

# Training to become skilled





**F**INDING a smooth passage for young people between academia and the workplace is particularly important in countries like Oman where there is a real drive to make vocational jobs open to locals, but tertiary education options are limited. The National Training Institute (NTI) was established way back in 1985, but is still a fast growing and dynamic agency aimed at helping companies in Oman to train their staff to industry standards. Through their experience in the market and understanding as an educator, the NTI has become a key enabler in Oman for companies looking to localise their workforces.

Their programmes cover all areas of business, from training check-out staff in supermarkets to engineers in the oil field, as well as providing courses on leadership for management. Through their six training centres that are scattered throughout the country, it has put the NTI

in a good position to cater to the current demands of the industry and government led demands in Omanisation.

NTI's CEO Lawrence Alva says, "NTI is an institute that helps organisations to develop their people but we also help the individuals develop their careers. The idea is to find out what organisations' needs are and to serve them."

Alva has helped to develop countless workers over his 30 years of experience in the industry, and the 21 of these with the NTI has seen more doors opening for Omanis in getting into vocational jobs and management positions. He started his career as a vocational training instructor and has now progressed to dealing directly with companies offering tailored training courses to suit the needs of their workforces.

Obviously, every growing business knows that it needs to develop the skills of their employees as they move up the



ranks of the company. This is an important lesson for the private sector in Oman and the NTI's success is from leveraging on this understanding of investment in people. This also fits with the country's mission in Omanising large sections of the country's human resources as although many young people in the country may have the academic requirements for job openings they do not have the necessary skills. This is where the NTI fits in.

The NTI is different in that it provides vocational training that is tailored to a company's particular job requirements for a candidate or employee and the mentoring recruits need to get job placements. He calls the position of the NTI here as a bridge between academia and the work place.

One of the challenges for the institute is finding the required number of candidates for entry-level jobs. "Getting the right candidates is one issue, because lots of people still want to be employed by the government," says Alva. "For the private sector people are not so keen to respond. We have to mobilise big numbers to recruit small numbers (of job placements), notably in the construction industry but any in the private sector is a challenge. We put a lot of effort in finding people for the private sector but that is the support we offer the clients. We tell them that we will help them find the

candidates, mobilise them, do the initial screening and get them ready for interviews. That takes a lot of our time and effort and it is all the more now."

So it is essentially the company who is the client, but as Alva says, the NTI has played a pivotal role in recruiting young, unemployed Omanis and then training them for the jobs they fill. "They could be coming straight from secondary school and we help the companies recruit them and then train them into employment. It could also be high-end technician training for those who have finished their diplomas in engineering who are to be recruited by the oil producers like PDO or BP and these programmes can take one or two years," the NTI CEO says.

"Our portfolio is quite wide, from entry level to high end jobs."

A new integrated training facility is being built in Ghala that brings together the different segments of training (commercial, business and technical) all under one roof.

The state-of-the-art facility's first phase is complete and should be open in November this year.

Alva says it will ensure that all the requirements NTI need for training staff are catered for in a high-tech and convivial working environment. "We are getting the purpose-built facility for training, with the right ambience, set up, infrastructure and space.











This is an ideal place for training. It's better to have (these groups) all together in order to get the right synergy between the groups," Alva says.

The CEO says that the importance of Omanis starting up their own businesses is another area they might look at in the future with the possibility of the NTI offering entrepreneurship programmes for those who wish to start up their own enterprise.

"Another area of development is with

SMEs because there is a lot of stress on this from the government. So this is definitely an area of growth for us," he says. Continuously catering to the demands of the market and the needs of the nation is in the National Training Institute's DNA, and whatever the requirements are in the future the NTI is sure to be on the forefront of recruitment, training and placement for thousands of young Omanis taking the first steps in their working lives.