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Artisan training's dramatic drop

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The construction industry needs to address its employment equity imbalances and boost levels of skills development or the sector may enter a crisis.

Engineers and artisans are in short supply both in the country and across the world. And in addition to that, the sector is male dominated and needs transformation.

Landelahni Recruitment Group conducted a survey, which shows that the deliveries in the sector are likely to exceed capacity.

Sandra Burmeister, the CEO of Landelahni said that with the huge infrastructure demands, the sector will have to come up with some innovative solutions.

The construction industry employs some 935 000 people which represent 8% of the South African workforce.

The sector is the third highest job creator after the trade and finance industries and saw a 27% increase in employment from 2001 to 2005.

Only 15% of top management in the sector is black, compared to 27% in other sectors. Only 4% of top management is female compared to 17% in other sectors.

Burmeister said what's more worrying is the high level of dropouts at tertiary level in construction related courses.

Between 1998 and 2004, 50 570 people enrolled at South African universities for engineering courses and 8 900 graduated giving a graduation rate of 17,5%, according to Engineering Council of SA (ECSA) statistics.

Technikons have an even lower graduation rates of 10%.

The Landelahni study showed that artisan training had dropped dramatically over the past 30 years from 33 000 to 1 440.

“More encouraging is the increase in Engineering Council registrations of new candidates, particularly blacks, indicating that companies are registering a diversity of employees. The 2004 intake is balanced, with 907 blacks and 940 whites registering across all disciplines,” Burmeister said.

But the industry is mostly made up of aging professionals with an average artisan of 53 years.

“This shows the magnitude of the skills challenge.

“The construction industry is already ahead of the all-industry average in training at the management and professional level. This is appropriate given the growth in the sector.

“However, training at technician level lags the industry average. When it comes to training of black employees, construction lags the industry average across all levels,” she said.

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