

ChefMLK apprenticeship programme to help grow the industry with skilled chefs

In the culinary world, it is common for a young person to train in-house and learn from an established chef. Following this tradition of young people learning from the masters, ChefMLK School of Cooking has introduced an apprenticeship programme.



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“We are expanding opportunities for young people by extending the apprenticeship entry into the industry,” says Amelia Hutchinson, senior culinary lecturer at ChefMLK School of Cooking. “We are also the only school of cooking on the East Rand, which makes the apprenticeship programme great news for youngsters from around here.”

The ChefMLK apprenticeship programme launched at the end of June with its first intake of first-year apprentices. The cooking school can accommodate groups of 12 apprentices at a time.

The apprenticeship

The apprenticeship is a three-year programme that culminates in a diploma. Each year consists of six one-week block release modules at the cooking school, combined with hands-on training in a commercial kitchen. In practical terms it sees trainee chefs working at an establishment and being released for a week per month to attend lectures at the cooking school. “By the time a student qualifies, s/he has three years of working experience in addition to a diploma,” says Hutchinson. What makes this route even more attractive, is that around 90% of apprentices remain employed after qualifying.

The ChefMLK apprenticeship programme is aligned with changes in the local industry. In South Africa, the professional chef occupation has been accredited as a trade occupation, meaning that chefs are regarded as artisans. The government is also increasingly supportive of learnerships and apprenticeships, in order to avoid an oversupply of inexperienced graduates.

In line with these developments, professional chefs in South Africa will in future have to complete a three-year programme as per the requirements of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). Unlike other shorter programmes, the ChefMLK apprenticeship is already at the three-year level, positioning the qualified artisans to achieve professional chef status.



Amelia Hutchinson

Top culinary trainer

Hutchinson is the perfect person to establish and run the new in-house apprenticeship programme at ChefMLK School of Cooking. Now a senior culinary lecturer, she knows what it's like to start on the bottom rung of the culinary ladder. "After finishing school, I worked as a waitress at La Terrazza, an Italian restaurant in Springs, my home town," she remembers. Having progressed to assistant manager, she decided that she belonged in the kitchen, and exchanged serving pizza and pasta for apprenticing with Glynn Sinclair at Sinclair's Signature Specialities.

While doing her three-year apprenticeship, Amelia completed the THETA-accredited Certificate in Professional Cooking with HTA. Subsequently, she obtained the City & Guilds Diploma in Culinary Arts, became an accredited assessor through Corporate College International, and completed the AIB Food Processing Sanitation/ Hygiene Certificate.

After a number of successful years in South Africa, Hutchinson left for London. "I was at a turning point in my career, feeling that I have lost my love of food and the kitchen," she says. Fortunately, she ended up in the kitchen of Jayne Marsland, "a fantastic chef and taskmaster. She made me cry, but also gave me back my passion and became my mentor and friend."

Back home, Hutchinson worked at the Wanderers Club for two years before finding her true passion at the HTA School of Culinary Art where she was a head of the department for seven years before joining ChefMLK School of Cooking. A highlight of this period was the e-learning programme she piloted with HTA and Hilton Middle East and Africa.

Hutchinson describes herself as a good administrator and passionate craft trainer. "From my very first day in the industry I have enjoyed sharing knowledge, and this led me to my niche in the culinary training arena," she says. "I adapt my teaching style to encourage learners to find their inner strength and skills – even if it means my shoe up their backside."

A firm believer in apprenticeships, Hutchinson's intention is to establish a programme at ChefMLK School of Cooking that will enable employers to equip young, upcoming chefs in-house with the necessary skills and qualifications to grow in the industry.

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