



Welding apprenticeship programme to boost SA skills base

SAIW Business Development Manager, Etienne Nell, describes and champions SAIW's new work-based apprenticeship learning programme for the welding industry, which is now available through the SAIW Foundation and the Quality Council for Trade and Occupation (QCTO).

A lack of apprenticeship opportunities is seen as one of the main obstacles facing artisan learners in South Africa. The issue is that while students may achieve a suitable qualification at a TVET college, they subsequently discover that they cannot obtain the necessary work experience to enable them to acquire a job.

Realising this, the Southern African Institute of Welding (SAIW) is championing work-based apprenticeship learning for the welding industry through the SAIW Foundation and the Quality Council for Trade and Occupation (QCTO). The programme provides aligned, professional training and service standards, with the aim of supporting the overall economic growth of the industry through skills delivery and international standard qualifications.

SAIW Business Development Manager Etienne Nell comments: "Welding industry apprenticeship training has been plagued with profit-only focused training centres, outdated curricula and poor skills standards with no workplace service delivery.

"Many welding apprentices were therefore failing to secure work and employment opportunities were lost owing to non-aligned skills training or

occupational competency."

Through the new single, integrated learning programme, all traineeships will be facilitated through the employee according to the QCTO curriculum and based on targeted skills training standards at the SAIW. The new Dual System Learning for apprenticeships will combine industry designed curricula with technical and simulated practical training at the SAIW, backed by authentic workplace experience overseen by qualified and experienced, employed welders.

Nell elaborates: "This means fabricators select and manage their own employees, register them for the desired training standards for the services they require and the employee is able to complete his or her apprenticeship on the job and according to industry requirements of the recognised standards of welding expertise required at their workplace."

Economic productivity and higher employment

The new, industry-designed curricula programme will ensure an apprentice of 1 310 hours theoretical training, 1 960 hours of simulated welding training and 2 200 hours of workplace experience, resulting in a new qualification which reflects occupational competence, trade theory, simulated practice and workplace capability. Qualifications such as these will assist apprentices in achieving economic productivity and higher employment returns in their chosen speciality.

Benefits for industry employers include the resulting productive value of the apprentice's work, SETA grant support towards apprentice training costs, a tax-break from SARS and B-BBEE scorecard points for skills development for the welding industry.

Showing full commitment to the QCTO curriculum and the new Dual System Learning for Apprentice's programme, the SAIW will also assist in maintaining

the required training results for external assessment, as required by QCTO.

Nell explains: "Working together with the SAIW, the QCTO and the International Institute of Welding, the welding industry as a whole is ensured of the best possible outcomes when supporting quality assured workplace learning to national qualification standards. They will have skilled employees, trained to industry standards and acculturated to the company, meaning there is reduced risk to quality and service, lower-cost recruitment and better employee retention."

Employer support is vital

In support of the internationally recognised Dual System national diploma, the SAIW is calling on the welding industry to step forward and show its support through providing Apprentice Contracts for employees and agreement towards a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) concerning quality assurance with the SAIW.

SAIW Executive Director John Tarboton describes it as a win-win situation of economic benefit to the industry, which couldn't have come at a better time given the current economic crisis the country finds itself in. He stresses however: "The reality is we can't do it alone. We need industry commitment and financial support to drive this programme, which makes perfect business sense given that it will ultimately lead to the delivery of highly skilled welding artisans of international standard and an overall deepening of South Africa's skills base.

"The SAIW is a non-profit technical organisation dedicated to promoting world-class excellence in welding, NDT and allied technologies. We provide training programmes, consultancy and industry support services, as well as certification of companies and personnel to international standards and specifications. And although based in Johannesburg, South Africa, we are now active throughout Southern African and also have experience further afield – predominantly in Central Africa, the Indian Ocean Islands and the United Arab Emirates," Tarboton concludes.



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