

# YIC exposes learners to possibilities in construction space

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Launched in 2008, the Youth in Construction (YIC) initiative exposes learners to the opportunities that exist in the construction and engineering space.

We interviewed Marie Ashpole, outreach officer at the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), to find out how the initiative came together, what it hopes to achieve, and what can be done to accelerate youth development in construction.

## ■ ***What does the Youth in Construction (YIC) initiative entail?***

It offers learners the opportunity to be exposed to the diversity that the civil engineering and construction industry offers, addressing the skills shortages in the sector. The initiative provides learners with practical experience and the necessary information to guide them in choosing a career in the industry.

## ■ ***What is its primary goal?***

The primary goal is to expose learners to the possibilities in the industry, and the importance of the civil engineering and construction industry as a national asset, and its critical link to skills development, infrastructure creation and maintenance, and service delivery to improve the quality of life of the majority of South Africans.

## ■ ***What factors prompted the industry to come together and launch this initiative?***

There were many misconceptions on what the construction industry entailed. One of these is the fact that many regarded it as a 'dirty' job, exclusively for males. Meeting people in the industry, both male and female, addresses the issue and opens up a whole new world to, especially, girl learners.

It was necessary to lay the groundwork for future development and progress in the industry where there are wonderful career opportunities and where construction skills are well rewarded. Through these expositions, young people are shown what is available and what can be achieved with the hope that they will join in building South Africa's future.

It is important to notice that it is essential for the industry to have a highly skilled workforce with the right balance of professional and technical qualifications.

Because of this lack of knowledge on the industry among learners, and many adults, the role-players in the civil engineering and construction industry joined forces to encourage learners and students to join the industry, through the Youth in Construction Week initiative.

The initiative, which was launched in 2008, was done in support of National Construction Week and organised by the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb), the South African Forum of Civil Engineering Contractors (Safcec), the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), the Gauteng Master Builders Association, now MBA North, and further education and training (FET) colleges.

Since its inception, about 35,000 learners, from grade 8 to grade 12, as well as FET college students from diverse



Marie Ashpole, outreach officer at the SAICE

backgrounds, had the opportunity to experience the excitement and diversity of the industry, while also receiving guidance and information on careers.

■ ***How will the Youth in Construction initiative be taken forward in terms of events, programmes, or workshops?***

In the present economic climate where construction companies experience financial pressure, sponsorships are hard to find. However, we are positive that this initiative will again be well-supported as soon as there is an upturn in project roll-out by government.

■ ***What are some of the challenges the youth of today face in entering the construction sector?***

There are many challenges, of which the lack of core mathematics as a matric subject is a stumbling block. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge on where to study and where to find learnerships or bursaries, is a concern. Learners can use the websites of all the above institutions to gain information on civil engineering and construction, as well as to possible sources of funding studies.

■ ***What can be done to accelerate youth development in construction?***

Firstly, exposure to exactly what civil engineering and construction entails is necessary to alert learners to its possibilities. Secondly, for youth development within the industry it is necessary for government to roll out the promised more than R870bn worth of projects to put the industry on a solid footing again to enable them to provide employment to the youth in the industry.

■ ***Any words of encouragement for those wanting to enter the construction space in SA?***

If you are looking for a career where you can solve problems, where you can really make a difference to people's lives by bringing water, sanitation, roads, waste management and everything else that improves quality of life in communities, then you have to consider a career in civil engineering and construction! I have yet to meet someone in the industry who is not passionate about what they are doing!

*Representing SAICE, Marie Ashpole was part of the original group of organisations that established Youth in Construction in 2008. She has been in her current position for the past 13 years, responsible also for the media, and the running of both the SAICE International Schools Water Competition, AQUALIBRIUM, and the SAICE International Bridge Building Competition.*

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