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Steel lags in skills development

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The steel industry is lagging in skills development to drive growth, a survey shows.



Photograph by: Sydney Seshibedi

Once the economy climbed out of recession both skills and training would be needed to bolster growth, the Steel Industry Survey 2009, carried out by Landelahni Business Leaders, found.

"The economic slowdown has brought breathing space to companies employing large numbers of engineers and artisans, but scarce technical and engineering skills are still in demand," Landelahni CEO Sandra

Burmeister said in a statement.

"The skills shortage in SA will continue to be exacerbated because, although there has been a rise in engineering graduates over the past three years and a concerted effort is being made in the area of artisan training, there are still too few technical skills available."

On employment equity, the steel industry lagged the all-industry average in core operational functions at all levels, from top management to skilled technical staff.

In core functions, blacks in top management accounted for 8.7 percent against the all-industry average of 24.2 percent. At the skilled technical level, the steel industry employed 45.1 percent blacks compared with the all-industry average of 67.9 percent.

Women made up 4.3 percent of top management posts against the all-industry average of 17.8 percent, while at the skilled technical level women represented 11.1 percent against the all-industry average of 39.3 percent.

University and technikons enrolments across all engineering courses from 1998 to 2007 totalled 321,459, of which 41,480 graduated - a pass rate of 12.9 percent for degrees and diplomas.

University degree engineering enrolments over the same period totalled 103,159, with 17,143 graduates, a 16.6 percent pass rate.

On average 1714 engineers graduated each year over the past 10 years.

The number of black metallurgical engineering graduates increased from 74 to 198 between 2003 and 2007 and those in chemical engineering from 232 to 712, indicating that efforts by the industry sector to increase bursaries and attract students had paid off.

"However the steel industry shares the limited pool of 14,474 professional engineers registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa with the mining, infrastructure, construction and manufacturing industries," Burmeister said.

According to the Steel and Engineering Federation of SA, a total of 5730 metal and manufacturing industry apprentices were currently undergoing training in the country, the highest figure in 10 years and ahead of the target the organisation set in 2008.

When it came to training of black and female employees, the performance of the sector was poor, with no black or female top management having received training in 2008.