



# Skills development through structured qualifications: learnerships and apprenticeships

## Apprentices remain undervalued

A recent study by Glenda Kruss, Angelique Wildschut, Dean Janise van Rensburg, Mariette Visser, Genevieve Haupt and Joan Roodt evaluating the impact of learnerships and apprenticeships revealed important trends about the potential significance of such a revived apprenticeship system.

Various mechanisms have been put in place over the past five years to promote the expansion of intermediate artisanal and technical skills, an imperative for the growing economy. With the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) as a catalyst, attempts were made to revive the declining apprenticeship system as a key mechanism to produce intermediate level skills and to address the shortage of artisans, writes **GENEVIEVE HAUPT**.

Overall, participation in the apprenticeship system had a positive impact, evident in a high rate of employment after completion of the qualification. However, despite the positive outcomes associated with participation in the system, entering an apprenticeship programme still remains a second, third or even fourth choice by school-leavers.

### APPRENTICESHIPS HAVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

A qualified apprentice can be trained through two processes, referred to as 'Section 13' and 'Section 28'. Section 28 generally consists of candidates who are not formally indentured, which means that they do not have a signed apprenticeship agreement, but after gaining sufficient work experience can apply to complete the trade test.

A Section 13 apprenticeship refers to candidates involved in training through formal

Table 1: Status after completion of apprenticeship [Source: Wildschut (2011)]

	FREQUENCY	VALID PERCENT
Working	526	75.9%
Working and studying	8	1.2%
Not working and not studying	144	20.8
Studying	15	2.2%
Total	693	100%

Table 2: Final transition cumulative, by status at entry [Source: Wildschut (2011)]

Status after leaving school	1	2	3	4	5	6
Worked and studied		12	18	20	21	21
Entered apprenticeship	58	58	61	61		61
Unemployed		31	100	129	139	139
Worked		311	395	431	436	436
Studied		347	740	814	824	826
Total	58	759	1314	1455	1481	1483
%	3.9	51	89	98	99.9	100

indenture. Section 28 apprenticeship candidates are therefore likely to be older and employed, while Section 13 candidates comprise largely younger school-leavers.

Our survey of apprenticeship participants found that about 70% of candidates who completed the qualification entered directly into employment (see Table 1).

A further 18% were unemployed after completing the apprenticeship qualification, and 2% were studying further. In other words, for the majority of our sample, participation in the apprenticeship system resulted in a smooth transition directly into employment.

The data suggests that the apprenticeship system provides an excellent platform towards employment. However, this appears in stark contrast to an evaluation of entry into the system. The data indicates that entering into an apprenticeship is not the first choice for school-leavers (see Table 2). Only around 4% of the total sample entered the programme directly after school, and it generally took two or more transitions before individuals enter the apprenticeship system.

It is clear that the majority of individuals involved in apprenticeship training first pursue other options, such as work or study, or a period of unemployment after completing school, before entering the apprenticeship system.

A disparity therefore exists in that, despite the success of the apprenticeship system in enabling a transition to employment, entering an apprenticeship is not a first choice for school-leavers.

The findings suggest the critical need for intervention at school level. We need increased awareness and understanding of apprenticeships as viable and successful mechanisms for skills development leading to employment.



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<sup>1</sup>As of March 2010, JIPSA was incorporated into the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDS-SA) March 2010. This article was drawn from three reports commissioned by the Departments of Labour/Higher Education and Training. All three reports are available on [www.hsrc.ac.za](http://www.hsrc.ac.za).

*Developing skills and capabilities through the learnership and apprenticeship pathway systems*. Synthesis report commissioned by the Department of Labour/Department of Higher Education and Training research project investigating the impact of learnerships and apprenticeships under the NSDSII. Glenda Kruss, Angeliqe Wildschut, Dean Janse van Rensburg, Mariette Visser, Genevieve Haupt and Joan Roodt.

*A Technical Report on Learnership and Apprenticeship Population Databases in South Africa: Patterns and Shifts in Skills Formation*, by Angeliqe Wildschut, Glenda Kruss, Dean Janse van Rensburg, Genevieve Haupt, and Mariette Visser, 2012.

*Learnerships and Apprenticeships Survey 2010 Technical Report: Identifying Transitions and Trajectories through the Learnership and Apprenticeship Systems*, by Dean Janse van Rensburg, Mariette Visser, Angeliqe Wildschut, Joan Roodt, and Glenda Kruss, 2012.



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