



Learnerships gain momentum, but is that enough?

The development of skills has been identified as a key factor in addressing poverty and inequality concerns. Nedlac highlights some of the progress being achieved in recent months in accelerating the implementation of learnerships, one of the key skills development mechanisms identified by the Growth and Development Summit (GDS).

In line with commitments made at the GDS, government, labour and business committed themselves to ensure that by May this year up to 80 000 learnerships would be in place. How far have the parties gone in meeting this target?

At the beginning of April, Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana, launched the first learnership programme under the newly established Employment, Skills Development Lead Employer pilot project, set up to accelerate learnership intake within the small and medium business sector. The project, which is co-ordinated by the Chemicals Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA), will benefit 6 000 learners, mostly previously unemployed matriculants and graduates, to be placed on programmes in the chemical, construction, retail and services sectors.

The concept behind the lead employer project is that the lead employers will rotate the learner through the workplace of several employers, ensuring that they get all the relevant training they need. This

makes sense for small employers who want to be involved in training, but who cannot offer the full range of experiences required. Four hundred learners have been selected already, and have signed up to start skills training, while 600 more will begin at the end of May 2004.

In late March, Mdladlana launched an accelerated bank learnership programme called Letsema. This project – co-funded by the Bank Seta and the National Skills Fund to the tune of R210-million – will develop 5 000 previously unemployed youth through learnerships over the next three years. Learners will be placed in the country's major banks, and other small and medium enterprises. The first group of 800 learners, consisting of 600 matriculants and 200 graduates, has already been recruited for the programme. Mdladlana was also present at the launch of the Telkom Learnership Project for 360 previously unemployed youth. The project is a joint venture between Telkom and the Informations Systems Electronics and Telkom Technologies Seta (ISETT), aimed at providing experiential training

for learners in the areas of call centre technology and project management in Durban, Cape Town, Gauteng and Port Elizabeth. The Department of Labour is contributing over R10-million towards the project.

What is labour doing?

Labour has reported to Nedlac that in the Western Cape, a task team has been set up to look at how to implement the provincial GDS. The issue of learnerships was also dealt with by the task team. In terms of the clothing sector, a decision had been taken that there was a need for every employee in the Western Cape to go through a learnership programme. It was also agreed that a six-year time frame would be used to achieve that. The aim was to do it in phases, for example to reach 15% in the first year, 20% in the next year and maintain 20% for the duration of the six years.

Fedusa has also launched a learnership programme, and has reported that it would be placing 145 people in learnership programmes within the federation over the coming five months.

This column is sponsored by Nedlac