

Bridge Maths and Science Learner Support Community for Effective Practice

Summary of the Tertiary Access Focus Group Meeting

Foundation Boardroom, Sasol Inzalo Foundation, The Mall Offices, Rosebank, Johannesburg

21 May 2014, 12h00 – 15h00

Dear Community Member

Zarina Khan facilitated the second Tertiary Access focus group meeting of 2014 with support from Carlene Gonzo and Barbara Dale-Jones. This meeting focused on tracking bursary beneficiaries' performance after the first year of study. Cynthia Xoli Malinga, Programme Manager at the Sasol Inzalo Foundation shared key findings with the focus group. This meeting also received updates from representatives of the messaging and Mapping subcommittees.

The following members of the community were present:

BRIDGE	Samantha de Reuck
GreenMatter	Liz Robson
Institute for Balanced Living	Jenny Dry
Maths Genius Leadership Institute (MGLI)	Edzai Zvobwo
MerSETA	Camilla Smith
National Business Initiative	Marianne Scott
PENREACH	Sabina Govere
Sasol Inzalo Foundation	Cynthia Xoli Malinga
Sasol Inzalo Foundation	Marietjie Vosloo
TEN	Mervin Patrick
Tshikululu Social Investments	Beatrice Water Meyer
Ukuqonda Institute	Gabriel Mphuthi
University of the People	Heather Third
Zenex Foundation	Lettie Miles

Understanding the Sasol and Sasol Inzalo Bursary Programmes

This focus group remains committed to understanding the Tertiary Access landscape and using the lessons learnt to support students to and through tertiary studies. In this meeting the central focus of discussions was a recent review of data provided by the bursary recipients of Sasol Group Services and the Sasol Inzalo Foundation bursaries. This data was collected using a six page survey using Survey Monkey. The two bursary initiatives support more than 500 students, at all levels (undergraduate to postgraduate) of tertiary studies in engineering, education, commerce and law. This data collection exercise assists bursary providers to determine how the students are performing after the first year of studies, a noted bottleneck to student success with many dropping out at that stage.

The two entities offer different forms of students support. The Sasol Group Services (SGS) bursars are given full cost bursaries that support the cost of tuition and student housing. The Sasol Inzalo Foundation (SaIF) bursaries are initially full cost tuition and student housing. The SaIF bursaries also offer additional support to

the students on their programme. Some students may be supported through half cost or access bursaries, as Cynthia goes on to explain.

Findings of the Survey Exercise

It is useful to note that the SGS bursaries are awarded to the best performing learners from across the board, regardless of their background. The SaIF bursaries are awarded to the most promising learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2013, 307 students received SGS bursaries while 221 students got SaIF bursaries.

The following slide gives an outline of the survey findings:

Key Findings

1. Key skills needed the most
 - Time management – even postgraduate
 - Effective study
 - Problem solving
2. Students can fail any year of study
3. Transition from school to university is the most challenging
4. Knowledge gaps are the hardest part academically
5. Intellectual pressure is the next hardest

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Key Skills

- Time management is the most needed skill for this group; on average 30% of the bursars expressed an interest in getting support in this area. The students explained that this skill would help them deal with the intellectual pressure of their studies.
- Approximately 25% of bursars would like support with effective study skills. This is aligned with managing the volume of work at each stage of their studies.
- Nearly a quarter of the bursary students asked for help with problem solving techniques.

Failure at tertiary and completion in the prescribed programme duration

Many of the students complete their studies in the recommended time. Over 60% of students in the SGS group and 63% of those in the SaIF group do so in the allotted time.

The Sasol Inzalo Foundation study found that about 37% of bursars would have to go through an extra year or two of study in order to get their qualifications. It is also important to know that the survey revealed that failure occurs during any year of study, not just first year. Almost one third of the SGS bursars found second year to be the most challenging; similarly a greater proportion (17%) of the SGS bursars needed to redo second year courses as opposed to 14% of the SaIF bursars. This may indicate that the SGS students, many of whom come from good high schools, may have sufficient skills to tackle first year. However, some do not manage to develop additional skills necessary to navigate the second year courses and beyond, successfully.

The SaIF learners require more support at first year. Thereafter, a much smaller proportion of these bursars need additional time to complete the courses for a given year of study, this implies that once they have a

solid foundation they can proceed more smoothly. SaIF invests a great deal of time and effort to catering for the socio-economic needs of the students and to providing appropriate intellectual support.

Knowledge gap and the transition

Almost one quarter of the respondents to this survey found the transition from school to university most challenging. Nearly half the student bursars found that knowledge gaps they had accumulated over time were the most challenging issue. Both these elements contribute to the intellectual pressure students feel on an ongoing basis as they pursue their studies.

Financial support

This focus group noted with interest that the SGS bursars who do not perform as required by their bursary commitment often lost funding while making up the failed courses. For the students in the SaIF bursaries programme a failed course results in reduced support, for example, only half of the value of the bursary is provided in the subsequent year of study. The foundation will also help these learners to acquire NSFAS loans for the shortfall because they often fall into the income brackets for financial need required to access these loans. In the case of those who fail yet again, SaIF offers an Access bursary. This is approximately one quarter of the full cost bursary and enables a student to register for the year's studies. This has prevented many students from becoming drop out statistics. Encouragingly, if the student manages to pass all the failed courses they can then be given access to the full SaIF bursary once again.

Tackling the challenges noted

In the discussion portion of the meeting the group considered three issues:

- a. The students' transition from school to university;
- b. Addressing student's knowledge gaps; and
- c. Developing needed skills for tertiary success.

The Sasol Inzalo Foundation noted that it is working on managing these challenges. The SaIF tries to isolate the challenging aspects of each year of study and offer specific support to assist the learning process at that level.

The SaIF assists students to deal with transitions by teaching them to deal with the inevitable pressure they will encounter in their studies. During the winter school programme, for example, SaIF bursars go through a "Pressure Day" a day focused on putting these young people through an intense programme for one day. After they have struggled with the project assignment throughout the day, they then have a project planning tutorial to show the benefits of planning. This is also designed to assist them with time management thinking as well.

Each year the students are also given some training on general thinking strategies and exposed to learning strategies in all the years they are sponsored by the SaIF. These learning strategies are emphasised in a way that underlines the need to master basic concepts and autonomously fill in the knowledge gaps from the school years.

Update from the Messaging Subcommittee

Jenny Dry advised the focus group that this committee was busy setting up a brainstorming session with guidance from Chantal at GreenMatter. The Messaging subcommittee is grateful for the link created with Chantal Kotze from GreenMatter, Head of Marketing and Stakeholder Management. She joined the committee to help clarify and streamline thinking on potential campaigns and draft messages. Among the key questions Chantal posed are:

- Who is the primary audience?
- Who is the secondary audience?
- Who are the influencers?
- What goals does the subcommittee have?
- What gaps are there and who else is in this communication space?

Some decisions made in the subcommittee meeting include:

- a. This work should be a national campaign
- b. The committee needs further information on the various stakeholders groups
- c. It will be a phased campaign that will span at least five years
- d. A potential budget for this could be around R20 million if there is a media partner. In the absence of a media partner this budget should be approximately R40 million; over the five year period
- e. Given the scale of funds required, it was noted that the community would need a significant amount of financial backing from business and government to execute this
- f. The marketing campaign should mirror the access chain's progression and the messages shared in each phase should build on one another.
- g. Objective: to build an educated society, like Singapore, for example.
- h. Work in a complimentary manner with other initiatives
- i. Disseminate the messages can take place in a number of ways including workplace wellness programmes, hair salons, social grant queues, clinics, media channels, taxi ranks among others.
- j. The next step is to have a brainstorming session with communications and marketing professionals on 18th July 2014

Update from the Mapping Subcommittee

The focus group noted that the Mapping Committee continues to define mechanisms for mapping tertiary access. After the first meeting the purpose and objectives of this community were defined. Work in the interim has built on those objectives.

Barbara Dale-Jones showed the focus group some of the online platforms that are currently influencing thinking in the subcommittee. The examples shared included:

- Strive Together – for its roadmap that traces the learners' journey from cradle to career at various levels. Each icon clicks through to additional information. This is comparable to the Tertiary Access chain and it also offers a network and additional resources.
<http://strivetogether.org/>
- Edutopia – this site provides resources from grade K through to grade 12 in the American scenario. There are blogs, classroom guides and whole school development tools among numerous elements that can be found on this website. Although it was noted as a slightly

congested portal, the segmentation of resources according to learner levels is attractive.

<http://www.edutopia.org/>

- Bie.org – this is an impressive American portal that allows online communities to form and aggregate resources. www.bie.org

Liz Robson, a member of this committee also noted the vital importance of advanced search tools on this portal that allow the information to be filtered in a variety of ways. The committee is speaking to Florus Devenage, a web and database designer who is helping the group visualise how a mapping portal should be structured. The subcommittee expressed gratitude to the Zenex Foundation for facilitating this introduction.

The developer has urged the committee to clarify the stakeholder groups and their information requirements to ensure that the basic layout of the mapping tool is correct from the onset. The committee then asked for assistance from the group in identifying the key issues certain stakeholders would need on the mapping tool under development. The focus group discussion managed to identify three groups: learners, bursary / funding providers and ordinary citizens.

Community outcomes

The Tertiary Access focus group aims to contribute to a smoother transition from school to the world of work for maths, science and technology graduates. Working with communities for effective practice, BRIDGE has the following objectives:

- The contribution of the community to the whole system;
- Creating common purpose, peer support and trust among stakeholders;
- The maximising of resources by the community;
- The spread of effective practice within the community and its associated stakeholders (Horizontal integration); and
- The vertical integration of policy and practice.

The Sasol Inzalo Foundation expressed a commitment to common purpose and the spread of effective practice by leading this session. Cynthia's presentation was clear and focused on key questions stakeholders continue to grapple with in supporting budding professionals. Marietjie also contributed to the spread of effective practice by volunteering to share an update on this focus group with the wider Maths and Science Learner Support community in the main second quarter meeting.

Defining the mapping solution is a distinct step in attempting to integrate policy with practice. The group looked at all the stakeholders present in the room and sought to define each group's information needs in relation to the mapping portal. When completed this will be a valuable resource for government, communities, funders and civil society, among others. The mapping subcommittee will continue to develop the ideas shared with the developer's guidance.

Best wishes,

The BRIDGE Team

July 2014