

DPWI calls on industry to empower individuals with disabilities

In a bid to promote inclusivity in the built environment industry, Bernice Swarts, deputy minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, has urged the department's entities to ensure that individuals with disabilities are provided with training, work, and business opportunities.



Deputy minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Bernice Swarts.

Swarts highlighted the common misconception that people with disabilities are incapable of performing the physical duties associated with the industry, leading to their exclusion from work and business opportunities.

These remarks were made at the inaugural Council for the Built Environment (CBE) colloquium on persons with disability in the built environment, which took place this week in Boksburg, Gauteng. The conference, themed *Co-creation of spaces which entrench universal access*, aimed to reinforce and expedite the rights of people with disabilities.



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Swarts noted some of the challenges still facing people with disabilities in the built environment, including physical access to many buildings which do not have ramps, handrails, heavy doors that are hard to open and close, narrow doorways and hallways, and poor signage that does not cater for the visually impaired.

“ The deputy minister called for people with disabilities to be offered job opportunities in project management and owning businesses in the built industry. ”

Swarts also called on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to ensure that people with disabilities receive training in built industry qualifications for them to be more employable in the sector.

The DHET's Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System is one instrument

that aims to create an enabling environment for inclusion and mainstreaming of people with disabilities in the post-school education and training system, which seeks to ensure that disability-related policies and guidelines are implemented and monitored.

'Positive gains'

“While there have been positive gains in the fight for the inclusivity of people with disabilities in the country, like the inclusion of the South African Sign Language as the 12th official language, the country is still lagging in reaching minimum targets for the employment of people with disabilities,” said Swarts.

Swarts also advised the CBE to invite stakeholders outside the built industry sector to next year’s colloquium, including education stakeholders, in order to have a more holistic approach in resolving the challenges faced by people with disabilities in the built industry.

Meanwhile, Swarts will this evening deliver a keynote address at the Built Environment Recognition Awards ceremony to celebrate the achievements of individuals and organisations, who are shaping the future of the built environment.

The awards recognise outstanding contributions to the industry and encourages professional registration.

The inaugural awards - hosted by the CBE - will take place in Durban.

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