



XPATWEB

Work Permit & Expatriate Solutions

2020/21 CRITICAL SKILLS

SURVEY REPORT

“ Highlighting the most in demand skills...”

2020/2021 Critical Skills Survey Report

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01 Introduction

South Africa's acute critical skills crisis is brought into sharp focus in Xpatweb's Critical Skills Survey 2020/21 which highlights the most in demand critical skills the country is now facing and how businesses are seeking to import personnel from across the globe amidst ever growing international competition between countries.

The Critical Skills Survey is conducted annually across a wide range of multi-national and corporate companies in South Africa to determine and assess the pressure points that Human Resource- and Global Mobility Practitioners face in sourcing critically skilled individuals when seeking to fill posts locally.

The number of respondents in the 2020/21 survey reach across a broad range of industries and has grown exponentially in recent years, with a 30% increase in respondents in 2019 (178), and a further 19% growth to 220 in the current year.

Survey's Critical Timing: Updated OHID List and Government Inter-Departmental Sessions

This survey has fast become known as a benchmark for business and policy-makers to the extent that input from the 2019/20 research findings was submitted for consideration by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) when drafting the latest national Occupations in High Demand (OIHD) list.

DHET accordingly invited Xpatweb to present its research findings from the Critical Skills Survey as part of an inter-departmental session, which included the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the Department of Labour (DoL) and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC).



30%

increase in responses
to 178 in 2019

19%

growth to 220 in 2020/21

Importance of Contribution: Draft Critical Skills List

As the only private company invited to present its findings in a Government interdepartmental session to develop the Occupations in High Demand List (OIHD), Xpatweb provided research from its own Critical Skills Survey, taken annually over the last five years. This research is also incorporated into the DHET's preliminary Critical Skills List (CSL).

From the 32 occupations that were listed in the research, 24 occupations have been included, proving a significant complementary overlap in the research.

The OIHD Technical Report indicated that where occupations reflect in Xpatweb's results, but did not fall within the post-validation list, the occupations were re-included in the preliminary

CSL. This evidences the importance of contributions by companies who participate in our annual survey.

The new OIHD list now serves as the basis for the updated CSL which was released for public comment by the Minister of the DHA, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, in February 2021. The draft CSL represents the latest list of skills deemed in short supply in South Africa and who may apply to work in South Africa on a Critical Skills Visa in terms of the Immigration Act.

For an occupation to be included in the CSL, it must currently be in acute shortage or likely to be in the future, due to its importance for South African strategic priorities. The occupation must also require a high-level skill or advanced qualification as well as require a long lead-time to develop a domestic supply pipeline.

Below table extract from OIHD Technical Report indicates re-inclusion of certain occupations based on the Critical Skills Survey results:

6-Digit OFO Code	6-Digit OFO Description
2019-214402	Mechanical Engineering Technologist
2019-132104	Engineering Manager
2019-214101	Industrial Engineer
2019-214102	Industrial Engineering Technologist
2019-652302	Fitter and Turner
2019-222103	Registered Nurse (Child and Family Health)
2019-222110	Registered Nurse (Mental Health)
2019-122102	Sales Manager
2019-212101	Actuary
2019-213205	Food and Beverage Scientist
2019-251401	Applications Programmer
2019-252302	Network Analyst
2019-214904	Quantity Surveyor

220
participants

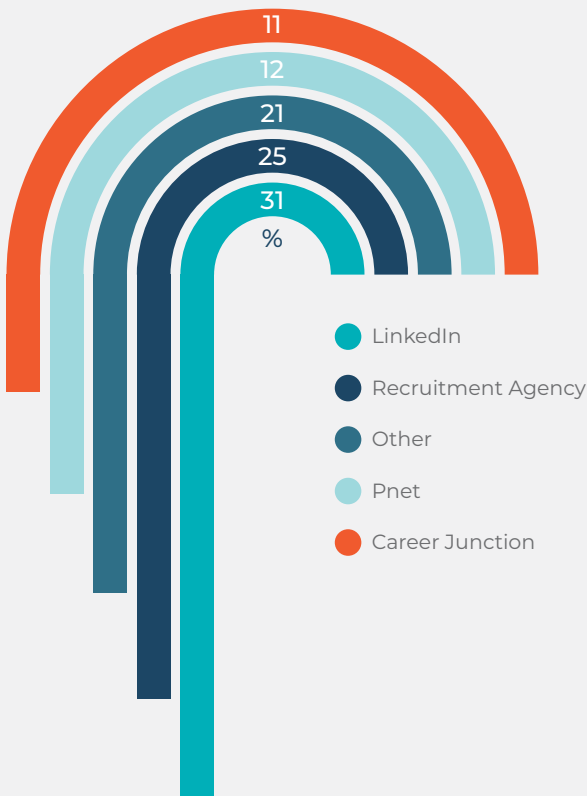
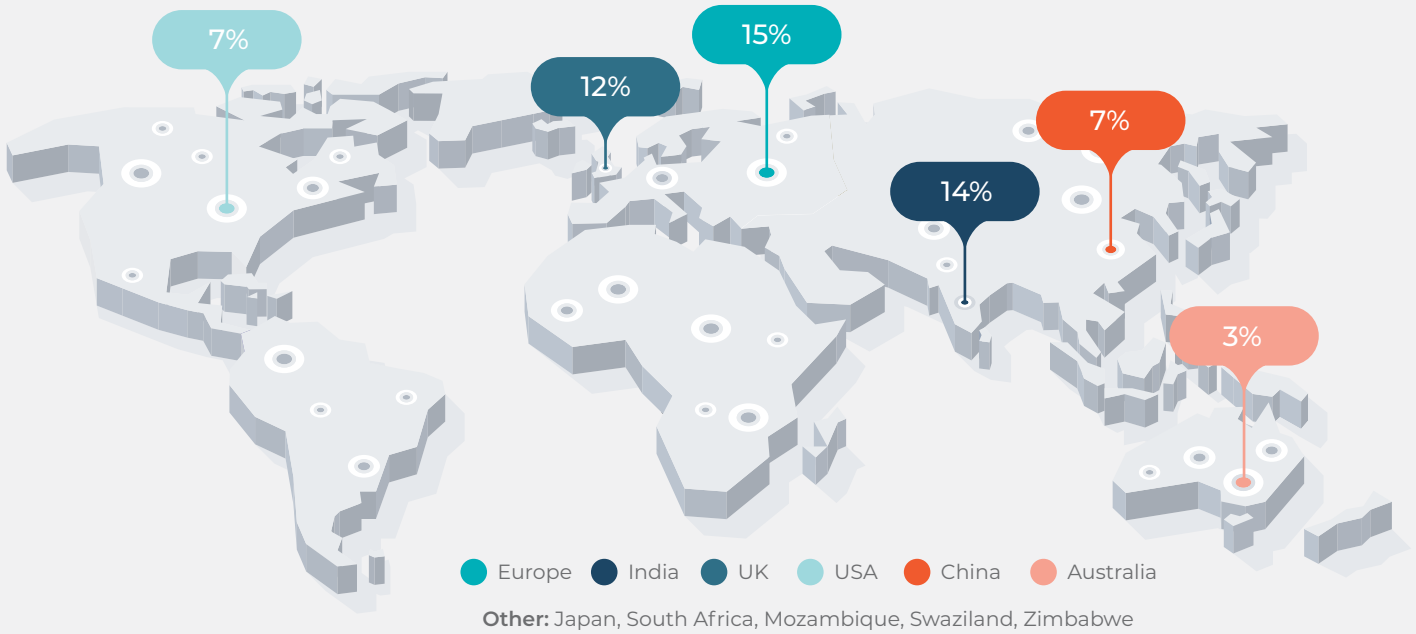
220 companies which participated in this year's survey including JSE-listed companies and large multinational groups, which operate across Africa.

Industries that participated

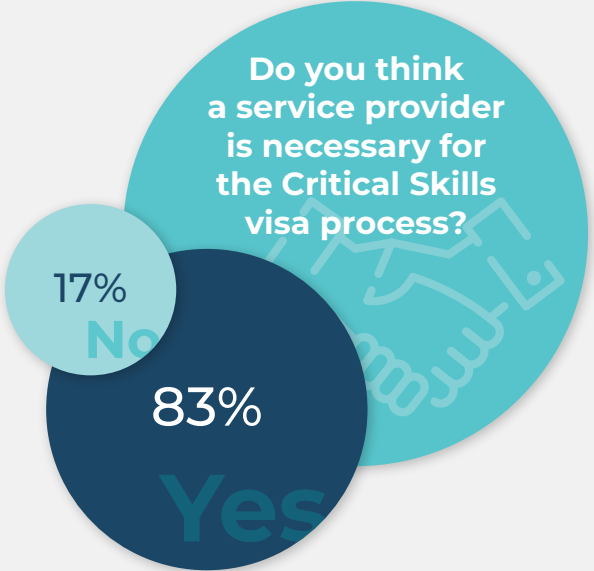


Recruiting of Foreign Nationals

Which country(ies) do you typically recruit/employ skilled individuals from?



On critical occupations, how do you recruit?



Identifying Immigration Challenges

77%

77% of organisations stated that they are still struggling to recruit and obtain critical skills in South Africa for their local and cross-border operations. Consequently, 76% of participants further confirmed that an international search will assist the organisation in meeting its business objectives.

International Recruiting of Foreign Skills

92%

92% of participants indicated that they find that the unfilled critical skill gaps in their organisations have an impact on stakeholders within their organisations.

These unfilled gaps are typically within the top 10 skills deemed most critical and as outlined within the report.

Impact

81%

81% of participants confirmed succession planning and skills transfer is a priority for their business.

Skills Transfer

02 Succession Planning

Skills Transfer and Succession Planning

Sourcing critical skills globally may solve an immediate problem which businesses are facing, however it does not necessarily address the wider challenge of the systemic critical skills shortage that has plagued South Africa for at least the last two decades.

The latter was confirmed by Mr Phindiwe Mbhele, Director of DHA's Corporate Accounts Unit, during a panel discussion between key-role players within the Expatriate and Mobility Sector that included DHA and DoL.

Mbhele indicated that in many cases the source of the challenges faced in the transfer of skills may not be ability, but rather method. He further emphasized that occupations such as CEO and other executive roles where the skill set is diverse, are hard to quantify.

Deputy Director of Labour Migration at DoL, Ms Nonhlanhla Ngwenya, addressed the concern and referred to the Employment Services Act ("Employment Services Act") promulgated in 2014, which may be used for training processes for South African employers to better enable them to conduct the necessary upskilling of local talent through skills transfer programs.

The Employment Services Act legislates skills transfer for local businesses and which makes provision for the employment of foreigners on the following conditions:

Fortunately, it appears that business attitudes are aligned with the Government's thinking as the survey revealed that 81% of companies consider succession planning and skills transfer a priority for their businesses.

In terms of section 8(2)(c) of the Employment Services Act, it is imperative that organisations implement a skills transfer plan when foreign skills are sourced in order to train local professionals into areas of specialisation, allowing them to glean from the imported candidate's vast global experience.

It is necessary to ensure that this requirement is included in the initial phase of planning when recruiting internationally skilled foreigners to ensure that expectations of skills transfer form part of the contractual obligation, as well from an immigration compliance perspective. Even where a foreigner has been offered a long-term working arrangement with an organisation, it is vital that skills transfer takes place to grow the local skills pool.

Local professionals should be afforded opportunities to engage more regularly and formally with senior skilled management and executives to develop their skills to carry the organisation into the future.

Professional Bodies

In order to qualify and apply for a Critical Skills Visa, a foreign national must be able to register with relevant professional body, board or council recognised by SAQA in terms of section 13(1)(i) of the National Qualifications Framework Act, where applicable, and in line with the Critical Skills Visa category as set out by DHA.

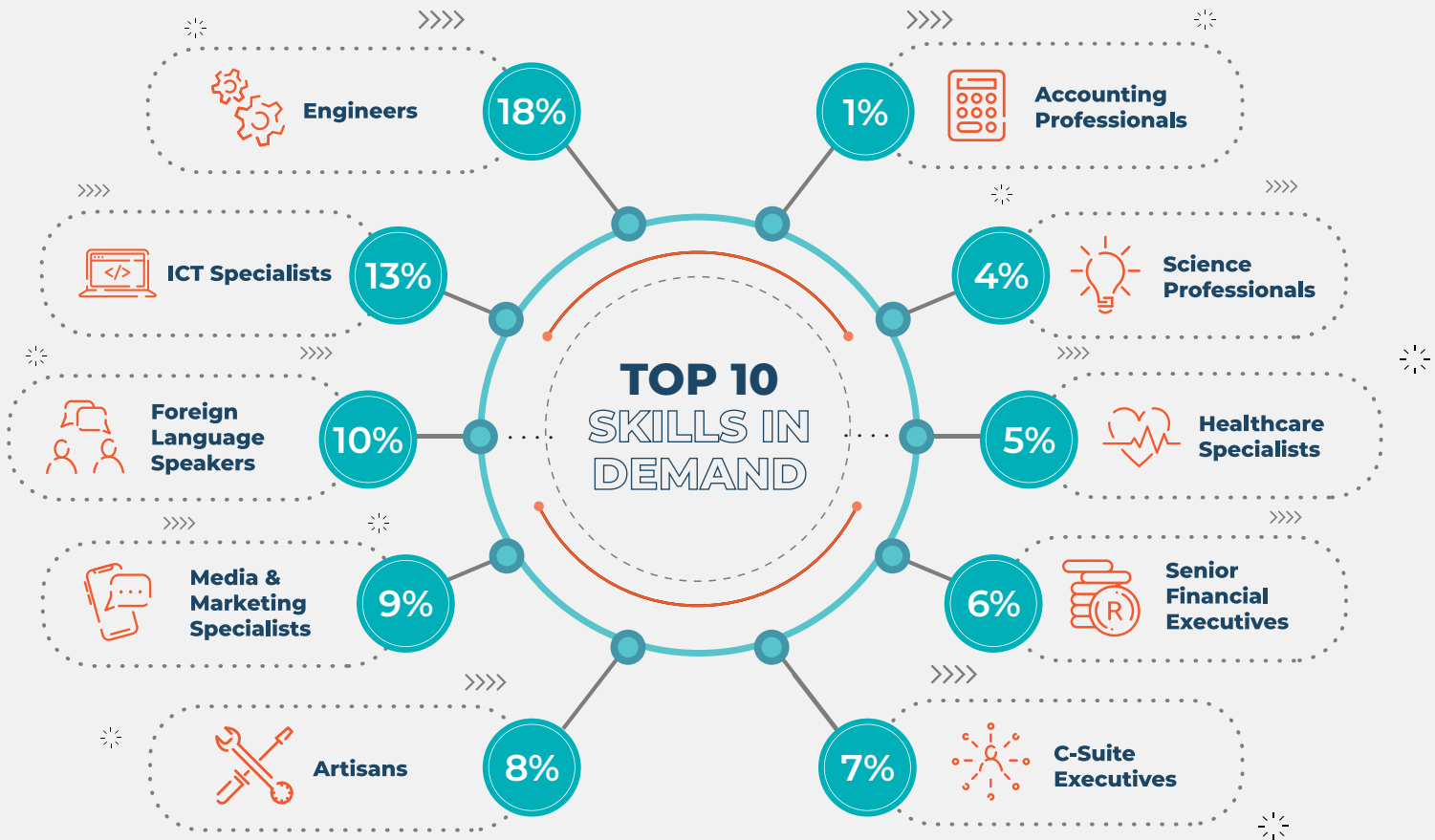
21% of companies indicated that the registration processes with professional bodies are particularly onerous when needing to apply for a Critical Skills Visa.

Inter-alia with hindering factors considered by participants, 21% of companies indicated that the registration processes with professional bodies are particularly onerous when needing to apply for a Critical Skills Visa.

It is essential that Professional Bodies who validate the employment of foreign skills are held to a standard which both upkeep the integrity of these skills and enable employers to recruit foreign talent and swiftly bring them to the country as may be required.

03 Top 10 Skills In Demand

Among the most in demand skills that businesses are struggling to recruit include **Engineering** (18%), **ICT** (13%); **Media and Marketing Specialists** (9%); **Artisans** (8%) and **Foreign Language Speakers** (10%).



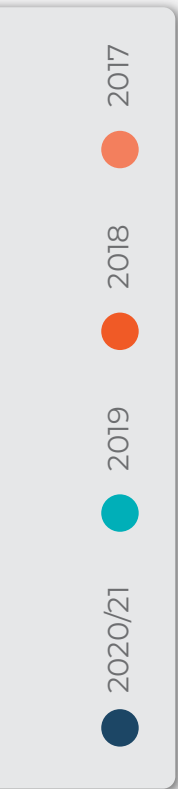
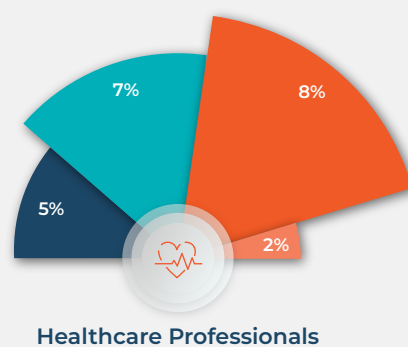
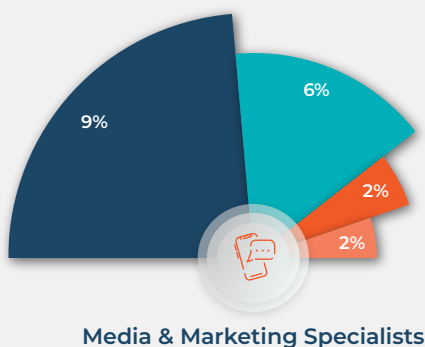
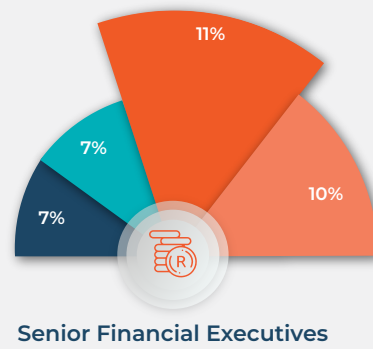
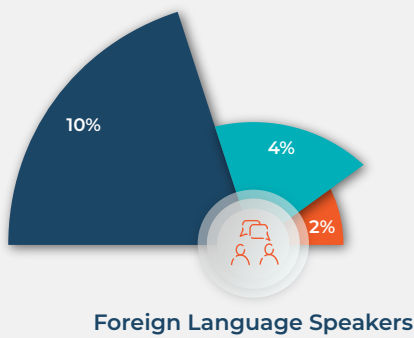
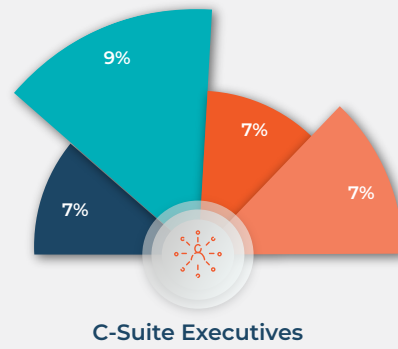
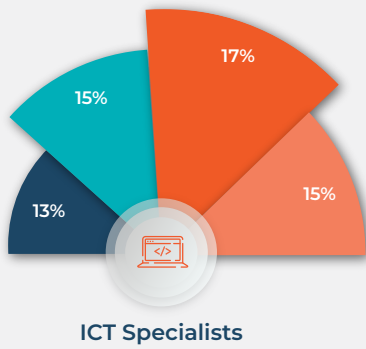
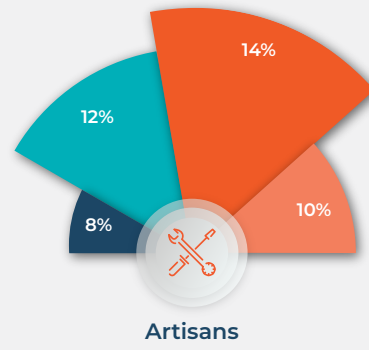
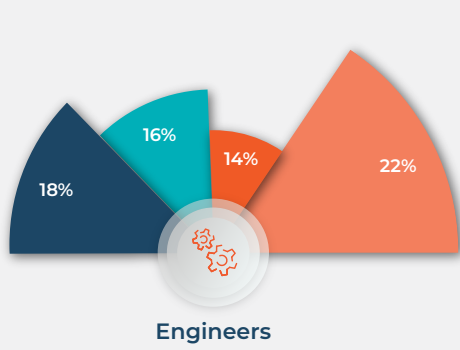
Critical Skills areas most difficult skills to recruit

Other Critical Skills areas cited include: Agriculture, Aviation, Food Technologists, Human Resource Specialists, STEM Teachers and Legal Specialities.

*The total number of responses include multiple areas of skills shortages selected by single participants.

2017-2021 Skills Shortage Comparison

Over the past five years, the skills shortage has persisted with eight categories of skills dominating the top of the list of professionals that businesses find difficult to recruit, leading to many seeking suitably qualified and experienced candidates beyond South Africa's borders to fill these posts. Herewith a comparison of the top eight changes to skills shortages in these categories over the past five years.



05 Occupations & Industry Highlights

Below we look closer at the top occupations in high demand.

Engineers in demand across the board

The number of businesses indicating that engineers are difficult to recruit increased from 16% to 18%.

Although we only see a 2% increase in engineers year on year, the demand for engineers has almost doubled in comparison in the participation group. In conclusion, we note that engineers are underrepresented in the statistics. This is due to several skill groups that have also greatly increased since the previous survey report. This includes media and market specialists (increase of just under 4% of the total group), science professionals (increase of 2% of the total group) and large growth in foreign language speakers (increase of 6% of the total group). Foreign language speakers representing the biggest increase in the total group of skills.

The continuing shortage of engineers could indicate that these skills are still being lost due to the "brain drain" as countries like Australia and the United Kingdom compete directly with South Africa for its qualified and experienced professionals. Business expansions into Africa for special projects and locally in the oil and gas sectors also tend to absorb these in-demand skills.

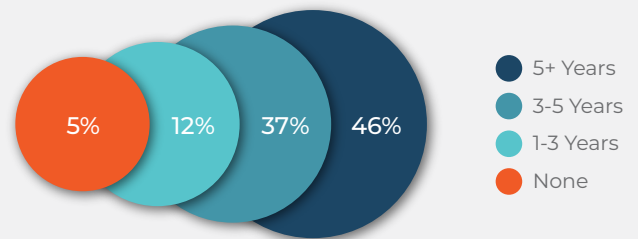
The top five sectors with highest demand in engineers included -

1. Production and Manufacturing
2. Architecture and Engineering
3. Mining
4. Construction and Extraction
5. Information Communication and Technology
6. Business and Finance

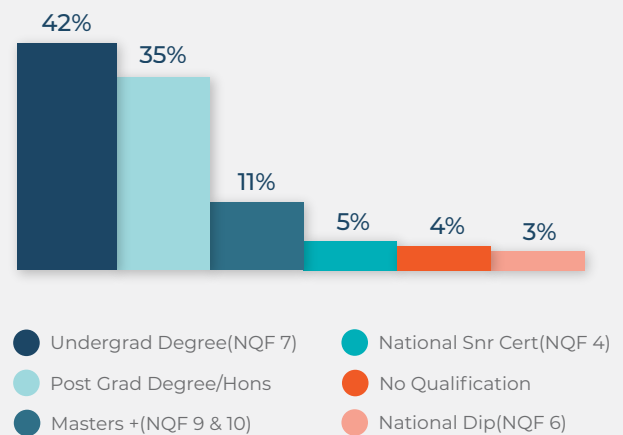
97%

of organisations in need of engineers, that were surveyed, indicated that sourcing professionals was critical to their ongoing operational success.

Experience



Qualifications



According to *NewEngineer.com*, eight of the most in demand engineering jobs globally in 2020 included software engineering; automation and robotics engineering; petroleum engineering; civil engineering; electrical engineering; alternative energy engineering; mining engineering and project engineering.

It is therefore not just the traditional jobs in civil, mechanical, electrical, and aeronautical engineering for which there is a demand for skilled professionals.

According to *NewEngineer.com*:

"there is a growing need for multidisciplinary engineers working in renewable technology, robotics, additive manufacturing, the digitisation of industry and 6G networks to name but a few areas."

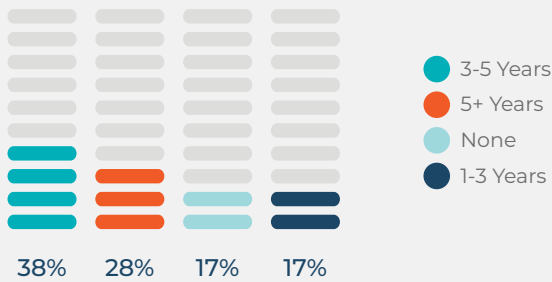
They noted further:

"The 2020 Global Engineering Capability Review recognised that the skills gap in engineering will also impact areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in terms of clean energy, sustainable cities and climate action. The review, commissioned by the Royal Academy of Engineering and Lloyd's Register Foundation, noted that whilst engineering offered an essential lever by which countries could achieve the UN goals, this could not be done unless there was a proper pool of talent coming through with the right level of skills."

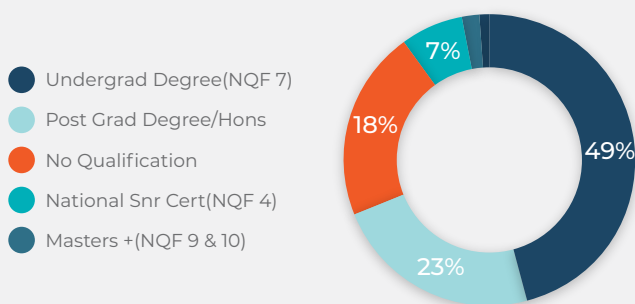
Developed countries like the UK, Germany and USA have historically produced the most engineers but recent trends show that Russia, India and Iran are now also producing a significant number of engineers.

ICT Skills Needed To Fuel The 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR)

Experience



Qualifications



The data showed that sectors with the greatest demand for ICT skills included -

1. Information Communication
2. IT and Technical Services
3. Business and Finance
4. Education and Libraries
5. Administrative Services
6. NGO's
7. Healthcare and Medicine
8. Hospitality Industry

Highlighting the skills shortage impact on their businesses, 94% of organisations reported that qualified data scientists are an occupation that was critical to their on-going operational success. A further 94% of organisations reported a similar need for qualified software developers, while 89% of organisations were in need to recruit data analysts to ensure their ongoing operational success.

According to a 2019 survey by the Institute of Information Technology Professionals South Africa (IITPSA), South Africa has a chronic shortage of ICT professionals. The survey listed the top ten hard to fill occupational vacancies in firms in the MICE (media, information, communication technology) sector as -

1. Software Developer (1 131 vacant posts)
2. Computer Network and Systems Engineer (352)
3. ICT Systems Analyst (316)
4. Programmer Analyst (165)
5. ICT Security Specialist (150)
6. Business Analyst (126)
7. Multimedia Designer (121)
8. Advertising Specialist (106)
9. Database Designer and Administrator (91)
10. Telecoms Network Engineer (91)

Moreover, according to IITPSA's survey, the demographic of the average ICT professional has remained the same over the past 12 years.

The demand for ICT skills remains steady with 13% of respondents indicating in the 2020/21 survey that they struggle to source skilled professionals in this field to drive their operational demand in order to transition into the digital economy.

As big data, robotics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and the internet of things rapidly shape the way of doing business, which often makes the difference between those competitors that survive the transition from the third industrial revolution into the 4IR and those that ultimately fail, sourcing these skills is a priority that cuts across all sectors.

Of the organisations surveyed, 98% indicated that they agreed that critical ICT skills were essential to their ongoing operational success.

Most sought after professions include -

1. IT Application Developers
2. Data Analysts
3. Data Scientists
4. Software Developers
5. Software Engineers
6. IT Program Managers
7. Digital Skills
8. Network Architects

Some businesses were so desperate for ICT skills that 17% indicated they were seeking qualified yet still unexperienced professionals, while another 17% were seeking those with one to three years of experience and 38% wanted to recruit staff with three to five years of experience. A total of 28% of respondents required ICT professionals with more than five years of experience.

A total of

98%

employers strongly believe that ICT is an imperative skill required in their business.

Cross Border Trade Growth Spurs Demand For Foreign Language Abilities

Foreign language skills are in short supply and organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit professionals who are proficient in multiple languages. This is despite the fact that the new draft Critical Skills List completely excludes Foreign Language Speakers as critical skills.

Some 10% of organisations indicated that they struggle to find people with adequate foreign language skills, a marked increase from just 4% in the 2019 critical skills survey. The growth in cross-border trade on the African continent and globally has led to the rising demand for foreign language skilled professionals including the hiring of interpreters.

Foreign language speakers most in demand included -

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. French | 6. Dutch |
| 2. German | 7. Portuguese |
| 3. Mandarin | 8. Arabic |
| 4. Italian | 9. Russian |
| 5. Spanish | 10. Brazilian |

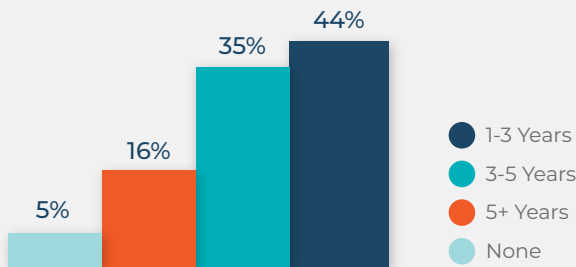
100%

of organisations surveyed reported that finding the correct person for the job was important to the ongoing operational success of the business.

79%

reported that they struggled to find skilled professionals with at least one to five years of experience in the field.

Experience



Globally, foreign language skill demand is rising in the workplace. A study by a global recruitment site Indeed cited that the number of jobs requiring German language skills in 2019 had increased by more than 10% over the previous three years. The number of positions requiring French speakers increased by 1%.

Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) rose from the fifth most-required language skill to the third with demand for Chinese speakers showing the biggest surge during the three-year period.

According to the study the most sought after foreign language skills were German, French, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Polish, Japanese, Russian and Arabic.

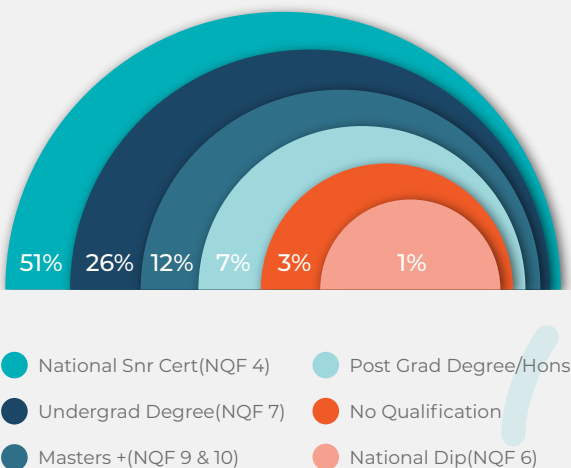
An earlier report released by the British Council revealed that the language skills which the UK would need the most following Brexit were Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, French, Arabic and German.

The British Council noted that 'Languages for the Future' identified these as the top five languages for the UK's prosperity post-Brexit, based on an analysis of economic, geopolitical, cultural and educational factors. The top five were significantly ahead of the next five languages in the ranking – Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Japanese and Russian.

"The new analysis argues that for the UK to succeed post-Brexit, international awareness and skills - such as the ability to connect with people globally beyond English - have become more vital than ever. However, the UK is currently facing a languages deficit," the report said.

Recent research showed that the percentage of 18-34 year olds in the UK who can hold a basic conversation in the top five languages was as follows: French (14%); German (8%); Spanish (7%); Mandarin (2%) and Arabic (2%).

Qualifications



Hunt For Senior Financial & C-Suite Executives

Senior Financial and C-Suite Executives remain in demand, with the number organisations reporting that it is a struggle to find suitable candidates to fill these key business leadership positions, only slightly in decline from 9% in the 2019/20 survey to 7% in the 2021 survey.

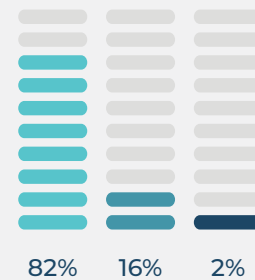
Most in demand professions were Chief Operating Officers (24%), Chief Executive Officers (19%), Chief Technology Officers (19%); and Chief Financial Officers (24%).

These skills are most sought after in the following sectors -

1. Business and Finance
2. Production and Manufacturing
3. Management
4. Education and Libraries
5. Information Communication
6. Healthcare and Medical Services
7. IT and Technical Services
8. Mining
9. Administrative Services

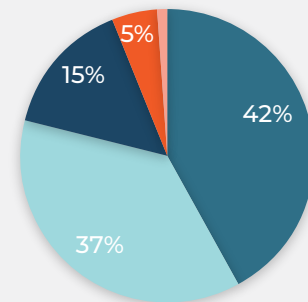
All organisations surveyed reported that the need to find suitable CEO's was "critical" to the ongoing success of their operations with 85% saying they required these executives with more than five years of experience. COO's were also critical to 94% of organisation's success and 67% reported that they struggled to get professionals with more than five years of experience. Some 92% of organisations said that CTO's were similarly essential, while 62% said that these executives should ideally have more than five years of experience.

Experience



● 5+ Years ● 3-5 Years ● 1-3 Years

Qualifications



● Masters +(NQF 9 & 10) ● No Qualification
 ● Post Grad Degree/Hons ● National Dip(NQF 6)
 ● Undergrad Degree(NQF 7)

Factors influencing the challenges that businesses are facing in recruiting the right person for these roles include the fact that organisations are increasingly seeking professionals with a strong skill set match, not only covering the essential qualifications and experience required for a traditional executive position, but also equipped with niche business experience. In short, businesses are acutely aware of market demand in their various global markets and need to be certain that candidates understand the nuances of their specific focus areas. A most recent case where this trend is illustrated is in the hiring of Pick n Pay's new Netherlands-born CEO Pieter Boone, who has held a range of leadership roles at a German multinational company. He was previously COO of Metro, which sells food globally and manages a logistics firm selling food to the hospitality sector.

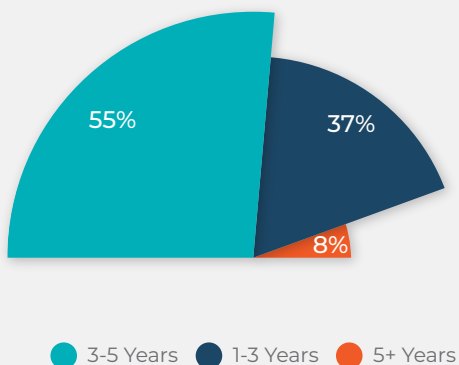
He brings a wealth of experience in emerging markets to his new role, highlighting the importance of both global and niche experience that appear to make him the ideal imported candidate.

Research by Gartner TalentNeuron echoes Xpatweb's findings regarding the ever expanding portfolio of skills required for C-Suite Executives. Gartner TalentNeuron's data, shows that there is also increasing demand for 'design thinking' which tops the list of emerging soft (cognitive and social) skills needed by C-Suite candidates. C-Suite Executives are also increasingly required to have high-tech "hard" (technical) skills to lead organisations in the digitalised terrain using emerging technologies.

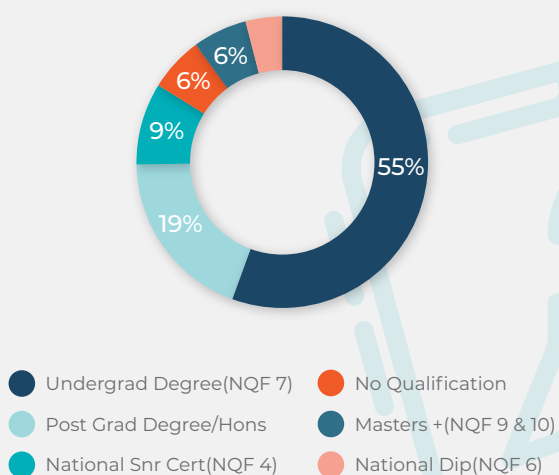
Trade Unions do not always completely understand why businesses want to employ C-Suite executives from abroad, assuming that local skills are readily available to fill these posts. However, businesses can usually demonstrate how they have undertaken an aggressive local and global recruitment drive and extensive interviews before selecting the best candidate. Multi-national firms in particular, which have expanded into SA for the first time, have a strong business case to send an executive from a foreign office, who is entrenched in the business culture, to set up shop. In addition, firms are seeking skilled executives who have engaged in the expansion process previously in other parts of the world and therefore have the experience to oversee the business plan and to manage the business across multiple regions. These skills are both niche and rare and require several years of experience to nurture making it essential to look globally for these professionals.

Surge In Demand For Marketing And Media Specialists

Experience



Qualifications



Marketing and Media Specialists emerged as a skill in demand once again in the 2020/21 survey. The level of demand for skills in this category is growing where 9% of firms stated they struggle to fill posts compared to 6% in the 2019/20 survey.

Professionals most in demand in this field included -

1. Sales and Marketing Professionals
2. Brand and Category Marketing Managers
3. Digital Media Strategists
4. Direct Sales Professionals
5. Media Specialists
6. Creative Designers

The level of qualified professionals in demand was highest for those who possess an undergraduate degree at NCF Level 7 (55%); followed by those with a post graduate degree at NCF Level 8 (19%); those with a National Senior Certificate (9%) and; Masters or higher NCF Level 9 and 10 qualifications (6%). Interestingly, least in demand in this category were staff with a National Diploma at NCF Level 6 (4%).

95%

reported that acquiring the skills of marketing and media specialists was essential to their ongoing operations.

Of the organisations surveyed 95%, reported that acquiring the skills of Marketing and Media Specialists was essential to their ongoing operations.

The latest survey data echoes earlier research by the Manpower Thirteenth annual 'Talent Shortage Survey' which revealed that skilled trades, technicians and sales and marketing positions were among the top three on the list of the most difficult positions to fill in South Africa and internationally. The 2019 survey, as reported by Engineering News, showed that general talent shortages averaged 54% globally and 34% in the country. Large businesses reported a significant 42% skills shortage, while medium sized enterprises noted a 40% shortage followed by 31% for small businesses and 22% for micro-enterprises.

South Africa's 34% skills shortage has held steady since the 2016 Manpower 'Talent Shortage Survey'.

Highly Trained Artisans Essential To Business Operations In Short Supply

South Africa's acute shortage of artisans has surprisingly eased with 8% of organisations surveyed in 2020/21 stating that they find it difficult to source these skilled professionals, a decline from 12% in 2019/20.

100% of organisations surveyed reported that they agreed with the statement that the recruiting of artisans was essential to the ongoing operation of their organisations.

Artisans topping the list of critical skills according to organisations' experience were -

1. Electrician
2. Fitter and Turner
3. Instrumentation Specialists Artisans
4. Millwright
5. Automation Specialist
6. Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Mechanic

100%

of businesses from survey agreed that Artisans are critical to their business operations.

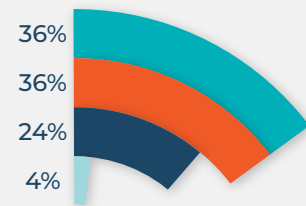
The organisations surveyed indicated that the most difficult artisans to recruit are those with more than 5 years of experience (36%); 3-5 years' experience (36%) and 1-3 years of experience (24%).

According to the (DHET), the National Skills Fund's 2020 Annual report in the Government's 2020-2025 mid-term strategic framework, artisan development will remain a priority.

The report notes that there is a continuous need for suitably qualified artisans to sustain industries and support economic growth within South Africa. In a range of national strategies, the need for artisans has been elevated and identified as a priority area for skills development.

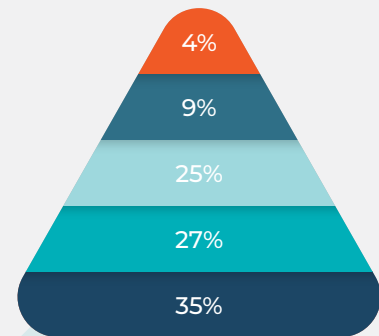
The National Development Plan indicates that by 2030, the country should be producing 30,000 qualified artisans per year, but this target has now been brought forward to 31 March 2026. The number of artisans who were found competent in the 2017/18 financial year was 21,151, as reported in the department's tracer study for artisans. This annual output has to increase by another 10,000 artisans leading up to 2026, according to the National Skills Fund's annual report.

Experience



● 3-5 Years ● 5+ Years ● 1-3 Years ● None

Qualifications



● Undergrad Degree(NQF 7) ● Post Grad Degree/Hons
 ● National Dip(NQF 6) ● No Qualification
 ● National Snr Cert(NQF 4)

Healthcare Professionals In Dire Shortage

South Africa's demand for healthcare professionals has remained constant since the 2019/20 report, according to the latest survey, as 5% of businesses surveyed indicated that they still struggle to recruit professionals in this skill category. This is only a one percentage point decline in the number of businesses responding that they struggle to source these skills compared to 6% in 2019/20.

Healthcare skills that organisations reported that they find the most difficult to recruit included:

1. Registered Nurses
2. Pharmacists - including Regulatory Affairs and Distribution Pharmacists
3. Laboratory Technicians
4. Healthcare Administrators
5. Biomedical Technicians

South Africa's shortage of nurses, in particular, has now reached a critical stage.

According to South Africa's new 2030 Human Resources for Health (HRH) strategy South Africa's healthcare workforce faces worsening staff shortages and the sector now requires funding (billion+) in additional investment to avoid the downward spiral.

The HRH strategy estimates that by 2025 an additional 97 000 healthcare workers - a third of these community healthcare workers - will be needed across the country's nine provinces. In addition, the public primary healthcare system alone will require nearly 88 000 more workers.

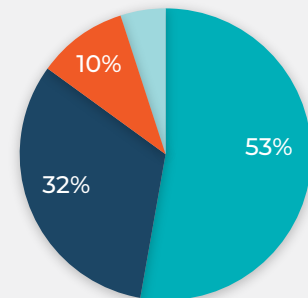
Nurses comprise more than half of the country's healthcare workforce and that more than 16 000 professional nurses comprise of the strategy forecast.

The South African Nursing Council's statistics have also showed that 48% of the country's nurses will retire within a few years, leaving a massive vacuum that will not be filled by the trickle of new nursing recruits who are now entering the profession. The training of new nurses has also been a challenge locally in recent years. Studies have revealed that the country needed 11 000 professional nurses in 2015 yet only around 4,000 were produced nationally by all colleges and universities combined.

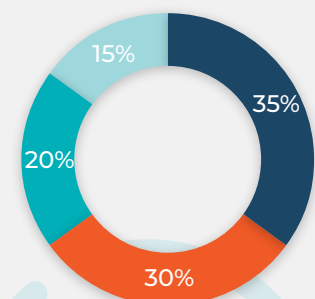
According to the Department of Health and DTI, the country is additionally facing a massive skills shortage of at least 12 000 pharmacists to level up to international standards for the profession.

Moreover, according to the 2019 PPS Graduate Professional Index (GPI), the number of skilled professionals committed to a career in South Africa is declining. While more than 70% of all graduate professionals would encourage matriculants to enter their respective professions, among medical professionals this dropped to 56%.

Experience



Qualifications



The Future Demand For Critical Skills

Remote Working

Pre-Covid-19, many businesses globally had embraced the flexibility of remote working and tele-commuting with largely highly skilled professionals only travelling to a business office several times a week or month. Covid-19's consequent impact and with lockdown regulations implemented globally to contain the spread of the virus, levelled the playing fields in this regard as businesses across most sectors were forced to allow staff to work from home simply to keep their doors open.

Global lockdowns further resulted into the non-availability of foreign skills and/or expertise needed by businesses, especially during such a critical time and delayed project execution and reduction to economic growth in country.

Despite the pandemic, the global skills shortage remains, and while remote working does make it easier to access these skills as more businesses are now open to creative ways of getting the job done without professionals being physically present, the critical shortages of staff such as nurses and doctors in the healthcare sector, for example, cannot be addressed in the same manner.

Xpatweb's survey results reveals the shortage of more on-the-ground technical skills which requires physical presence, and the World Economic Forum listed the top 10 skills of the year 2025 as part of a recent Future of Jobs report, which can be considered as soft skills -

1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Complex problem-solving
4. Critical thinking and analysis
5. Creativity, originality and initiative
6. Leadership and social influence
7. Technology use, monitoring and control
8. Technology design and programming
9. Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
10. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

Whilst remote working has fortunately proven that skills can be moved around the globe, this poses the question to which extent this can be

done, and specifically to the criteria of skills required by and from businesses.

It will thus be interesting to see how the rapid trend towards remote working globally impacts the next critical Skills Survey, as well as the measures the South African Government will put in place to regulate work activities performed by foreign skilled individuals, albeit performed remotely.

Global Competition for Skills

The survey findings reveal that SA continues to compete on a global stage for critical skills across different fields.

The United States (US), Australia, and the United Kingdom's (UK) critical skills shortage lists virtually mirror the skills that SA is desperate to attract as highlighted in the latest Critical Skills survey - from ICT and C-Suite Executives to Engineers, the world is crying out to fill posts in these fields to grow their economies.

Countries such as India and China, for example have a strong reputation in producing ICT professionals, but these skilled young people are seeking to explore the world and are open to global opportunities, making these countries excellent source markets from which to draw professionals. However, in doing so, SA has to compete more than ever with the likes of the US, Australia and the UK when considering its strategy to recruit these professionals. South African policy makers therefore need to consider how to make it as easy as possible for skilled professionals to gain access to work and business opportunities locally. This is something the South African Government is committed to and has already embarked upon with the publication of its most recent critical skills list, allowing visa pathways to professionals to fill posts that are in high demand across various sectors of the economy. The Critical Skills List makes it possible for businesses to embark on recruitment drives to source these skilled professionals abroad.

Equally, other competing countries are seeking to attract skilled professionals and are adjusting their own critical skills lists to speed up the recruitment process.

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The UK for example has recently published new rules that will fast track the visa process to make it easier for foreign trained and qualified nurses to relocate and work in the country.

SA ought to consider a similar process as statistics released by the South African Nursing Council reveal that as many as 48% of the country's nurses will be exiting the profession due to retirement in the next few years. It is alarming to note that the uptake of new nursing recruits into the SA healthcare sector will not be sufficient to replace those who have retired.

As a host country, SA offers myriad benefits to skilled global professionals and these positive aspects need to be highlighted when businesses seek to embark on aggressive international recruitment campaigns. These include the fact that SA is the traditional gateway to opportunities on the rest of the African continent and local firms are therefore extensively networked on the continent to provide a springboard for future growth.

The personal lifestyle benefits may complete the picture of a country that has much to offer to professionals in return for their contribution to the economy. These benefits include:

- A range of international French, German and English schools.
- Burgeoning secure lifestyle estates which offer spacious living in a sunny country, that is often a huge positive factor for professionals who are relocating from the cold EU with its harsh winters.
- World class private medical care and financial infrastructure.

Conversely, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted foreign skilled professionals' perceptions and the Government is encouraged to consider these views when seeking to enhance South Africa's global popularity as a designation for skilled professionals.

According to the 2021 survey entitled 'Decoding Global Talent, Onsite and Virtual' by Boston Consulting Group and The Network, the number of people willing to relocate for work has declined since the first survey in 2014. The survey, which included 209 000 people in 190 countries, showed that most people's view of work had been changed by the pandemic, with the result that countries that have managed the pandemic well by 'flattening the curve' grew in popularity as emigration destinations.

Desired emigration countries include: Canada, US, Australia, Germany, UK, Japan, Switzerland, Singapore, France and New Zealand. On an extremely positive note, 57% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to work remotely for a company that did not have a physical presence in their home country.

There is a concerning factor that;

73% of the organisations surveyed, would also consider this option, which could further accelerate the skills braindrain without citizens even leaving the country. This may be good news for the fiscus, but it is a concern for SA businesses, which will now have to compete on this new virtual plane to retain the interest of local skilled professionals for whom it is becoming increasingly easy to be globally mobile while working remotely from home.

However, it is expected that the skills highlighted currently as being in short supply, will continue to be in demand in at least the next few years as other countries are also facing similar skills challenges.

2014/2021 Critical Skills Lists Comparison & Analysis

Summary of Key Changes To South Africa's 2021 Draft Critical Skills List Compared To The 2014 List

South Africa's much awaited new draft Critical Skills List contains several amendments in terms of the skills that have been added and removed from the list. This section highlights the key changes to the new list for comparative purposes.

Agriculture, Agricultural Operations and Related Sciences

'Agricultural Engineer' has been re-included on the new list but 'Agricultural Scientist', 'Forestry Technician' and 'Sheep Shearer' have been excluded. Two new occupations have been added to the list, namely, 'Agricultural Engineering Technologist' and 'Farm Manager'. The new draft list now contains only three occupations in this category while the old list had four occupations.

Architecture and the Built Environment

'Architect', 'Construction Project Manager' and 'Quantity Surveyor' are on both lists. However, 'Land Surveyor' and 'Urban Regional Planner' have been excluded from the new draft list. A brand new occupation appearing on the new list for the first time is 'Naval Architect'. In summary, there were five occupations on the old list and this has now been reduced to just four on the new list.

Business Process Outsourcing

Several occupations under this skills category have been amended in terms of their titles.

'Customer Service Manager/Team Lead' has been changed to 'Call or Contact Centre Manager', while 'Software Development Engineers/Managers' now simply reads, 'Software Developer'.

The following professions that were on the old list weren't included on the new list –

- Business Analyst
- Foreign Language Speakers for Specialist Language Support
- Quality Analyst
- Quality Assurance Specialist/Auditor
- Systems Architect, Engineers and Managers

Occupations added to the new list that do not appear on the old list include –

- Forecast Analyst
- Resource Planner

There were previously seven occupations on the old list and there are now four on the new list.

Business Economics and Management Studies

Sweeping changes to this skills category saw a total of 14 new occupations added to the latest list as well as one title amendment.

'Actuaries and Risk Assessor's have been changed in name to 'Actuaries' and 'Organisational Risk Manager' respectively, while 'External Auditor' and 'Financial Investment Advisor' are on both lists.

New occupations on the list include:

- Business Administrator
- Business Development Officer
- Company Secretary
- Corporate Communications Manager
- Intellectual Property Special Advisor

Engineering

This skills category has shrunk dramatically, with 22 occupations being removed from the new list.

The old skills list had a total of 41 occupations while the new draft list includes 19 occupations, of which 11 are brand new skills that have been added to the list. The name of one occupation, 'Industrial and Production Engineers', has been amended to simply, 'Industrial Engineers'.

Electrical- and Chemical Engineers have both been removed while the survey indicates they remain in high demand.

Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences

There are nine occupations on the old list and ten on the new list in this skills category.

'Nursing Professionals' as previously listed on the old list have now been specified into specific categories on the new list.

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'General and Specialist Practitioner' have been changed to 'General Medical Practitioner', thus excluding specialist fields. The occupations of 'Medical Superintendent/Public Health Manager', 'Public Health Physician' and 'Veterinarian' have been excluded from the new list. 'Hospital, Retail and Industrial Pharmacist' have been re-included on the new list as is.

Information Communication and Technology

There have been several changes to this skills category and it is unclear whether the name changes of some skills encompass skills that have been excluded from the longer new list.

'Network Analyst' has been included in the new list, while 'Data Centre Operations' has been removed and 'Data Management Manager' added, and 'Database Specialist' on the old list reads 'Database Designer and Administrator' on the new list. The old list reflects 'Network Specialist (Security)' while the new list shows 'ICT Security Specialist'.

In summary, 11 occupations that were on the old list have now been excluded from the new list, while the three above mentioned skills possibly underwent name changes. A total of 15 brand new occupations have been added onto the new list.

Professionals and Associate Professionals

This skills category saw extensive changes with a drastic reduction of 37 listed occupations that had appeared on the old skills list to just two that are on the new draft list.

The only two occupations from the old list that remain on the new draft list are 'Organisation and Methods Analyst' and 'Draughtsperson'. In summary, there were 39 occupations under this section but the new list has shed 37 of these occupations.

Life and Earth Scientists

Occupations under this skills category were reduced from 35 to just six skilled occupations. The job title, 'Food Scientist' was amended to 'Food and Beverage Scientist' and this was the only occupation from the old list that appears to have remained on the new draft list. Five of the six occupations on the new list are brand new including 'Geophysicist' and 'Hydrologist'.

Among the skilled occupations that were on the old list, which do not appear on the new list were Geochemist; Botanical Scientist; Bioeconomist; Chemical Scientist; Environmental Engi-

neers; Environmental Manager; Engineering Geologist; Geophysicist; Biological Scientist; Environmental Scientist and Engineering Geologist.

Trades

Only the occupation of 'industrial machinery mechanic' has been re-included on the new draft skills list.

Of the nine occupations on the new list, eight of these are brand new occupations.

Skills removed from the list include 'Millwright' and 'Electrician', with both indicated as being in high demand according to the survey results.

Accounting

All eight occupations listed under this category are new additions to the draft critical skills list. These occupations include:

- Accountant in Practice
- Accounting Officer
- Financial Accountant
- Forensic Accountant
- Fraud Examiner
- General Accountant
- Management Accountant
- Tax Professional

Manufacturing

All four occupations listed under this category are new additions to the draft critical skills list. These occupations include:

- Manufacturer;
- Manufacturing Operations Manager;
- Mechatronics Technician;
- Metal Machinist and Quality Controller (Manufacturing).

Marketing and Media

All 11 occupations listed under this category are brand new additions to the draft critical skills list.

The occupations under this category are listed as follows:

- Advertising Specialist
- Communication Coordinator
- Communication Strategist
- Digital Artist
- Market Campaign Analyst

CONTINUE →

- Market Research Analyst
- Marketing Practitioner
- Multimedia Designer
- Multimedia Specialist
- Sales and Marketing Manager
- Web Designer

STEM

The previous critical skills list included no occupations under this category, the new draft list includes 'University Lecturer', 'FET College Principle' and 'Statistical and Mathematical Assistant'.

Academics and Researchers

All of the academic and research positions listed on the old list have been excluded on the new list.

This dramatic reduction in occupations led to the significant reduction in the total amount of critical skills listed on the new draft list.

In addition the requirement for doctoral graduates (acquired in South Africa) has been removed from the skills list.

Uncategorised

Brand new occupations on the new list that do not appear under a specific category are 'Airport and Harbour Manager'; 'Dockmaster' and 'Marine GIS Technician'.



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