

LETS TALK LEARNERSHIPS AND SKILLS PROGRAMMES

Dear Industry Partner

Following the implementation of the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act, there has been much talk about LEARNERSHIPS and SKILLS PROGRAMMES and some confusion about what they are, what one needs to implement such a programme and what funding is available to employers for this endeavour. Interest on the subject of LEARNERSHIPS was further highlighted following the budget speech of February 2002, in which substantial tax breaks were advocated for employers who implement this system between then and 2006. Any changes to the tax breaks for the next few years should be known following the Minister of Finance's budget speech scheduled for Wednesday, 08 February 2006.

This document serves to address issues surrounding LEARNERSHIPS and SKILLS PROGRAMMES in our industry sector and provide a structured and coordinated way forward for implementation and subsequent access to funding.

To provide clarity and as a reminder, the following is of importance:

- **A learner** is a student, delegate or participant on a learning programme or intervention
- **A training provider** is anyone who provides training. This could be handled in-house or outsourced to a college/school
- **A National Qualification** is a qualification that is nationally recognised, written and agreed by industry. They are not job specific, but rather aim for a holistic outcome that incorporates elements that are job specific as well as other knowledge and skills that result in a well-rounded and adequately trained learner. It should be noted that a National Qualification is NOT a training course, but rather a list of things that people should know and be able to do (outcomes). The training course is the means to achieve these "outcomes". National Qualifications hold a number of benefits for industry:
 - They ensure that learners who achieve them will have standard and common knowledge and skills, irrespective of who and where training was provided
 - They provide a mechanism for assessment that incorporates knowledge and skill (application)
 - They provide a means to enable benchmarking of jobs and related remuneration
 - They are portable
- **Unit Standards** are the elements that make up a National Qualification (rather like a module, but in this case, only outcomes are listed). The content of the unit standards that go into making up a full National Qualification were predetermined (by industry through the old TETASA network).

What is a LEARNERSHIP?

Quite simply, a LEARNERSHIP can be equated to what most of us know as an "apprenticeship". It is a mechanism to enable people to achieve a National Qualification (or nationally recognised certificate/diploma). **LEARNERSHIPS can be offered to people who are already employed or those who are unemployed.**

A LEARNERSHIP must have the following elements:

- It must be registered with the Department of Labour. This is facilitated by THETA

- There must be a formal training component (training in a classroom environment). The recommended duration of this should be no less than 30% of the training provided, but this can and will vary depending on the knowledge component present in a particular National Qualification
- There must be an on the job component (training provided in the workplace). Here, the recommended time allotted should be approximately 70% of the training provided
- It must result in a full registered National Qualification
- Learners (or those completing the LEARNERSHIP) must be assessed using the guidelines provided in the unit standards and/or national qualification. Learners can also apply to be assessed for things they already know and do, without undergoing further or additional training (recognition of prior learning or RPL)
- There must be a signed CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENT between the learner, the employer and the training provider (or college)
- A signed LEARNERSHIP AGREEMENT which details the rights and responsibilities of all participants to the LEARNERSHIP (i.e. the learner, the employer and the training provider) must also be in place and approved by THETA
- Training must be provided by an Accredited Training Provider

Employers who implement LEARNERSHIPS can apply to receive funding to offset inputs i.e. training and assessment costs (see below).

What is a Skills Programme?

A SKILLS PROGRAMME does not aim to provide the holistic and rounded approach offered by National Qualifications. *They aim to provide a limited range of knowledge and skills to enable a person to perform a job.* As an example, a travel receptionist or processor will not necessarily need a full travel qualification to perform their job – they need only select knowledge and skills.

SKILLS PROGRAMMES are built to serve an industry (not an individual employer) and are determined by industry based on need. Once agreed, the details are forwarded to THETA for approval. The process involves looking at jobs commonly found in industry and then attaching a range of unit standards to meet the needs of those jobs.

A range of SKILLS PROGRAMMES are currently available (refer to the THETA website on www.theta.org.za for more information). These will also be reviewed once the new National Qualifications have been registered and will be circulated for comment and lodged with THETA to enable implementation once the exercise has been completed.

While there is no specific funding allocated for the implementation of a SKILLS PROGRAMME, benefits to industry include:

- The ability to implement bite sized chunks of training to up-skill existing employees in a manner that is manageable and cost effective for the employer. This applies in those instances where down or right sizing of an organisation is required – to avoid retrenchment and/or job losses, employees can be moved from areas that are no longer cost effective and trained and moved to areas that are
- A goal focused and planned means to grow, for example, a junior consultant to an intermediate consultant
- The ability to improve multi-skilling in an organisation

Guidelines To Access Normal Grants

To recap, all employers who pay PAYE to SARS on behalf of their employees OR those whose employee costs exceed R 500 000.00 per annum, must by law, pay 1% of employee

cost to SARS – this is commonly known as the “levy contribution”. Of the contribution made, 20% is forwarded to the National Skills Fund – these funds will be used to address national training priorities.

The remaining 80% is forwarded to THETA. Of this, 10% is used by THETA for its own administration costs and the remaining 70% is available for grants. The employer can access a percentage of their levy contribution, payable as a grant, provided the following is in place:

- The organisation must have registered with SARS and levy contributions must be paid and up to date
- The organisation must have indicated that they are a member of THETA when the SARS registration took place
- A Skills Development Facilitator must be in place
- A Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) must be completed and forwarded to THETA
- An Implementation Report, confirming that training interventions have taken place, must also be completed and forwarded to THETA

Unclaimed grants will be pooled into DISCRETIONARY FUNDS and will be utilized to subsidise the cost of LEARNERSHIPS and other interventions, deemed to be a priority, in range of TOURISM sectors.

Priorities are outlined in the THETA Sector Skills Plan – a five (5) year plan for the period 2005 – 2009 and annual checks to confirm that the priorities outlined in the plan still exist should be done by THETA. Clearly, this resource is limited and claims made against these unclaimed levy contributions will be treated on a first come, first served basis.

What funding is available?

For SKILLS PROGRAMMES

“Funding” for SKILLS PROGRAMMES are accessed through the normal channels i.e. the guidelines indicated above.

For LEARNERSHIPS:

Please check with your SETA/THETA.

A Word Of Caution

LEARNERSHIP registrations must be renewed annually, by THETA, with the Department of Labour. The need is predetermined based on industry inputs and only if the need is identified by an industry sector, will the Department of Labour accept the request for registration from THETA.

The Way Forward

Companies and/or Organisations

If you **would like to participate** in LEARNERSHIPS and/or SKILLS PROGRAMMES for travel, please contact THETA to confirm that the National Qualification has been registered as a LEARNERSHIP. If yes, contact your selected ACCREDITED TRAINING PROVIDER.