



The challenge of developing artisans

There are obstacles blocking the path of artisan development, but the HRDC remains positive for the future.

Why did the HRDC establish the Artisan Development Technical Task Team?

The need for increased numbers of artisans as well as the need to improve the quality of artisan training has long been recognised as a key driver of both economic growth and employment opportunities in South Africa. The Task Team was therefore established by the HRDC in 2012 to address these challenges by looking into the main blockages facing the artisan development system at that time and to propose recommendations that would address these. The key blockages were identified as follows:

- The lack of accurate data on artisans and artisan training- for example, how many artisans does South Africa need and in which trades, how many learners are currently being trained in the various trades and what workplaces exist to provide workplace training for these learners?
 - The lack of a single guaranteed funding model for all artisan trades as well as a single, simple administration and grant payment system for employers who train artisans; and
 - The lack of an agreed national system that assists support workers in the engineering field to qualify as artisans.
- A fourth blockage was subsequently identified by the Task Team – namely, that apprentices are considered to be employees in terms of current labour legislation, which discourages some employers from offering apprenticeships to artisan learners.
- The HRDC agreed to the following measures recommended by the Task Team to address these challenges:

- The establishment of the National Artisan Development Support Centre, based at the Ekurhuleni East Technical Vocational Education and Training College. The Centre now collects artisan learner data onto a single national database and intends to expand the system to include, inter alia, data on existing artisans as well as statistics on the demand for artisans in which sectors and trades
- A policy which eliminates the previous sector-based approach to artisan grant funding by establishing a uniform grant per learner (currently R150 000) when they enter into an apprenticeship or learnership with a company as well as a uniform grant payment system; and



The Human Resource Development Council of South Africa's Secretariat provides strategic, technical, administrative and logistic support, and assumes responsibility for, among other aspects, management of the multi-sectoral response to human resource development matters.

- Occupational knowledge learning.
- Workplace learning.

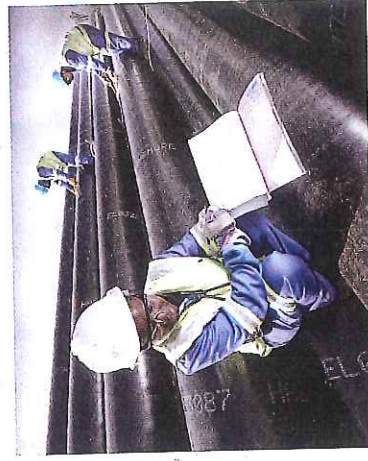
- Trade testing.
- Certification as an artisan.

A possible review of these steps is presently being considered. One change being discussed is, for example, to contract a learner with an employer earlier on in the process in order to better integrate the theoretical and practical parts of the training and to ensure that the candidates obtain an apprenticeship.

How does the future look for artisans?

The future for artisans is bright and much is being done to address the existing problems and difficulties. Some of this is outlined above. Steps are also being taken to update the curricula and improve the quality of teaching at the TVETs, as well as to increase the opportunities for learners and lecturers at TVET colleges to obtain workplace experience. There are also moves in place to improve the quality of career guidance for young learners and to encourage more learners to train as artisans, as well as to improve the current trade test system. While the number of apprentices passing their trade tests has improved considerably in recent years, steps are being taken to increase the current pass rates still further.

Lastly, many private sector and SOC employers have excellent artisan training systems in place and are committed to train beyond their own needs. ■



What are the opportunities for new artisans today?

The demand for new artisans has become more limited as a result of the current economic conditions in South Africa, especially in mining and manufacturing. However, hopefully this situation will change as economic conditions improve and it is essential for South Africa to maintain and indeed increase its number of qualified artisans in the longer term.

What are some of the challenges faced by artisans during their training?

The lack of apprenticeship opportunities is one of the main obstacles facing artisan learners, which means that while a young person may achieve a suitable qualification at a TVET college, he or she may subsequently discover that they cannot obtain the necessary work experience in order to enable them to take a trade test. The poor quality of teaching in many of the TVET colleges also results in a high dropout rate among learners. However, a great deal of work is being done to address these challenges.

What are the steps towards artisanship?

There are a number of possible routes to becoming an artisan, but the current national model (the so-called "Seven Steps"), is:

- Career guidance and management.
- General / vocational fundamental knowledge learning (usually at a TVET college).
- Learner agreement registration and contracting with an employer.