

# COLLABORATING TO DEVELOP THE WORKFORCE

In 2021, as Chief Executive of the Bambisanani Partnership, I met with Dr Thobile Sifunda, Head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Sport and Recreation, to discuss a range of potential collaborations. We agreed that some joint training of physical education teachers and sports coaches in both the UK and South Africa could have enormous potential benefits for all concerned and should be explored. As a result, Leeds Trinity University, a key Bambisanani partner, contacted representatives from the Department for Education and the Department of Sport and Recreation in KwaZulu-Natal. What emerged, in a time of Covid restrictions and lockdowns, was the idea to link both lecturers and students within a digital space in order to ‘work together and learn together’ in the true spirit of the Bambisanani Partnership. At the time, students at Leeds Trinity University were unable to undertake professional work placements within their chosen occupational fields so the alternative possibility of digital placements was discussed and developed.

More specifically, digital placement provided second-year Leeds Trinity University students, across a range of degree programmes, with the opportunity to use their theoretical knowledge of physical education and sport to develop teaching and coaching resources for use in South Africa, under the supervision of Sheila King, Dr Chris Rowley and Dr Nicola Arjomandkhah. The students worked in collaboration with their South African peers, who were also on placements from a range of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges within the KwaZulu-Natal region, to design and produce resources which aligned with the South African curriculum. In keeping with the collaborative nature of the Bambisanani Partnership, the placement officially launched with a virtual meeting between the five Leeds Trinity University students and their peers in South Africa, and they were joined by the aforementioned staff from Leeds Trinity University and Mr Mduduzi Madlala, the project leader and key contact within South Africa. Following this initial exchange of ideas, questions and information, sub-groups were set up for the remainder of the project, led by at least one student from both countries. This enabled continued communication and collaboration for the duration of the project, as the students sought to establish specific project aims and monitor subsequent progress towards these objectives.

The project provided a range of benefits to the development of the physical education and sports coaching workforce in both countries. The students involved in the project received a valuable opportunity to apply their theoretical and practical knowledge within a real-world setting; they developed their digital skills across various software and platforms; they broadened their cultural awareness through active engagement and collaboration with peers from another country; they developed their leadership and communication skills; and they worked effectively as part of a wider team, collaborating with a range of stakeholders both within the UK and South Africa. They were very positive about the initiative:

*“I loved meeting new people during this placement. One of the most challenging aspects was communicating with the South African students over WhatsApp and working on through despite the poor-quality reception via video connection. What I’ve learnt during this placement is to always be proactive and make things happen”.*

Nathaniel Wilson-Fleming, second year Sports Coaching student at Leeds Trinity University

*“My experience for this South African placement was filled with many challenges and rewards. I started the process feeling quite unsure but excited about the work I would be involved in. Working with new people as well as people abroad in a collaborative project was very appealing. A challenge throughout the experience was communication with our South African colleagues as both sides were working with different internet access. This made finding out exactly what was expected more difficult; however this was all solved in the end. One thing I really enjoyed was asking our colleagues about their experiences and getting to know them better. This allowed me to see the bigger picture and how the work that we would be doing would impact the community. This made the experience a lot more impactful and rewarding. Overall, I found the experience to be very fulfilling and worthwhile and I am very thankful for it.”*

Eilish McGovern, second year Exercise, Health and Nutrition at Leeds Trinity University



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*"I have gained so much more knowledge and experience through this collaboration, particularly in the session planning for soccer teamwork. I would be very happy indeed to continue interacting with the students in the UK."*

Mbongeni Masinyane, a qualified graduate in Coaching Science from Esayidi TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal

There are also long-term benefits for the institutions involved in the project. Mduduzi Madlala, from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Higher Education, reflected that the effective delivery of this digital placement project has led to further exciting developments for the universities and the Bambisanani Partnership. For example, the University of Technology (DUT) in Kwa-Zulu Natal has begun to collaborate with both Leeds Trinity University and the TVET colleges in the implementation of the programme. Meetings between staff have also identified and discussed the potential for future information exchange and skills transfer between students and lecturers, with direct university to university links taking the project to a new level. Mr Shoji, Project Manager for DUT, is keen to share resources, develop joint study modules and involve local schools as well as the TVET colleges. Similarly, Dr Chris Rowley, Senior Lecturer for Sports Psychology at Leeds Trinity University, recognises

the potential for further internationalising their physical education and sports coaching curricula. Although the digital placements were initially seen as a way to compensate for the absence of the international volunteering visits that Leeds Trinity students usually take as part of their Bambisanani work, they now offer a way to facilitate further collaboration and cultural exchange.

Huge praise must go to everyone involved in what was effectively a pilot of a completely new area of collaboration for us all. New contacts have been made, new relationships developed and new ways of working identified. The UK students learned from the strengths of the South African students and the South African students learned from the strengths of the UK students. This is precisely what the Bambisanani Partnership is about. There is clearly a desire from both sides to take this further and I look forward to seeing the digital work develop.

For more information about the Bambisanani Partnership, visit [www.bambisananipartnership.org](http://www.bambisananipartnership.org) ■

**David Geldart**

David Geldart is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Bambisanani Partnership.

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