

The difference between Learnerships and Apprenticeships programmes

An apprenticeship is an agreement between an apprentice and an employer for a set period of time during which the apprentice works and receives training in the workplace. The Skills Development Act of 1998 replaced the apprenticeship model with that of the learnership model. Learnerships are learning programmes that require learning on the job supported by structured or institutional learning. They are generally designed in the SETAs, approved by the Department of Labour, funded from the Skills Levy and must lead to a qualification on the NQF (SASSETA, 2014).

The difference between an apprenticeship and a learnership

The apprenticeship system in South Africa was regulated by the various Industry Training Boards, and was the means by which the artisan skills base was developed (SASSETA, 2014).

Comparison between a learnership and an apprenticeship		
	LEARNERSHIPS	APPRENTICESHIPS
Relevance to occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate in any occupation in all economic sectors in which work-based learning paths are viable. • It is specific to an occupation but also develops employability across a wide spectrum of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tended to be restricted to blue collar trades. • Many trades are relevant in a wide variety of sectors, e.g. electricians and machine operators.
Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners in most occupational fields. • Can be employed, unemployed or pre-employed at the time of entering the learnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly in the traditional trades. • Apprentices are employed for the duration of the apprenticeship.
NQF Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The qualification that a learnership leads to, can span across all eight NQF levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The qualification is not higher than the trade i.e. equivalent of NQF level 4.
Age of learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No age restriction on learners entering a learnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually entry level employees.
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration is determined by the minimum of 120 credits, so learnerships are usually 12 or 18 months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three to four years.
Contract with learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal learnership agreement is signed by the learner, employer and training provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract is signed between the apprentice and a single employer for the duration of the apprenticeship.
Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to meet legally specified criteria for NQF alignment, e.g. it is portable and serves as a building block for further learning. • SAQA-registered and nationally recognised by employers and training institutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The certificate issued is trade-specific, making portability difficult. • Qualifications enjoyed wide national and international recognition in respect of the specific trade.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds occupational-specific skills and develops generic (critical cross-field) competencies, which are relevant in all work contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The qualification is not necessarily recognised by training institutes as a stepping-stone towards further learning.
Credits for outcomes archived	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners are awarded credits for the outcomes successfully archived, even if they do not complete the learnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal recognition for outcomes achieved if apprentices don't complete the apprenticeship.
Curriculum and learning programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jointly planned by relevant stakeholders. The interrelationship between integration of workplace and institutional learning is formally structured into the learning programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration and interrelation between institutional and workplace learning is not formally structured, and the integration does not always happen.
Institution learning components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered by wide spectrum of training institutes and contextualised to the needs of the occupation for which the learnership is designed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learner's work-based experience is restricted to the work context of a single employer.
Purpose of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote access to employment, as well as further education and training opportunities in the fields of the learnership, as well as in other fields. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at developing trade-specific skills and consolidating the worker's ability in that trade.
Role of the learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily that of learner for the duration of the learnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary role is that of an apprentice, who is in employment.
Approval/ registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be approved by the relevant SETA, which submits it for registration to the DoL. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved under the Manpower Training Act 1981.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final judgement of the competency by workplace and training provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learner's competency is assessed through trade tests conducted by institutions accredited under the Manpower Training Act as COTT.
Employment after conducting the learnership/ apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment is not guaranteed, but the learnership also prepares the learners for employability outside full-time employment with an employer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment is not guaranteed, although employers take on apprentices with a view to keeping them as permanent employees after successful completion of the apprenticeship.

(SASSETA, 2014)