



Cosmo Academy: local skills for local industry

African Fusion talks to Emma Britz, head of training for the Cosmo Training Academy, about the Academy's evolving training offering, all built around meeting local industry needs to meet specific skills requirements and preparing local young people for employment.

Initially set up to train welders for the local construction and fabrication industries, the Cosmo Training Academy has evolved into a service driven training centre that provides an array of artisan, development and learnership courses. "We are still true to our roots, though. We offer a QCTO-accredited three year welding apprenticeship course. We currently have two students going through this programme, one in his first year and another in his second. They are both apprentices at Water Skills, a South African specialist company in the design and construction of turnkey water and effluent treatment plants," says the academy's head of training, Emma Britz.

On the welding side, she says that Cosmo has also developed short courses based on the IIW International Welder diplomas, Modules A, B and C for Fillet, Plate and Pipe welding, respectively, coupled with the process specific options preferred by the candidate's employer. "We have compiled our own learner guides for these modules, based on IIW requirements, which involve a two week theoretical component followed by a practical welding component, all of which is done here in Silverton," notes Britz, adding that one of the Academy's local students is currently completing his second IIW diploma.

Recently completed is a contract with Ford to train 18 of its fitters with basic trade skills, which included, Basic Electricity, Basic Pneumatics and Basic Generic Welding. "These artisans are now back at Ford's assembly plant in Silverton having

completed these courses in batches of six students over the past few months," Britz tells *African Fusion*.

In response to COVID, she says that the Cosmo Training Academy has also started to offer its learnerships on its online platform. "We offer several full time one-year Learnerships such as Business Administration; End-user Computing and Wholesale and Retail, for example. We now have three learners doing our full-time Health and Safety Level 2 Learnership using the new online platform," she says.

The practical work is done at the Academy itself, but the coursework is being presented online. The host company for this course is Averde Technologies, the turnkey solutions provider of energy, telecommunications, networking, and construction services to industrial clients.

"This course is useful in any construction or fabrication environment. We have now moved over to online presentations with a live tutor delivering the support and leading students through coursework activities. Further practical work takes place here, while the students will go back into the workplace to do the summative assessment at the end of the course," she explains, adding that Cosmo is also reworking several of its IIW, Merseta and Services SETA courses for delivery of the knowledge components via the online platforms.

"Local businesses tend to send one or two of their people to us, for specific practical welding courses or for product training on the welding machines or cut-

ting equipment they have bought from Cosmo Industrial. Then our own specialists will train the candidates or welders on the equipment they will be using. This ensures that, when customers buy a machine from the Cosmo Group, they are enabled to get the best possible value for their purchase," Britz explains.

"We are often asked to develop and deliver specific and customised training courses for industries and businesses finding themselves needing to upskill their people to meet immediate needs. Also, though, a lot of parents approach us on behalf of their children who, when looking for work, often find they don't have the skills that are needed. Because we at Cosmo know what industry needs, through the direct contact we have with local industry, we are able to recommend appropriate training and, once completed, we can often approach the companies we work with to consider employing successful students," says Britz.

"Local companies sending people for training are usually eligible for Skills level support and Tax relief, and we are also in a position to help companies to access this support," she adds.

The Cosmo Training Academy now also does legal liability training: First Aid, Firefighting and Health and Safety. "We train people to safely use forklifts and lifting equipment; to work at height on scaffolding; we deliver Occupational Safety Certificates for Welders; and we offer HIV awareness programmes, all to help companies to comply with HSE workplace requirements," she says.

The Academy is now introducing management qualifications, a supervisors techniques course, for example, which is now accredited by Merseta. "Going forward, we are looking to incorporate more soft skills into our offering, such as Customer Service, a course that is now developed and ready to be uploaded as an online offering.

"We strive to meet the needs of our local community, ensuring that the companies around us have suitably skilled people for their continued success, while also contributing to reducing unemployment and creating better and more sustainable jobs," Britz concludes.



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