

MIWA, Bidvest McCarthy address artisan skills shortage

Through an initiative of Motor Industry Workshop Association (MIWA) and Bidvest McCarthy, 31 companies and 88 apprentices have applied for funding to address the artisan skills shortage in our country in the last year.



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“This is a brilliant step forward for us as an industry,” says Pieter Niemand, director of MIWA, a constituent association of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI).

He explains that a project plan was mapped out and agreed on in April this year. “We believe we have to mobilise the aftermarket sector of the motor industry to start with formal apprentice training. As it takes four years to train an apprentice until they qualify, the sooner we start with the formal training process, the sooner the aftermarket sector will start to contribute to addressing the skills shortage in SA.”

For many years the industry depended on the larger dealer bodies to train and qualify artisans but this has proved to no longer be sustainable. Fewer people are entering the industry and at the top end, qualified artisans are recruited by companies abroad. “If we really want to be successful in addressing the skills deficit in SA, all stakeholders in the industry need to participate and create opportunities for youngsters who are passionate about the industry and need to be trained formally,” says Ilze Botha, group training manager, Bidvest McCarthy.

A culture change

Niemand says currently there are many people who have worked in the industry for many years who have not had the opportunity to get their formal trade certificate. “We are looking at a culture change in the industry where formal training becomes the norm. This will improve the industry’s credibility and promote that being a qualified artisan is a professional career which in turn will assist in attracting youngsters to the industry.”

The project plan roll-out started with presentations to workshop owners around the country from May to September. Those who attended were informed about the benefits of apprentice training and the funding opportunities available through merSETA (in the form of Discretionary grants) and SARS (through learnership tax rebates).

“Further to just being a national training provider and a trade test centre, we offer as an additional benefit, assistance with administration, workplace approval and funding opportunities available through merSETA,” explains Botha.



Pieter Niemand

At the beginning of October, those workshop representatives who attended were then asked to indicate their interest in the project. “We received just over 100 companies indicating their interest. A hugely positive response,” says Niemand.

Communication followed outlining the documentation required to participate in the project and the process to be followed. Botha says it became apparent that many of the companies needed guidance in the following four areas:

- being informed of how apprenticeships work,
- what is expected and required of them,
- understanding the funding and tax models, and
- assistance with current employees who have been in the trade for many years and require formal qualifications.



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29 Aug 2017



“We provided assistance to the companies and to date have 31 companies who have submitted the initial funding request documents and are now formally part of the project. We have 88 apprentices that have applied for funding split into 67 from the motor trade, 13 from the diesel trade and seven automotive electricians,” says Botha. Split by region there are 33 in Gauteng, 23 in KwaZulu-Natal and 32 in the Western Cape. “We need to bear in mind that these numbers will change as funding will be either approved or declined, workplace approvals will be approved or declined and so on.”

The total value of the project in respect of discretionary grant funding is approximately R13m.

Once the project implementation is finalised and the training can commence, the next phase of the project will kick off. Botha says this will include revisiting the other ±70 companies who indicated their interest but who have not continued with the process.

Niemand believes that although over 100 responses received is a great start, there is still a lot of work to be done. “I want to encourage all workshops in the sector to consider the formal training of apprentices. We have to start making a difference in our industry and this is a great way to do it,” he concludes.

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