



# WHY FLEXIBLE, STUDENT-CENTRIC TRAINING IS CRITICAL

Executive director of the Southern African Institute of Welding (SAIW)  
**JOHN TARBOTON** shares how the pandemic has influenced the organisation to relook its training programmes.

**S**AIW is sometimes seen as having a 'take it or leave it' attitude and our courses are often considered unaffordable. As a result, we have taken a long hard look at how we operate and reimagine who we are and how we do things.

We also have a dedicated student liaison officer who is an experienced SAIW staff member and can provide detailed information and advice on career choices and how students can attain their goals and aspirations through the upskilling that we offer.

Looking at the practicalities of training amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant financial fallout, the SAIW management team visited a substantial number of its members

and clients in the first three months of this year. During these meetings, it became clear that many of its fabricator members have reduced their number of employees, and it has therefore become exceedingly difficult to release an employee to attend a course.

Some students have even had to request refunds for courses that they had paid for because they were denied time off from work. This is purely because employers have retrenched staff and cannot afford to give students extensive time off work, even if the course is funded by the employee. So there is a demand for after-hours virtual courses



**John Tarboton**

## VIRTUAL LEARNING

Tarboton says that another COVID-19 related innovation that needs to be implemented across all training institutions is virtual learning, where the content allows.

Virtual training has a host of added benefits for the student – it reduces travel, accommodation

and related costs, particularly for those from out of town. This would also allow employees to be at work and attend online courses for those days that the instruction is all theory. ■

**OUR NEW MODULAR APPROACH, FOR INSTANCE, WILL GIVE EMPLOYERS THE FLEXIBILITY TO TRAIN PEOPLE WHEN THEIR WORKLOAD ALLOWS.**

accompanied by physical or virtual sessions on Saturdays and other practical components and interactions, such as tutorials, which will require a physical presence.

## FLEXIBILITY IS NEEDED

What training institutions must realise is that we must work hand in hand with industry so that collectively we provide students with the skills our crippling economy needs right now. How this translates into practicality is that training institutions should allow more flexibility when it comes to training schedules.

Our new modular approach, for instance, will give employers the flexibility to train people when their workload allows. A course could be completed over, say, two years. Modules will typically be one week and after each module, a class test will be written, and the module can be 'banked'. The student can then complete the next module when finances or workloads allow.

Previously, smaller modules were also often presented at a fabricator's facilities on a particular topic relevant to their needs. Ultimately, all the courses will be modularised to provide this flexibility and to allow customisation of courses where desirable.

A student-centric, flexible approach has also been applied to the payment of courses where SAIW now offers long-term payment options via the online revolving credit service Mobicred.