

Future-ready automotive starts with future-ready technicians

- Ford is creating pathways for young technical talent while building a sustainable pipeline of future-ready technicians for its dealer network
- The programme combines paid workplace experience, formal training and mentorship to develop the skills modern automotive retail demands
- Ford's investment in technical skills supports youth employment, strengthens its dealer network and ultimately benefits customers

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA, 27 August 2026 – “South Africa faces a striking paradox. We have high youth unemployment while industries such as automotive are struggling to find the specialised technical skills they need,” said Kevin Heunis, Service Engineering and Operations Director, Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa (Pty) Limited.

“Not every successful career needs to begin with a university degree. Technical and vocational careers can provide meaningful, future-focused opportunities, but we need stronger pathways connecting young people's potential with the skills industry needs.

“That need is very real at dealership level. Vehicles are increasingly sophisticated technology platforms and our dealers need diagnosticians, technologists and problem-solvers who can understand advanced systems and resolve complex problems. The technical capability in our workshops ultimately has a direct bearing on the experience we provide our customers.”

Building a pathway from school to the dealership

Ford South Africa's Autotechnician Apprenticeship Scholarship is designed to create a sustainable pipeline of future-ready technicians for its dealer network, while opening career opportunities for young South Africans with technical aptitude, curiosity and problem-solving ability.

The programme was piloted in Pretoria in 2026 with eight students from low-income families selected from local technical high schools. Over three years, they combine formal technical education with paid, hands-on dealership training, progressing from practical shadowing and theory to on-the-job repair work, advanced training and ultimately qualification.

Building on the pilot, the Autotechnician Apprenticeship will formally launch in 2027, with a new intake beginning its three-year apprenticeship as the pilot cohort progresses into its second year. A further intake is planned for 2028, creating overlapping cohorts and a continuous pipeline of technical talent progressing towards qualification and potential employment within Ford's dealer network.

The pilot apprentices gain workplace experience at CMH Ford Hatfield, CMH Ford Gezina and CMH Ford Steyns, receiving hands-on training and a monthly stipend. The scholarship also supports theoretical course costs, tools, uniforms and transport, while apprentices receive mentorship, professional development and career guidance.

Gift of the Givers manages student selection and programme monitoring, while MerSETA provides curriculum and theoretical training support. Ford Service Engineering & Operations facilitates collaboration between dealerships and colleges and integrates Ford technical standards into the curriculum.

Developing talent for a changing industry

The apprenticeship looks beyond academic results and traditional recruitment criteria to identify qualities such as curiosity, problem-solving ability, technical aptitude and practical intelligence.

“Potential doesn’t always come through a CV,” said Heunis. “Some of the strongest technical talent can be found in young people who naturally want to understand how things work – who build things, experiment and solve practical problems.”

As vehicles become more complex, technicians increasingly work with advanced diagnostics, electronics, software and connectivity. Qualified technicians can progress into specialist and Master Technician roles, management, training and technical support, with some career paths offering international opportunities.

Developing this talent is therefore both a skills and business imperative. Future-ready technicians provide Ford dealers with the technical capability required to diagnose and resolve increasingly complex vehicle issues and deliver the service and ownership experience customers expect.

Skills development is nation-building

The Autotechnician Apprenticeship Programme forms part of Ford’s broader “Cradle to Vocation” approach to education and skills development, spanning early childhood development and literacy, mathematics and science, technical and vocational education, and entrepreneurship at university level.

“Skills development is about far more than filling vacancies,” said Neale Hill, President of Operations at Ford Motor Company, Africa.

“When a young person gains a qualification, workplace experience and an opportunity to build a meaningful career, the impact reaches beyond that individual. It can improve the prospects of a family, strengthen a community and contribute to the economy. That is why we see skills development as nation-building.

“Ford has been part of South Africa for more than a century and investing in people and communities remains fundamental to our role in this country. This programme is one practical example of how we can use our expertise, dealer network and partnerships to create opportunities for the next generation.”

“We are not looking at this as a once-off intake. The intention is to build a pipeline,” added Heunis.

“Ultimately, this is about developing the people who will look after our customers’ vehicles in the years ahead. As vehicle technology changes, the capability within our workshops has to evolve with it.

“The next generation of diagnosticians, engineers and innovators may already be sitting in South Africa’s technical classrooms. Our responsibility is to recognise that potential and help create the pathways for it to flourish,” Heunis concluded.

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