

CONSTRUCTING A SKILLS PARTNERSHIP

FET colleges and industry partner to develop skills for the construction sector

In the wake of a recent report that highlighted the almost crisis proportions of the skills shortage in the construction industry, a joint skills development initiative between major players in the industry and

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Further Education and Training (FET) colleges has been launched.

In early November, Education Minister Naledi Pandor announced the formation of a partnership between a consortium of leading players in the construction sector and her department that will see designated FET colleges being assisted in the training of artisans.

During 2007, five leading construction companies will assist designated FET colleges with this training.

The five listed companies in the partnership are Murray and Roberts, Aveng (Grinaker-LTA), Wilson Bayly Holmes-Ovcon's (WBHO), Group Five and Basil Read. The benefit of the partnership agreement is that increased numbers of skilled artisans will become available for the entire construction sector. There will be an attempt in future to bring more companies on board.

Part of the partnership is financial

assistance. In the first year, 50% of the intake will enjoy industry bursaries – in addition to the FET bursaries that will be available. The industry will support the recruitment of learners, the quality of the education and teacher assistance.

Mike Lomas, CEO of Group Five, recently graphically illustrated the impact of increased government infrastructure spending on available skills in the construction sector.

Speaking at the annual conference of the Bureau for Economic Research in November, he said spending on infrastructure is set to increase by 89% over the next few years.

If the workload goes up by the same percentage and Group Five is to retain its present market share, the company will have to appoint a further five managing directors, 12 directors, 25 contract managers, 100 engineers, 400 artisans and 4 000 semi-skilled workers.

He also highlighted the fact that, due to an international upswing in big construction projects, opportunities for South African companies are not restricted to local markets. Construction projects in the Middle East and especially Dubai have opened up huge possibilities for South African companies.

In Dubai alone, some 1 000 cranes form part of the city's skyline, compared to 20 in Sandton. The pressure to find competent construction companies to do work is so huge that in a country like Zambia they are offered share in the income of mines as incentive to take on and to complete projects.

Lomas also predicts that the construction boom in South Africa will continue well after 2010 due to government's plans to upgrade and expand rail transport and plans to build power stations.

Although exact numbers for the shortage of skilled workers in the construction sector are not available, a recent report by the Landelahni human resources group stated that: "Overall, there is a major skills shortage at the professional and technical level within the construction industry."

The report was based on a national survey sample drawn from the Construction Industry Development Board's 2006 list of registered contractors tendering for projects in excess of R30 million, and also included consulting engineering firms employing more than 200 people.

A total of 65 companies, totalling some 80 000 permanent employees, was surveyed. The report was further based on research of employment trends in the construction sector at both national and international level. (A comprehensive article on the report appears on page 46)

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