

New centres accelerate testing of artisans to meet SA's skills shortage

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MORE accredited trade testing centres were needed across the country to meet the growing demand for artisans required to plug the technical skills shortage, Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana said last week.

He was speaking at the launch in Port Elizabeth of the Services Sector Education and Training Authority's (Services Seta's) 11 new centres that will speed up the testing of artisans, including electricians, welders, plumbers, fitters, diesel mechanics and bricklayers.

These are some of the technical skills that are needed to implement various major infrastructure development projects worth billions of rands, and studies have shown that this could be hampered by SA's chronic shortage of skills.

Mdladlana said under the government's Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition, Setas needed to deliver 22 000 of the 50 000 artisans needed by next year to boost the country's economic growth.

"On average since 2005 we have seen more than 5 700 learners graduating as artisans annually, with a



Membathisi Mdladlana

placement of just above 70% in formal and self employment opportunities," he said.

According to a study by human resources group Landelahni last year, SA continued to suffer a severe shortage of qualified, competent and experienced artisans.

The study showed that the number of artisans tested across all trades increased from 15 000 in 1970 to 26 500 in 1986, while those who passed trade tests increased from 6 000 to 13 500.

However, from 1986 the numbers of those tested dropped to 9 041, and

those who passed dropped to a low 3 222, or 42%.

However, the existing testing centres were battling to cope with the growing demand for trade tests.

Also speaking at the launch, Services Seta CEO Ivor Blumenthal said the Seta already had 11 000 candidates registered for training in various trades, and that the new training centres were intended to accelerate the testing of artisans.

Blumenthal said overseas moderators and professionals were being engaged to ensure that the accredited centres produced artisans who were benchmarked to international standards.

He said successful artisan training models in countries such as Germany, South Korea and Japan were being studied to provide lessons for SA "to ensure that we do not re-invent the wheel by trying to start afresh something that has proved successful elsewhere".

Blumenthal, however, bemoaned SA's withdrawal from the world trade skills competition. He said that as a result of nonparticipation there was little way of knowing how competitive our tradespeople were against the rest of the world.

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