

South Africa's oldest business short course celebrates its 100th intake

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The Programme for Management Development at the UCT Graduate School of Business is the longest continuously running business short course in South Africa and this September it celebrates its 100th intake.

In the 1960s, the business school landscape in South Africa was a different animal to what it is today. Back then there were just two schools in operation: The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) established in 1964; and the University of Pretoria Business School, established a few years earlier.

The GSB launched a part-time MBA programme in 1964 and, in 1968, it launched its first short course – the Programme for Management Development (PMD) – which is now considered to be the oldest continuously running such course in the country, celebrating its 100th intake in September 2018.

“Fast-forward 50 years and Executive Education in South Africa is now a fiercely competitive, multibillion-rand industry,” says Kumeshnee West, Director of Executive Education at the GSB.

Sixteen business schools participated in the most recent *Financial Mail* survey of the industry, which highlighted that South African business schools are now facing mounting competition, not just from new international schools but from traditional consulting firms such as PwC that are venturing into the market.

“The potential executive education pickings are sufficiently rich that a growing phalanx of foreign institutions is gathering around the table,” writes David Furlonger. Of these Duke and Harvard are prime examples. Last year, 1,800 corporate students passed through the classrooms of Duke’s Johannesburg campus.

West says that it is a tough but exciting environment to operate in. “You have to be ahead of the game,” she says. “Yes we get to draw on our five decades of experience at the GSB, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We strive to offer relevant and transformative learning experiences.” She adds that PMD has stayed the distance because it has been able to reinvent itself as the years have gone by. “The need for management development is a constant,” she says, “though what is required of managers and leaders has changed over time. Today’s working environment is of course changing at an exponential rate thanks in part to the rise of AI and digital technology – and business schools have a duty to keep ahead of this curve and help our clients to do the same.”

Jenny Boxall, who co-designs and facilitates the PMD agrees: “Financial acumen and technical expertise are still rated highly in workplaces, but research shows that managers with self-awareness and self-knowledge are more effective and better able to lead productive teams in today’s workplaces,” she says. “The course is therefore putting ever-more emphasis on self knowledge, exploring how people communicate, how messages are interpreted and how this process can be improved upon.”

The WEF Future of Jobs report puts people management, emotional intelligence, and coordinating with others in the top 10 skills list required to be successful in 2020. And a 2017 survey by the *Financial Times* of what employers are looking for today found that the ability to work with a wide variety of people is cited by 76% of employers as a core competency required of business school graduates.

“While some people are naturals when it comes to these so-called softer skills, most benefit from guidance in developing them,” says Boxall. “By gaining insight into your own strengths and weaknesses and becoming attuned to your own blind spots, solid people skills are developed that make us better at relating to others as well.”

It is especially important, she adds, that these skills are developed in managers at middle and senior level in organisations.

“Managers occupy positions of tremendous importance in companies. They are the primary influencers of behaviour within organisations, they are jugglers of multiple functions in many directions, and influence staff and frequently perform a make-or-break role in several areas. People-savvy managers can improve productivity, profitability and sustainability – and that’s the bottom line.”

The 100th intake of the Programme for Management Development runs in September in Cape Town. The programme will also be offered for the first time this year at the GSB’s Johannesburg office in Sandton. For more information go to <http://bit.ly/GSBPMDPR>.

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