

Quality local welding skills urgently required for economic recovery

In 2017, government identified a list of 13 scarce skills with welding ranked at number two on this list, highlighting the critical need for qualified artisans in this field. Following decades of non-regulated welder training, there are many welders but very few who are adequately qualified or competent enough for new and existing projects.



This is according to Southern African Institute of Welding (SAIW) executive director John Tarboton: “The current constrained Covid-19 environment, which restricts cross-border movement, means that local skills are urgently required to maintain and produce products for key South African sectors. These include power generation, mining, petrochemical, motoring and structural steel manufacturing.

“With skilled welding artisans at hand, South African fabricators have an unprecedented opportunity to thrive, especially within the manufacturing sector where as much as 80% of manufactured products and maintenance requires highly trained welders. However, until there is an adequately trained workforce available, many South African companies and welders won’t be able to take advantage of this huge opportunity.”

Artisan appreciation

As an internationally recognised body for the welding industry in southern Africa, the SAIW believes it can assist the situation by providing the necessary industry facilities and accredited training levels. Says Tarboton, “Internationally, the role of the apprentice starts at an early age as part of the education curriculum where school leavers already carry artisanal value for future employment.

“Unfortunately, in South Africa, there is a stigma around being an artisan and a real lack of appreciation for the value this role holds as a potential career. Ultimately, the demand for work in current times lies in the blue-collar sector and we welcome industry co-operation and alliances for career upliftment which promotes our student welders to a level where they can add real value. This will provide better employment opportunities and provide skilled local welding services at a lower cost.”

In line with this, the SAIW is looking at the establishment of a national register of trained welders. It plans to launch an online portal where SAIW members can log in and source the required skilled employee within their industry sector. The strength of this offering is the trust that prospective employers can place in this offering, given its endorsement by the SAIW.

Internationally recognised local proficiency

The SAIW is also seeking to better serve the industry by providing a more flexible, customised approach to the courses that it offers. This will see it developing specific skills programmes tailor-made for individual students and specific sectors.

Tarboton comments: “Overall, our training courses will continue to emphasise the role of the welder within an internationally recognised playing field via our association with the International Institute of Welding (IIW). But we are also focused on training students for what is required on the ground locally.

“Ultimately, we aim to provide the required building blocks for a long-term career in welding which is in line with international standards and we also want to give our students the ability to work in local manufacturing and fabrication industries within a reasonable period of time.”

Looking ahead, Tarboton says, “With this new streamlined strategy, we aim to boost welding skills through our internationally accredited training facilities, and firmly believe that the skills we create within the local sector, will be significant contributors to the relaunch of the South African economy.”

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