

Cape Chamber commends Department of Education

The Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry commends the Department of Basic Education (DBE) which has withdrawn its decision to standardise on software tools for the subjects of Computer Application Technology (CAT) and Information Technology (IT) in the senior band of Grades 10-12.

The decision was announced to all branches of education in Circular S15 of 15 December 2013 which withdraws the decision to standardise on software tool in Circular S9 of 9 September 2013 and retains the status quo.

Concerns were raised from industry reported on by the media and by individuals in the public domain of social media that the decision to standardise on software tools would have had a negative impact on the use of Free and Open Source Software and the use of current and relevant software programming languages.

Software skills in education is a critical issue

There has been a strong response from industry and various stakeholder groups including letters of concern and an online petition. Roderick Lim Banda, chair of the Cape Chamber Digital Portfolio Committee, says that "the consensus and such a unified voice from a wide set of stakeholders representing businesses, professionals, teachers, parents and students is a positive sign of our recognition that software skills in education is a critical issue."

The DBE not only took time to meet representatives from industry but also took time to review a wide range of concerns. It also called for a stakeholder meeting which took place on the 6th of December 2013. Various provincial departments also met with representatives of teachers and other stakeholders.

The Chamber believes that this was a wake up call for industry on the gap between education and the demand for skills to grow our knowledge economy. It is a problem that government alone cannot address and which requires involvement from businesses, non-profit organisations and society as a whole. Our economic growth and competitiveness is dependent on skills and the baseline and foundation is in the readiness and quality of our matriculants.

Through the process of engagement between various stakeholders and the Department of Basic Education it was clear that there are challenges facing administrators and teachers which government cannot tackle on its own. The lack of teachers must be supplemented by efforts of businesses, professionals, volunteers and parents who have relevant skills and experience to contribute to the process of making technology a stimulating and meaningful learning experience.

The process has also highlighted the need to review a curriculum that is over a decade old that positions computing in education as a narrow channel for specific university programs and professional careers. Our education system cannot rapidly adapt to the pace at which technology changes but the past decade has seen a much faster adoption of computing skills to the point where it has become a core competency in many if not most careers.

A step in right direction

To increase economic growth and reduce unemployment particular for youth unemployment, it is imperative that we improve the way in which we teach technical, creative and entrepreneurship in our education system and training in industry. Lim Banda states that "the decision by the Department of Education is a step in right direction and opens the way for improving the way in which industry and government can work together to improve our education system".

The teaching and adoption of technology and related skill sets requires continuous review and evaluation and wider stakeholder input must be included in the annual cycle of curriculum development and assessments. The Digital Portfolio Committee of the Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be prioritizing education in 2014 and will be establishing a forum for such discussions and publishing information that can in future serve as input into such a process.

The Chamber would like to call on businesses to be more involved and invested in ensuring that our education system contributes towards our economic growth and provides a means for eradicating poverty

"We commend the Government for listening to business and we hope this opens the door for better collaboration in future. This has provided an opportunity to the private sector to commit ourselves to improving the vital system of education that our children and the country deserves," Lim Banda concludes.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>