

A rebel with a cause



Ute Gass

For the first time, APSO National Executive dedicates an article to recognise an individual's outstanding contribution to our industry. Such recognition will become a regular feature in the APSO gram.

Ute Gass (Chairperson: Western Cape) can be described as one of the stalwarts of our industry – particularly in her many years of service and unwavering dedication to developing skills in South Africa.

Ute is single minded about her responsibility for a brighter skills future for all. This is in line with a public statement made by the Minister of Labour, Mr Madladlana: "The challenge of employment creation has reached a stage where neither government, labour nor business can afford to spare any effort towards finding a lasting solution to skills development."

Despite having to face many challenges, Ute is positive that she will achieve her goal. As a Master Assessor, she has, at no cost, committed more than two years of her time to employment and skills development - often to the detriment of her own company and staff.

In his State of the Nation address (February 2001), President Thabo Mbeki clearly recognised skills development as a national priority. This year, both the Government's Human Resources Development Strategy as well as the Department of Labour's National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) was launched.

Ute is adamant that Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMME's) are central to delivering skills and learnership targets as they employ in excess of 54% of the nation's economically active population. Unfortunately, they are often overlooked considering the practical implementation of SETA initiatives. SMME's often find themselves out of their depth when it comes to essentially basic issues such as Workplace Skills Plans (WSP's), Annual Training Reports (ATR's) and are further hampered by the lack of assessors in the Labour Recruitment industry. In a survey, APSO found that some skills development facilitators (SDF's) are charging SMME's as much as R2 600 to compile a simple WSP and ATR. This further exacerbates matters, considering that the fee set by the Service SETA is R300.

If it is true that SMME's are the largest employers, then these issues need to be addressed by APSO, SETA's, the Confederation of Associations in the Private Employment Sector (CAPES) and, on a larger scale, with International Confederations. Despite these challenges and the frustration of dealing with many

impracticalities in the system that inhibit her own, the SETA's and ultimately the National Skills Authority's ability to reach national skills targets, she remains dedicated to delivering sterling service in line with the NSDS objectives. Ute believes that SMME's are in the advantaged position to drive the National Skills Development Strategy. Her enthusiasm is demonstrated in her focus on assisting APSO members, the majority being SMME's, to align themselves with the NSDS.

Ute is President of the Institute for Personnel Service Consultants (IPSC), APSO's fully constituted and incorporated training arm and, until recently, served on the Services Sector for Training Authority (SETA's) Labour Recruitment Chamber Board. On behalf of our industry, I commend Ute Gass for her steadfast and always positive approach to skills development.

Ute, your contribution continues to pave the way for the future of our industry and South Africa, which inevitably depends on our country's ability to master and retain skills.

Michael van Staden
APSO President