

Food and beverage artisans sees increase

By [Sue Blaine](#)

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The number of artisan apprentices in the food and beverages manufacturing industry has increased eightfold over the past four years, the sector education and training authority (Seta) said yesterday, 14 April 2010.

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande's goal was to produce 25000 artisans a year, a large jump from the current 5600, to address national needs.

The Seta's efforts would go towards fulfilling this goal, its education and training quality assurance manager Krappie Eloff said yesterday.

"We went from 50 artisan apprentices (per training year) to 360 ... hopefully in four to five years we'll see that paying off (in the form of fully qualified artisans)," he said. There are about 1100 artisan apprentices in the whole three- to four-year training system.

The first batch of 96 have qualified in the past financial year.

Artisans in the industry make, maintain and repair machinery that is used in mass food production, such as machines used to make biscuits and others that package foodstuffs.

The Food and Beverages Manufacturing Industry's (FoodBev) Seta artisan output was small in comparison to that of Setas such as the Mining Qualifications Authority and the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Seta, said Eloff.

FoodBev Seta skills planning manager Blanche Engelbrecht said their own research showed that the artisan shortage had decreased by about 30% since the accelerated training programme began four years ago. It took three or four years to qualify artisans from scratch, so the Seta recruited apprentices from the "many" further education and training college students who had already done the requisite theoretical training, she said.

The Seta has about 4000 members, about 80% of which employ fewer than 50 people each. The funding for the R80m project to accelerate artisan training came predominantly from the other 20% of member companies, said the Seta's CEO Ravin Deonarain at a Johannesburg breakfast.

SAB had made the largest contribution, said Eloff. The brewer's engineering skills development manager Tony Reddy said the firm had simultaneously, in May 2007, put R60m of its own money into a full apprenticeship programme and R7m into a three year programme to complete the training of partly qualified artisans.

Through these programmes five people had qualified in instrumentation and 15 were still in training; 19 qualified as electricians (30 in training; 10 as fitters (9 in training); seven as fitters and turners (12 in training) and 22 as millwrights (20 in training).

Mary Metcalfe, director-general in Nzimande's department, said she and Nzimande had a frank roundtable discussion with further education and training colleges last Friday from which it emerged that the sector faced “huge challenges” that could only be solved by greater co-operation. A committee for thrashing out solutions had been put together and there would be a “summit” in August, she said.

Source: Business Day

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