

# Umuzi to share its creativity with Cape Town



By [Pasqua Heard](#)

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Continuing its mission to make South Africa's creative industry more accessible and inclusive, Umuzi, a creative academy and agency based in Johannesburg, will be expanding to Cape Town this year and invites young creatives, agencies, production companies, and other creative employers to get involved.

Gilbert Pooley, MD of Umuzi, describes the heart of the organisation: "We recognise that transformation isn't as simple as helping someone get a qualification or even a job. True transformation is about changing the way we see ourselves, and our opportunities. Thus, Umuzi is more than an education institution, we are a community transforming the South African creative industry. Our theory of change is to improve access to creative careers, which in turn changes the South African narrative, and promotes more inclusive economic growth."

Offering a different approach to traditional educators, instead of charging a tuition fee, Umuzi pays its students a monthly stipend during their studies and assists them with finding employment afterwards. Umuzi's learnership consists of twelve months of study, while the remaining three months are dedicated to an internship at well known agencies. Over 80% of Umuzi's 2016 graduation group got jobs at leading advertising agencies, as well as media and production houses.

*Umuzi An Out of the Ordinary Academy* shows you what Umuzi offers its students:

Tshepiso Mabula, an Umuzi multimedia recruit who's already making waves in the industry with her work featured on Design Indaba's website, says she would recommend Umuzi to other creatives. "There are few places in this country where one can gain everyday work experience while also working towards a formal qualification. The months I have spent at Umuzi have helped me sharpen my skills and also improve my professionalism, which is very important if one wants to thrive in the industry... It is here that I learned of the lack of representation within the industry and why it is vital for people like me to infiltrate it."

Pooley and Odendaal Esterhuyse, creative director at Umuzi, share how agencies can contribute to diversity in the industry and what it takes to be recruited by Umuzi.

### ▣ How does Umuzi aim to make the creative industry more accessible?

**Pooley and Esterhuyse:** Firstly, we run the academy that develops aspiring, young creatives who don't otherwise have access to training because of a lack of either financial and/or social support. But we also do it by building a community of creatives that is more inclusive and interested in telling relevant stories. More importantly, we're interested in empowering people to tell their own stories. We believe that advertising and media often plays on stereotypes and misrepresentation of cultures and we want to address that in our content. We do this by also participating as a creative agency in our shared industry.

Our education philosophy is very focused on employment. It's not about the qualification (which we also give as part of the learnership), it's about building a relevant and competitive portfolio and finding a job opportunity for them. We know from experience that the creative struggle is a layered one. These young creatives don't just lack the financial resources. They also lack the social capital needed to penetrate the industry. So, in addition to the financial support, we also give social support in the form of community and network with the industry. We've established a beautiful community and culture that allows peer-to-peer support and learning. And we've partnered with various agencies who are open to welcoming these young creatives into their workplace.

### ▣ What do you look for in your applicants?

**Pooley and Esterhuyse:** We focus our attention specifically on their technical, conceptual and professional skills. Our ideal applicant already has some experience in the discipline they want to pursue (multimedia, copywriting, graphic design, and digital marketing). We aren't looking for polished creatives, just someone who has already experimented with their chosen medium and shows potential for growth. We also look for people who share our values as an organisation, people with the ability to empathise with others and share perspectives. Because we place such emphasis on our culture and community, we try to attract like-minded people to provide positive growth.



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### ▣ What do you think agencies can do to increase diversity in the creative industry?

**Esterhuyse:** I think we can all be more open to mentorship and skills development, specifically for those individuals who can't afford traditional education. I think agencies can be more open to developing young, aspiring creatives. From a

storytelling perspective, I think we should develop our own stories and develop new ways of telling those stories. The lived experiences of some of our recruits result in such rich and unique narratives. If we continue developing the skills needed, these stories can finally surface and be shared. Through this process we can finally change the narrative in South Africa.

**Pooley:** Most agencies are aware that they need to improve their diversity, especially that of their creative teams. Many agencies have plans in place, but unfortunately we see too many examples of under-resourced, or under-managed initiatives, with agencies trying to do it all themselves. Even with the best intentions, their business and client priorities inevitably overshadow education and transformation and often these internally driven programmes disappoint by not finding the right talent, or providing enough support to allow it to reach its potential.

Umuzi specialises in accessible creative education. We are working with bodies like the Creative Circle and their members to improve overall standards and positioning ourselves as the specialist in finding and developing diverse talent. This means we reach a far larger pool of talented young people, and deliver a much higher quality on-the-job learning experience, with the scale and focus benefits of an industry-wide solution. This means the agencies can focus on being great employers and providing our graduates with fantastic first jobs.

### 🏢 How can learners and agencies get involved?

**Pooley and Esterhuysen:** We are currently recruiting aspiring, young creatives in Johannesburg and Cape Town to participate in our 12-month learnership. Applicants can find out more at [www.umuzi.org/learnership](http://www.umuzi.org/learnership) and apply online.

We are also offering Johannesburg and Cape Town-based creative employers the opportunity to sponsor learnerships and hire our talented graduates. Please contact [gilbert.pooley@umuzi.org](mailto:gilbert.pooley@umuzi.org) with employer enquiries.

For more information on Umuzi, visit their [website](#), find them on [Facebook](#) and follow them on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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