implement,” Weir explains.

Save the banks tens of millions of rands

He adds that the Rhodes Business School is the first in South Africa to deploy “the kind of comprehensive business analysis methodology they require, that will save the bank tens of millions of rands.”

Standard Bank is the first major supporter of the Rhodes programme. Deloitte South Africa also shared the vision and partnered with Rhodes Business School and the financial services Seta, FASSET, with the nationwide delivery of the programme in 2012 and 2013.

Other clients and benefits

Rhodes Business School also successfully delivered the programme at First National Bank, training two cohorts of Business Analysts in 2012 and 2013.

“What was exciting about the First National Bank programme was that we were training their existing Business Analysts. This demonstrated the versatility of this programme,” says Skae. “Whether we are training novice or seasoned Business Analysts, they all confirm the value of our approach.”