

How trade apprenticeships can help tackle SA's youth unemployment crisis

With SA's youth unemployment rate [currently at 63.9%](#), traditional trades such as plumbing, electrical work, carpentry and construction can play a key role in absorbing new job market entrants.



Source: Supplied

According to higher education, science and innovation minister Blade Nzimande, we need at least 60% of school-leavers to pursue artisanal-type training to meet the country's demand for scarce skills.

Apprenticeships are a particularly attractive model as it allows youth to 'earn as they learn'. However, this requires apprentices who are adequately prepared to enter the workforce, and businesses that are capable of taking on apprentices.

Businesses need the financial and human resources to take on apprentices. "This sector is dominated by SMMEs," says Arjun Khoosal, cofounder of Kandua.com, a local marketplace for home services. "By helping these small service businesses to succeed, we can create more economic and employment opportunities, including for young people."

"We have a quantity and quality gap when it comes to artisan education in South Africa," says Jess Roussos, cofounder of BluLever Education, a company focused on vocational education and training for artisans. "To be a successful apprentice, you need self-awareness, the ability to work in a team, and some understanding of what will be expected of you in a workplace."

Set apprentices up for success

"If you ask any artisan what makes the best person in their team the best, they will tell you about their teamwork and communication skills," adds Roussos. "Technical skills are just the base of what's needed, and yet they're all that's usually taught. This is why the foundation of our apprenticeship programme is an intense two-month life-skills and work-readiness

programme called Leadership Base Camp.”



Arjun Khoosal, cofounder of Kandua.com

Roussos adds that the other aspect that ensures the success of the programme is the close collaboration with industry and partnership with employers. “The truth is that there is a hesitancy in the industry around apprenticeships. However, so far, every one of our employer partners has asked to take on more of our apprentices after their first experience.”

Enabling artisan-led SMMEs

The core of any apprenticeship programme is employer-based learning. A stable and growing business creates a conducive learning environment. “Artisan-based businesses have different development needs, an important one being access to market,” says Khoosal.

“The plumbers, electricians and builders on our platform tell us all the time that the biggest barrier to their success is simple: finding new customers, which is what we facilitate through Kandua.com.”

“Trades are one of the easiest entry points to self-employment and can provide a good income,” continues Khoosal. “However, tradespeople cannot rely on their artisanal skills alone if they want to build a stable business. Business skills, soft skills and management tools that are fit for purpose are part of the equation. This is why we partner with BluLever Education and why we are expanding our offering of tech tools designed for these small service businesses.”



Jess Roussos, cofounder of BluLever Education



Source: Supplied

An attractive career path in a sector with stable demand

“This is quite a cycle-resilient market, especially for businesses that serve homeowners or other small businesses,” says Khoosal. “Fixes always need to be fixed, and it is even better to repair than to replace items during a downturn.”

Khoosal adds that, “Sixty percent of the professionals surveyed by Kandua.com have between 3 and 10 permanent employees and also employ several contractors on a project basis. In the context of South Africa’s unemployment rate, each of these jobs and each of these businesses represents not only an individual income, but often a family’s survival.”



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“The demand for qualified artisans will only continue to grow,” concludes Roussos. “We need to change the narrative that these fields are ones that you enter out of necessity. With the right support, today’s apprentice can not only be tomorrow’s plumber, but a manager of a team, or a founder of a plumbing company.”

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