



Free State Department of Education

Country: South Africa

Location: Free State, South Africa

Industry: Education

Software and services:

Microsoft Partners in Learning

Professional Development

Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert

Microsoft Showcase Schools Program

Websites:

<http://www.education.fs.gov.za/>

<http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/>

Partners:

SchoolNet SA

ICTISE Division: University of Free State

The Free State Department of Education is committed to implementing a formal learning pathway for teachers in the Free State. Instead of offering one course on basic computer literacy and then moving on to the next school, schools in the Free State are selected each year to work through a number of courses.

Since 2010 the Free State Department of Education has commissioned SchoolNet SA to offer the Microsoft Partners in Learning ICT Skills for Teachers, HelpDesk and ICT Leadership for Education Managers courses to teachers from approximately twenty schools per year. This has led to over 6 000 teachers mastering basic computer skills for classroom administration and lesson preparation; school managers learning about ICT policies and the appropriate use of technology at their schools; and selected teachers and learners acquiring technical skills to undertake basic trouble shooting and computer lab maintenance.

Every year since 2009 approximately a thousand Free State in-service and pre-service teachers have benefitted from the Microsoft Partners in Learning courses, the Innovative Schools Program or the Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert Program. Whilst Microsoft continues to provide some training in this province, the Free State Department of Education saw the value of scaling the Partners in Learning professional development courses so that more Free State schools could benefit from this training.



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"In the ICT Skills for Teachers course, context makes such a difference. Teachers can see how computer skills will make their lives easier. They leave the training with something they can use on Monday. If they are making a test that they will use, they do not see the workshop as a waste of time."

Randall Pienaar
Free State Department of Education

"So many labs are only used by the teachers or the learners who are learning about computers. Our aim is to get teachers using ICT with the learners as part of their teaching."

Randall Pienaar, Free State Department of Education

eLearning is a Provincial Priority

Teachers begin with the Microsoft Partners in Learning ICT Skills for Teachers, and from there, some are selected to attend clustered training in ICT integration where they complete the One Step Further and WebQuests courses. Teachers are then encouraged to pursue project-based learning courses and to eventually enter their learning activities in both the National Teachers Awards and the Microsoft in Education Forum competitions. In addition to these courses, the ICT Leadership for Education Managers and HelpDesk courses are held in each district to build management and technical skills which help ensure that teachers work within a supportive environment that has working computer facilities.

Randall Pienaar, acting Chief Education Specialist for eLearning at the Free State Department of Education, is a master trainer for the Microsoft Partners in Learning ICT Skills for Teachers and Student HelpDesk courses. Randall says that through using the content of the HelpDesk course teachers and learners from a school in Botshabelo were able to dismantle and fix four or five old, broken computers, install an operating system and network them all within five days. These skills and the ability to maintain a computer lab are crucial when schools are often reliant on donated second hand computers and receive little technical support.

The eLearning unit of the Free State Department of Education consists of just two people but it is able to achieve a lot by working with the ICT coordinators of the District Teacher Development Centres, the University of the Free State and SchoolNet SA. Innovation Days, roadshows, TeachMeets and other workshops for subject advisors and teachers are held in collaboration with the ICTISE Division of the University of the Free State and Microsoft Partners in Learning contributes their courseware and capacity building.

The Free State Innovation Days play a major role in inspiring teachers to integrate technology into their classrooms. Each event can accommodate 250 teachers with the IT centre of the University of the Free State providing a hands-on experience for all attendees. Teachers have an opportunity to see a number of teachers demonstrate how they are using technology in their classrooms and presenters include winners or finalists from the National Teachers Awards and Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts. These teachers showcase their projects and inspire others by showing what is possible, sometimes despite a shortage of resources.

Key Technology

- Office 365
- Office

For More Information

Microsoft in Education
<https://education.microsoft.com>

Microsoft Showcase Schools
<http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/school-leaders/showcase-schools/default.aspx>