

TRAINING & RECRUITMENT

Feature by Liesl Venter, Ed Richardson and Melisa Ntephea

Candidates need to hit the ground running

Producing workplace-ready graduates is becoming an increasingly important priority as the logistics and supply chain sector evolves and employers seek candidates who can contribute from day one.

According to Dr Nazmira Mohamed, programme coordinator for Boston's BCom Supply Chain Management, BCom Management Marketing and Postgraduate Diploma in Management, bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world operations remains one of the biggest challenges facing higher education.

"Educational institutions have to continuously review and update their curricula to ensure graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills required by industry," she said.

Mohamed added that sustainability and green logistics were becoming increasingly important, particularly as South Africa's logistics sector responded to changing customer

expectations and environmental requirements. At the same time, training is shifting towards global logistics and compliance, reflecting the realities of international trade.

She said employers were increasingly looking for graduates with digital skills as logistics companies invested in warehouse automation, digital freight tracking and other technology-driven solutions. Companies are also placing greater emphasis on data interpretation, systems integration and digital tools, as automation reshapes supply chain operations.

To address these changing requirements, Boston has incorporated modules such as Supply Chain Analytics, Digital Transformation of Supply Chain Operations, Global Logistics

Management and Business Ethics into its curriculum.

"The freight sector's growth is being held back by skills shortages. Boston's balanced curriculum of commerce and supply chain modules directly addresses this by producing graduates who

are ready for industry," she said.

Recruitment requirements are also evolving. Mohamed said employers were experiencing shortages of experienced transport economists, procurement specialists and

professionals with expertise in freight forwarding and customs clearing. Analytics and costing skills are also in high demand, while planners, transport coordinators and transport specialists remain among the hardest positions to fill.

Mohamed said demand for

training and skills development continued to grow, particularly across the retail and manufacturing sectors.

"We are seeing particular demand from retailers for training in areas such as inventory management to help reduce stock-outs and improve operational efficiency."

While demand for training is increasing, she acknowledged that smaller companies often struggled to afford advanced digital training, despite the growing need to equip employees with new technology skills.

Looking ahead, Mohamed expects training to place greater emphasis on project management, global logistics and digital technologies, while employers increasingly seek adaptable graduates capable of managing both local and international supply chain challenges.

She said skills development would increasingly combine online learning with practical South African case studies to better prepare graduates for the workplace. LV

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Bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world operations remains one of the biggest challenges facing higher education.

– DR NAZMIRA MOHAMED

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AI proficiency a must-have

Training in the logistics industry should move beyond teaching only traditional transport, warehousing, inventory management and customs procedures to helping staff to master artificial intelligence (AI) tools, according to training specialists and managers.

“South African supply chain professionals face a unique storm: unpredictable port delays, fluctuating fuel costs and shifting consumer demands. Relying on manual spreadsheets and legacy systems means you’re reacting to disruptions instead of predicting them,” according to a training academy’s website.

The needs are identified in the Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) strategic plan 2025–2030.

It states: “In the forwarding and clearing subsector, automation in warehousing and cargo handling is boosting efficiency, reducing errors and improving demand management.”

It recognises that the logistics industry is rapidly adopting AI to improve demand forecasting, route optimisation, warehouse automation, inventory management, predictive maintenance, customs documentation, risk management, supply chain visibility and customer

service through AI chatbots.

“This technological advancement necessitates that all employees become proficient with technology. To stay relevant and competitive, employees must be upskilled to effectively collaborate with these new technologies,” according to TETA.

Rather than being seen as a replacement for logistics professionals, AI should be

treated as a tool which supports faster, data-driven decision-making while employees provide operational judgement, customer engagement and regulatory oversight.

Modern training should therefore focus on working alongside AI systems rather

than competing with them.

Courses should integrate AI literacy, AI-assisted decision-making and practical digital skills that enable employees to work effectively with AI technologies while maintaining human oversight.

This is particularly important within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where regional integration, cross-border trade and the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) are increasing the demand for digitally skilled

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Modern training should focus on working alongside AI systems rather than competing with them.



AI is helping logistics companies improve efficiency, from optimising transport routes to automating warehouse and fulfilment processes.

logistics professionals.

Through the training, staff should be able to grasp how AI is utilised across logistics and supply chain activities, utilise machine learning models for demand forecasting and inventory control, analyse routes, optimise transport using AI-based techniques and automate decision-making processes within warehouses and fulfilment operations.

Training should emphasise practical workplace applications rather than programming.

The good news is that no major investment in hardware or software is needed.

It can start with open-source or free no-code applications which run on existing computer systems.

Tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Excel AI and Perplexity can speed up the writing of delivery reports, preparing incident reports, summarising transport regulations, drafting customer emails and developing standard operating procedures. ER



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Technology

Technology is reshaping the logistics sector, driving innovation, efficiency and new business models. This feature highlights the latest developments, challenges and opportunities.

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Three qualifications the industry can't afford to lose

Government's decision to extend enrolment periods for legacy qualifications has provided a level of assurance for some professionals. This decision, however, has left the industry with lingering questions as uncertainty looms over whether the freight sector is developing the skills it will need in practice in the years ahead.

CEO of the Institute of Customs and Freight Forwarding (ICFF), Ingrid du Buisson, believes the more pressing issue for industry is ensuring that the occupational qualifications supporting today's freight workforce remain available. While government has extended older qualifications, she says occupational programmes that have either already expired or are approaching expiry should be prioritised.

Occupational qualifications reflect the skills required by the modern freight and logistics sector, making them an urgent focus area for extension by government.

Among these, the Occupational Certificate: Clearing and Forwarding Agent (SAQA ID 96368) stands out as a priority. The qualification expired in December last year and is often a starting point for careers in customs clearing and freight forwarding.

"It is the operational qualification that prepares people to work in the industry," Du Buisson said. "It equips learners with the practical competencies employers require, from customs procedures and freight documentation to international trade processes."

This qualification was introduced as part of the gradual shift towards occupational qualifications. It was designed through engagements with industry to better reflect current workplace requirements and replace outdated legacy programmes.

Another key qualification is the Occupational Certificate: Supply Chain Practitioner (SAQA ID 110942). It is also due to expire later in December, and Du Buisson describes this qualification as a reflection of the way supply chains have been increasingly integrated and technology driven. It requires practitioners who fundamentally understand logistics planning, inventory management and end-to-end supply chain coordination.

As supply chains become more complex, Du Buisson argues that industry requires qualifications that can develop practical workplace competence – not just theoretical learning.

Equally important is the Occupational Certificate: Customs Compliance Manager (SAQA ID 102499), which will expire in December. According to Du Buisson, growing regulatory and increasingly sophisticated customs environments mean companies need professionals who understand compliance, risk management and border administration.

"Customs compliance has become a specialised discipline, requiring continual professional development as legislation and international trade requirements evolve," Du Buisson adds.

She believes that long term, these qualifications will support career progression from operational roles, all the way to management and specialist positions.

"Industry is not saying legacy qualifications have no place. Our concern is that the qualifications currently preparing people for today's freight environment must not expire."

For the ICFF, this discussion is simply around ensuring qualifications that form the foundation of customs, freight forwarding and supply chain careers continue to produce the skilled professionals industry will need in the future. MN

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Training & Recruitment

Real-world exposure an ongoing challenge

A global shortage of skilled supply chain professionals is placing renewed emphasis on training and staff retention, while the logistics industry is demanding a different mix of skills than it did five years ago. As technology and AI become as important as operational experience, employers are looking for professionals who can adapt to a fast-evolving workplace.

According to Professor Rose Luke of the University of Johannesburg's Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (Africa), technical expertise is no longer enough, with organisations increasingly

seeking professionals who can combine data-driven decision-making with strong interpersonal and leadership skills.

While soft skills have always been essential, Luke says the growing use of AI has introduced an entirely new dimension to workforce development.

"There is a lot of training required around AI, including how to use it effectively, as well

as the ethics and governance surrounding its use," she says. "Data science and data analytics remain critical, but it is equally important to understand how to combine AI with real intelligence."

Sustainability and environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles are also becoming central to supply chain operations, requiring professionals to develop new

competencies alongside traditional logistics knowledge. As a result, Luke says training must be ongoing, current and relevant, while companies will need to do everything they

can to retain skilled employees.

Dr Nazmira Mohamed, programme coordinator for Boston's BCom Supply Chain Management, BCom Management Marketing and Postgraduate Diploma in Management, says employers are increasingly seeking multi-skilled graduates who can combine traditional supply chain expertise with digital capabilities.

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The breadth of the logistics and supply chain profession makes it impossible to cover every workplace requirement in a single curriculum.

— PROFESSOR ROSE LUKE



Technology and AI are reshaping the skills required across the logistics and supply chain sector, placing pressure on educational institutions to adapt.

"Businesses are looking for professionals who can manage contracts, procurement, costing and transport economics while also optimising digital systems," she says. "Recruitment is increasingly favouring candidates with exposure to automation and data analytics."

Whether educational institutions can keep pace with these changing requirements remains an ongoing challenge. Luke believes South Africa's tertiary institutions are producing graduates with strong foundations, but says the breadth of the logistics and supply chain profession makes it impossible to cover every workplace requirement in a single curriculum.

"The field is so broad that it is not always possible to

cover every aspect that may be required in the workplace," she says. "What we hope to do is ensure that our graduates enter the workplace equipped with the ability to adapt and learn new skills quickly."

She said practical workplace exposure remained one of the biggest gaps between academic training and industry requirements. While universities have introduced a range of initiatives to give students real-world experience, industry has an equally important role to play.

"Students could benefit from greater exposure to practical workplace issues through initiatives such as holiday placements and other opportunities to gain hands-on industry experience," she said. LV



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