Editor’s Note

RAPPROCHEMENT

South Africa has always revelled in contradiction, and the skills landscape is no exception to this rule. Consider the widespread misconception that the South African education and training ecosystem is incapable of producing anything of lasting value. Nothing could be further from the truth, as our cover story indicates. In fact, the country that pioneered triple-bottom-line reporting also enjoys the fourth highest research funding in the world, thanks in no small part to vibrant institutions such as the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement as well as corporate partners with their heads properly screwed on.

This exceptional degree of higher order skills can only be bolstered by the recent announcement by the South African Research Chairs Initiative of 54 new funded research chairs, which brings the Department of Science and Technology’s total investment to 157 university research chairs at over R1 billion.

Yet, unemployment proceeds apace, as the economy haemorrhages skilled artisans and college-leavers find themselves hard put to find work.

Analysis of the problem yields different conclusions according to perspective, but clearly government can do much to improve the situation, while private sector priorities must always be examined from a people perspective.

Certainly, the options for integrating successful high-level research programmes and challenging artisan development initiatives will be high on the agenda at the 2014 ArcelorMittal Skills Development Summit, taking place at the CSIR ICC in Tshwane on 5 and 6 August.