

# Professional registration with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)

## Grow your business by getting more of your engineering staff professionally registered

The wheels of service delivery and the broader economy demand not just more engineering graduates, but more registered engineering professionals, able to take responsibility and make decisions independently, while ensuring the highest level of quality and safety. It is for this reason that organizations need to work towards developing all engineering staff towards professional registration with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

## Making staff more valuable

It is not difficult to see why professionally registered employees are more valuable to a company. Apart from the positive end-result (registration empowers your staff to sign off on projects), the learning that takes place includes a wide range of essential skills.

Candidates must master – and be able to demonstrate – that they can not only analyse engineering problems but also develop solutions. They must understand and apply advanced knowledge, including general principles and specific aspects of their jurisdiction and local area.

It is critical for businesses that staff must manage engineering activities and communicate clearly with others in the course of doing this. Taking a broad and forward view of what they are doing is also vital: they must develop forward thinking, and address the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of their projects – as well as the legal requirements and health and safety aspects.

ECSA also requires the candidates to demonstrate ethical conduct, and to take responsibility for the engineering decisions they make. All these demands raise the calibre of candidate in the workplace, and therefore uplift the profile of the company – instilling confidence in the employee's ability.

## Better returns, lower risk

The skills learnt in the lead-up to professional registration create a strong foundation for the candidate that engineering companies can rely on for years to come in the servicing of their clients' needs – knowing that their staff are legally and professionally capable of tackling complex projects independently, or actively contributing to project teams. This means less time-consuming management, lower risks, and better returns.

Supporting development towards registration ensures that there is a continuous cycle of skills transfer and experience within the business – ensuring that the expertise can be built up over the years and effectively passed down from one generation to the next. How else is a business to remain sustainable and retain its competitive edge?

## Developing the profession

The reality is that the engineering profession is one that is at risk, with a scarcity of skills and a dearth of professionals aged 35-55 years. The development of engineering graduates to the point of registration has therefore been identified as a national priority, which requires targets, policy, and funding.

The SETAs are being encouraged to make discretionary funds available to support companies in their efforts to provide structured workplace experience to graduates. ECSA has been lobbying the Department of Higher Education and Training to set national targets, not only for graduation, but for candidacy programmes and to fund the candidate phase. Calls for expressions of interest from SETAs are increasingly reflecting support for graduate internships or candidate programmes.

Candidate programmes are no longer a 'nice-to-have' but are fast becoming key to addressing South Africa's ever-increasing demand for engineering professionals. Candidates are also quick to realize which organizations will invest in them and move there as soon as an opportunity arises.

## Organizational commitment

Addressing the problem starts with an organization's commitment to fill their engineering workforce with registered professionals as well as supporting graduates to obtain registration and stay registered.

'Research has confirmed that companies that invest in structured training and mentoring of their graduates record higher levels of productivity from their graduates when compared with their counterparts whose training and mentoring is not structured,' says Edgar Sabela, Acting CEO of ECSA.

Organizations should start by registering a Commitment and Undertaking (C&U) with ECSA, ensure that their graduates register as Candidates, and provide them with appropriate projects, supervisors, and a mentor to oversee and monitor progress. The sooner companies invest in this process the quicker candidates can pick up the workload and take responsibility.

Registration with ECSA is just one step in the continuous development of engineering staff that will allow the business to retain them and plan ahead for succession. Knowing that there is a plan for their advancement also encourages younger staff to contribute fully to the business; if they regard themselves as part of the business's future, you can rely on their commitment.

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