

# New approach to plumbing apprenticeships aims to increase employment

Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, together with employers, educators and the Institute of Plumbing South Africa (IOPSA), have created two formal apprenticeships that aim to inspire entry-level youth to achieve professional qualifications in plumbing and unlock new employment opportunities.



Source: [Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator](#)

“Plumbing offers great opportunities. It features on the 2020 National List of Occupations in High Demand and is part of the government’s target to have 30,000 trained artisans in place annually to fulfil strategic infrastructure projects and Covid recovery plans,” says Brendan Reynolds, executive director of IOPSA. “If we can change employers’ perceptions of apprentices, we will see significant growth in apprenticeships and new employment opportunities to meet the government’s target.”

Both programmes start with Harambee sourcing and matching candidates through the sayouth.mobi platform, based on the attitudes and aptitudes most valued in successful plumbers. According to Reynolds, many young people arbitrarily choose trade jobs because they offer a faster route to earning a stipend. However, if a young person is not suited to the work, they will not succeed regardless of how desperate they are to make a living.

## Setting young artisans up for success

This new approach to sourcing and skilling sets these young artisans up for success, and the transformative training they receive enables them to play a vital role in enhancing the sector and the economy.

The two formal apprenticeships offer different pathways to employment. The first is a three-year programme by BluLever Education that results in qualified plumbers who have Red Seal certification and can work on their own. The second is a newly-created one-year programme by the National Business Initiative (NBI) that results in apprentices known as plumbing hands who work alongside qualified plumbers to learn a vital role in offices, hotels, or any building with plumbing where small things often go wrong, like leaking toilets or dripping taps.

BluLever's unique approach starts with an intense eight-week induction leadership camp. Adam Collier, BluLever's co-founder and co-CEO who was named among *Mail & Guardian's* Top 200 Young South Africans in 2021, says, "Right from the start, we focus on enhancing life skills through work-readiness training, technology skills, and entrepreneurial thinking. When apprentices move on to technical skills, they have the personal mastery and soft skills that enable them to succeed."

Throughout their three years with BluLever, apprentices spend three months in the classroom and nine months in the workplace.



### Gap in market for youth to pursue artisan careers

5 Jul 2021



## High-impact route to employment

The National Business Initiative (NBI) entry-level qualification offers a short, high-impact route to employment through a one-year programme that supplies the industry with the skills it needs while pathwaying young people into work as quickly as possible. Once in full-time employment, they can progress to a Red Seal qualification.

Apprentices spend 13 weeks in the classroom where the curriculum includes an intensive focus on plumbing skills supported by an effective work readiness programme, developed by Harambee, that teaches behaviours and socialisation for work. In addition, the Allan Gray Makers programme introduces the opportunities and possibilities for business ownership and entrepreneurship. This is followed by 6-9 months of structured learning in the workplace under the supervision of a qualified, experienced plumber.

Classrooms are hosted by select TVET colleges. Because of the industry-wide approach and the involvement of NBI, IOPSA and Harambee, this programme has given TVETs a much higher pass rate (\*86%) than before. Most important, it has enabled TVETs to shift their mindset to a more employment-oriented programme that addresses the gap between theory and workplace application. It's an important collaboration because it enables training to be scaled up.



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Miranda Lusiba 18 Jun 2021



## Gender transformation strategy

A Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy has been developed to assist and enable an element of IOPSA's sector transformation strategy. The plan provides a framework to identify where and how additional support can be provided to individuals and employers to create an environment conducive to the participation of diverse groups, particularly women, who have previously struggled to access the sector.

Well over 50% of BluLever and NBI's apprentices are women. Feedback from trainers and employers is that they perform as well as, or better than, male colleagues.

Kaela Wilson, marketing director for Women in Plumbing, says, "Women have an eye for detail and patience for challenging situations. They are also better at communicating with customers and are perceived as less threatening."

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