

SCARCE SKILLS refer to those occupations (positions in the organisation) in which there are a scarcity of qualified and experienced people, currently or anticipated in the future, either (a) because such skilled people are not available or (b) they are available but do not meet employment criteria. This scarcity can arise from one or a combination of the following, grouped as relative or absolute:

Absolute scarcity: suitably skilled people are not available, for example:

- A new or emerging occupation, i.e. there are few, if any, people in the country with the requisite skills (qualification and experience) and education and training providers have yet to develop learning programmes to meet the skills requirements.
- Firms, sectors and even the country are unable to implement planned growth strategies and experiencing productivity, service delivery and quality problems directly attributable to a lack of skilled people.
- Replacement demand would reflect an absolute scarcity where there are no people enrolled or engaged in the process of acquiring the skills that need to be replaced.

Relative scarcity: suitably skilled people available but do not meet other employment criteria, for example:

- Geographical location, i.e. people unwilling to work outside of urban areas.
- Equity considerations, i.e. there are few if any candidates with the requisite skills (qualifications and experience) from specific groups available to meet the skills requirements of firms and enterprises.
- Replacement demand would reflect a relative scarcity if there are people in education and training (formal and work-place) who are in the process of acquiring the necessary skills (qualification and experience) but where the lead time will mean that they are not available in the short term to meet replacement demand.

CRITICAL SKILLS, on the other hand, refer to specific key or generic skills within an occupation. In the South African context there are two groups of critical skills:

- Key or generic skills, including (in SAQA-NQF terminology) critical cross-field outcomes. These would include cognitive skills (problem solving, learning to learn), language and literacy skills, mathematical skills, ICT skills and working in teams.
- Particular occupationally specific skills required for performance within that occupation to fill a “skills gap” that might have arisen as a result of changing technology or new forms of work organisation.

Both scarce and critical skills must be identified at the occupational level, with scarce skills being considered against the occupation itself and critical skills being reflected as specific skills within the occupation.

- There is a growing mindset, even in business circles, that companies get the sector education and training authorities (Setas) they deserve.
- Levies will increase, and almost 80 percent of this amount generates the country's expensive but not stable skills development element through the 23 Setas.
- There needs to be more interaction and more relationship building between the 2 groups, unity in working together for submissions etc.