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# App development, engineering skills in demand

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Skilled graduates are needed to meet the insatiable need for app development.

Graduates with app development and engineering skills are in demand and more likely to enter SA's workforce.

This is according to Nqobile Dlamini, citizenship lead at Microsoft South Africa, who says companies want to employ young graduates with app development skills that can be used to solve local challenges.

Microsoft's partners and customers are looking for graduates with a vast range of skills but at this point app development and engineering are the key skills employers want, she notes. These are the key skills that are very important in the technology sector, Dlamini explains.

## Economic prospects

According to Moira De Roche, MD of e-learning company Aligned4Learning, graduates skilled in engineering and app development can coin it.

Having a pool of these skills at local level will change the old model where local operations were only really for sales and market development, says De Roche. "The revenue stream is in add-on development services, especially for customised cloud applications."

De Roche says there is no real evidence South African graduates are interested in fields where they will gain app development skills, even though mobile has brought an awareness of apps.

We need to find a way to say: "You know those apps you have on your phone? Wouldn't you like to develop some?"

She explains the lack of interest in these types of skilled fields is due to the fact that there are too few schools that teach information technology. "I believe there are less than 400 country-wide. It's at this level that we can start to really develop the interest.

"Universities react to changes in what is required in the market too slowly. This is understandable; they have to develop a curriculum and then get it approved by the Department of Higher Education. So the time lag is always at least a year behind what the market requires."

Meanwhile, professor Barry Dwolatzky, director of the Joburg Centre for Software Engineering at Wits

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University, has also been vocal about the shortage of software engineering skills in SA.

According to Dwolatzky, South Africa's skills shortage is a real issue and limits the country in its abilities and has a direct impact on economic growth.

"Senior software engineering specialists require both a strong theoretical foundation and an ability to apply this theory in practice. We lack these specialised skills and this needs to be addressed now," he says.

## Right connections

To address this core skills shortage, Microsoft started the Student to Business (S2B) programme, which is designed to connect students with Microsoft partners and customers for entry-level jobs and internships.

The programme is open to any student interested in a career in technology. Graduates engaged in S2B receive training on the core skills required by an employer, and also gain a certificate for the training they have completed.

Young people can go to varsity and graduate but in most cases they won't have the core skills required on the job, says Dlamini.

"The reason we started the programme is that our partners expressed that they were not getting the right people with the right skills. Our role is to connect the unemployed graduate to employers; those employers are our partners or customers," says Dlamini.

Every year the programme aims to place 1 000 graduates in year-long internships so that they receive work experience. The graduates also receive a monthly stipend from the employer.

The initiative, which has been running for the past eight years, has seen 8 500 young people being put through the programme. Over 80% of the youth that go through have maintained full-time employment, she says.

S2B graduates have gone on to be placed in organisations such as Ascent Technology, Avenade, Business Connexion, Britehouse, City of Joburg, Dion Wired, Incredible Connection, Foschini Group, Edcon, Discovery, South African Revenue Service and the State Information Technology Agency.

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