

## **Making South Africa's youth more employable through digital skills training.**

Microsoft is announcing a partnership with the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) and Afrika Tikkun to extend the Global Skilling Initiative that was launched last year to provide at least 20 000 young people with critical digital skills.

The focus is on building digital skills capabilities in South Africa, and to improve the employability of the country's youth in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) industry, by providing the physical footprint and infrastructure these young people need to access this digital skills training.

This partnership between the public and private sectors will harness the individual and collective capabilities of each of the partners, to provide the support needed to access the training. Afrika Tikkun, for example, is hosting and facilitating access to the portal – <https://afrikatikkunservices.com/gsisa/> - where young people can register, undergo an assessment and start on their identified learning pathways.

PSETA will support unemployed learners to access this opportunity and promote the initiative through its networks to ensure that as many unemployed learners as possible have free access to the best resources, to improve knowledge and capabilities. This includes leveraging partnerships with other public sector entities in opening up access to libraries, computer labs, community halls and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, as well as assisting with the connectivity needed to participate in, and complete the training and certifications that will help their employability by bringing them into the digital economy.

“When young people are not able to enter the labour market or find opportunities for further education or training, we are losing the potential of these youth to contribute to our economy, productivity and growth. Government's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) seeks to actively change the economy towards positive growth. This requires an active and immediate adaptation by the post school education and training system and will require a range of stakeholders, including government, private sector, and educational institutions, to engage in continuous, structured consultation, collaboration and co-ordination,” says Thulani Tshefuta, Chairperson of the PSETA Accounting Authority.

“Finding ways and forging meaningful collaborations to empower South Africa's youth with the skills they need to effectively navigate the Fourth Industrial Revolution is a key priority for the South African government, and collaborating with private sector partners including corporates and civil society is critical to equip and prepare our youth for the workplaces of the future,” says Bontle Lerumo, Chief Executive Officer at the PSETA.

This latest partnership builds on the momentum of the Global Skilling Initiative, which has helped nearly 300 000 people in South Africa gain access to digital skills like software development, data analysis and customer service specialisation since last June.

It also builds on the success of strategic partnerships with non-profits like Afrika Tikkun as part of the initiative. In October last year, Microsoft South Africa provided a \$150 000 (over R2.5 million) grant to the youth development NPO, which helps young people from underserved South African communities through its holistic cradle-to-career model that includes skills development and work readiness programmes.

This grant was used to extend the reach of digital skills to more South Africans by recruiting jobseekers into the Global Skills Initiative programme; assessing job-seekers to determine the best learning pathway for them, as well as supporting and incentivising them to access and complete at least one learning pathway; enrolling and helping job-seekers with formal certification; and sourcing work experience, job placement and entrepreneurial opportunities.

“South Africa’s youth, particularly those from underserved communities, have borne the brunt of the economic crisis precipitated by the pandemic,” says Onyinye Nwaneri, Chief Executive Officer at Afrika Tikkun Services. “Unemployment has risen to 32.5 percent, with 7.2 million people unemployed in the fourth quarter of 2020 – and many of these are young people desperate to gain future-ready, relevant skills that will help make them more employable.”

Digital skills are the key to employability and economic growth. “Research has found that the most critical future skills that businesses will continue to require in the next five years are all digital, with data analysts, data scientists and machine learning specialists topping the list of the most in-demand roles,” says Lillian Barnard, Managing Director at Microsoft South Africa.

The partnership aims to pass on the most critical skills by providing the training, tools and platforms designed to connect job-seekers with employers. Backed up by resources from LinkedIn, GitHub, and Microsoft, the initiative will help young people access digital skills courses for the most in-demand jobs, and low-cost certifications. As part of this, Microsoft will extend free LinkedIn Learning and Microsoft Learn courses and low-cost certifications that align to 10 of the most in-demand jobs through to December 31, 2021.

Also included in the initiative is: the use of LinkedIn Skills Path to help companies better hire for skills; expanded access to LinkedIn’s Skills Graph to help create a common skills language for individuals, employers, educational institutions, and government agencies to help improve workforce planning, hiring and development programmes; Career Coach, a Microsoft Teams app powered by LinkedIn, to provide personalised guidance for higher education students to navigate their career journey; and Microsoft’s Career Connector, which intends to place 50,000 job seekers who have built skills via Microsoft’s non-profit and learning partners in tech-enabled jobs over the next three years.

“By providing youth with the learning paths of the skills that are most in demand, the initiative is helping create employability and bridge the skills gap in the country. It is extending the footprint of Microsoft’s global skills initiative by



harnessing the power of partnerships and enabling more widespread access to critical digital skills training,” says Barnard.

Young South Africans interested in accessing these critical digital skills can learn more on the Microsoft microsite. All of the resources for the Global Skills Initiative are also available at [www.aka.ms/jobseeker](http://www.aka.ms/jobseeker)

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