

Skills mismatch in chemical sectors negatively impacting employability

According to Yershen Pillay, CEO of CHIETA, the mismatch between skills in demand within the chemical industry and skills that are being developed in South Africa is negatively impacting the employability of many locally trained artisans.



Source: Patrizio Martorana © [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

He says that while the organisation is constantly working to address this mismatch and the resulting skills gaps across the board, the issue needs greater engagement by all relevant participants in government, private sector, and training institutions in order to impact South Africa's high level of unemployment.

"South African companies are faced with importing skills from Europe and Asia because specific and high-quality welding skills are in scarce supply. In South Africa, we do not lack general welding skills, we have a sufficient supply of welders to meet the demand. What we lack are specific types of welding skills such as underwater welding and aluminium coded welding where demand far outstrips the supply," explains Pillay.

It is becoming clear that digital-savvy artisans are also in short supply. South Africa needs a pool of digitally savvy artisans such as mechanical fitters who understand the fundamentals of coding as the factory floor becomes increasingly automated and digitised.

Top 10 skills in demand

The current top 10 professional skills in demand identified in CHIETA's stakeholders' workplace skills plans in 2022 include:

- Chemical engineer
- Mechanical engineer
- Environmental scientist
- Chemist
- Retail pharmacist

- Industrial engineer
- Industrial pharmacist
- SHE&Q practitioner
- Medical product sales representative
- Pharmaceutical product sales representative

This list does not take future skills needs into account.



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Zuko Mdwaba 18 May 2022



SMMEs and startups

In terms of specific skills in demand among SMMEs and startups in the chemical industry, a recent study by CHIETA revealed a skills gap in management coaching, management and entrepreneurial skills, and mentorship. These incorporate agility, governance, innovation, leadership, performance management, R&D leadership, numerical, packaging, problem solving, programming, project management, communication, negotiating, and marketing.

Digital skills development

CHIETA's skills development initiatives are increasingly being designed to address specific skills mismatches, and a focus area for the organisation is digital skills development. Pillay says, "The more our wider skills development shifts from traditional to digital skills training, the more likely it will be to see an increased absorption of trainees and artisans by industry."

An initiative within this category is CHIETA's Smart Skills Centre programme which is bridging the digital skills divide by taking training directly to rural communities. The first Smart Skills Centre, which will open in Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape this year, is aimed at providing local communities access to digital skills in 4IR-related occupations. CHIETA is investing a further R50m in Smart Skills Centres across the country by 2025.

Close the gaps

Pillay notes, "We remain committed to maintaining a stakeholder-centric approach to our evolving skills development initiatives and to strengthening our capacity to adapt to the rapid pace of change in skills needs within our industry."

"At the same time, we strongly encourage wider engagement between all stakeholders, government, other SETAs, and training institutions across the board to ensure that closing scarce skills gaps is contributing to job creation in SA."

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