

Why learnerships are a critical part of the solution to South Africa's unemployment crisis

With South Africa facing crippling unemployment rates, especially among its youth, it is critical that young people enter the job market with a recognised qualification and practical work experience, says Rajan Naidoo, director of EduPower Skills Academy.



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“Most matriculants don’t even have a basic understanding of the working environment let alone the work experience required by most recruitment adverts. But how do you get experience when you don’t have a job?” he asks.

Rajan believes that the solution to unlocking future career aspirations for our youth and for the unemployed is through learnerships.

What is a learnership?

A learnership is a work-based learning programme that leads to a qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Generally a 12-month programme, learnerships require that you complete a theoretical course at a training provider as well as practical training, which usually takes place in the work environment. Together, they form an integrated and comprehensive learning programme.

“Learnerships were introduced by the government to help skill learners and to prepare them for the workplace. At EduPower, we achieve this by fast-tracking real skills in a contact centre environment which greatly increase our learners’ opportunities for employment,” says Rajan.

He adds that when you register for a learnership, you don’t have to pay any application or study fees. In fact, while in the learnership, you work, learn and even earn simultaneously. “Learners receive a monthly payment called a stipend which covers expenses such as travel and meals. The amount varies and depends on the company sponsoring the learnership, as well as the academic level being completed.”

“While the stipend is great, when you are considering a training provider, be sure to ask if they include soft skills training. At EduPower, our learnerships include digital skills, communication, teamwork and critical thinking to name a few. This helps prepare our learners for the workplace and teaches them the soft skills that every employer expects,” Rajan advises.

What do you need to qualify for a learnership?

- You need to be between 18 and 35 years old.
- You need to have a National Senior Certificate (Matric) or an equivalent qualification (NQF Level 4).
- You need to have proof that you are a South African citizen.

According to Rajan, even though matric is strongly preferred, EduPower does accommodate learners with Grade 11 for some of their courses. He also adds that even though 18 to 35 years old is a requirement for most, in some instances EduPower has waived the 35 year age limit to accommodate people with disability.

How to apply for a learnership?

Rajan says there are a number of ways to apply for a learnership, including:

- **Apply directly to a company:** If you want to work for a specific company, you can approach their human resources department and ask if they have a learnership programme. If they say yes, get the details and apply.
- **Contact a SETA:** Learnerships are managed by 21 different Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) so you will need to identify the qualification/industry you want to pursue and then contact the relevant SETA to see if there are any learnerships available.
- **Contact the training providers:** Training providers offer learnerships on behalf of companies. EduPower, for example, maintains a database of over 300 able-bodied as well as candidates living with a disability. You can contact the recruitment team and send them your CV and other documentation so that when a learnership becomes available, you are first on the list.
- **Online recruitment:** Most learnerships are advertised online so put together a career plan, stock up on data and when a learnership is advertised, send your application.

Rajan concludes by saying that the first step to your future career is getting out there and making it happen for yourself. “Learnership programmes are more than just skills and practical experience. If you have a great attitude and make the most of the opportunity to learn and prove yourself, they are one of the most effective gateways to better employment or self-employment opportunities.”