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## Supporting Youth Employment in a Time of Economic Despair

South Africa continues to grapple with myriad economic challenges: low growth, worsening levels of unemployment, poverty and chronic levels of exclusion from meaningful participation in the formal economy. The recent figures from Stats SA of 74.7% youth unemployment underscore the fact that young people, and young women in particular, consistently bear the brunt of this malaise. This is despite the government's investment in skills training and development over the last couple of decades.

Our **Youth Day 2021 Quick Brief** shared our approach to addressing youth unemployment and highlighted the fact that acceptable levels of employment across our economy are yet to be realized. Given the significant skills gaps across the industrial economy in particular, it has become clear that there is a need for improved cooperation between various stakeholders in order to get the country on an inclusive growth path. Evidence suggests that effective vocational training programmes that enable young people to gain industry-relevant skills play a pivotal role in reducing the number of people who are disengaged from both education and work.

The **National Business Initiative (NBI)**, through its work in the area of **Installation, Repairs & Maintenance (IRM)**, has identified the property industry as a potential growth sector of employment opportunities for large numbers of young people in the area of property maintenance and repair.

With funding from NBI member company **Absa**, the NBI has been implementing the **General Handyperson programme** since November 2020 at **Ekurhuleni West TVET College (EWC)**. This programme prepares young TVET College students to gain access into entry-level learning and employment opportunities in maintenance companies across the property value chain. Through an intensive capacity building intervention, the programme is providing a scalable and replicable

model for supporting TVET colleges to offer demand-driven skills delivery, linked to tangible labour market opportunities.

The programme, developed in consultation with industry experts, addresses demand in the property sector for entry level maintenance assistants. This can provide a more effective talent pipeline and expand opportunities for both full-time and contract employment, as well as a pathway to an artisan trade and entrepreneurship. The journey for the current cohort has been as follows:

- Learners were enrolled in a 13-week college-based training programme (aligned to the QCTO-registered Assistant Handyperson skills programme) at Ekurhuleni West TVET College delivered through combined online and project-based learning. This technical training covered key general handyperson competences in plumbing, carpentry, tiling, electrical and other related areas.
- The technical training period had an intensive work readiness programme built into it, aimed at instilling a set of attitudes and behaviours that are required in the workplace, complemented by an entrepreneurship education component provided through the **Allan Gray Makers programme**.
- Following the 13-week college-based training, students have been placed into various construction and maintenance SMEs for 9 months, under the supervision of workplace mentors that have been specifically trained to support IRM trainees. This workplace learning process is guided by a logbook.
- At the end of the workplace-based learning period, the learners will return to EWC in order to complete a final project for assessment and graduation.

The building blocks for the design and development of the IRM Initiative are located in previous demonstration projects, delivered by the NBI and its partners in the construction and plumbing industries. These demonstration projects provided important insights into some of the key ingredients required to deliver on effective learning and employment pathways, including:

industry ownership and recognition;  
secured demand for skills;  
demand-driven, high quality curriculum and delivery; and  
appropriate selection, matching and preparation of students, based on the occupational demands.

These principles have informed the IRM model and work is now underway to determine how they can be applied in a scalable and sustainable manner.

The funding support for this bold initiative by Absa has played a catalytic role in refining the IRM model, galvanising broader interest and support amongst key stakeholders across a range of industries.

Over the next three years, the NBI will work with our government partners, Property Point and multiple TVET Colleges across Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal to expand entry-level opportunities into the commercial and public property maintenance industry, building on the investment that Absa has made in this first cohort.

The overarching lesson from this initiative is clear: there is an urgent need to increase the workplace opportunities available to young people in key industries. In addition, investment in skills needs to align with the current job landscape and what is in demand from the labour market. These lessons reinforce public TVETs as the preferred sites of delivery for skills programmes of this nature.

**For more information on the NBI's Skills & Youth Employability work please contact Xhanti Mhlambiso (Programme Manager: Social Transformation): [XhantiM@nbi.org.za](mailto:XhantiM@nbi.org.za)**





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The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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