



NEWS RELEASE

Issue date: 15 September 2008
EMBARGO: For immediate release

CRITICAL SKILLS SHORTAGE IN AEROSPACE AND DEFENCE SECTOR: AAD YOUTH DEVELOPEMENT PROGRAMME INITIATIVE TO GROW THE SKILLS POOL.

The Africa Aerospace and Defence (AAD) Show Director and Executive Director of the South African Aerospace Maritime and Defence Industries Association (AMD) **Simphiwe Hamilton** says that the shortage of skills in the Aerospace and Defence industries has reached crisis proportions.

“The depth of the crisis is illustrated by the experience of one of our AMD members, namely BAE SYSTEMS Landsystems OMC. BAE SYSTEMS has for months been searching locally for engineering and technical personnel and then in desperation hired staff from outside of South Africa to meet contractual obligations”, explains Hamilton. Globally, there is a massive shortage of qualified personnel in the Aerospace and Defence sector. This has translated into a depletion of our local skills base as pilots, engineers and technician leave South Africa for better remuneration elsewhere.

Furthermore, South African universities and technicians are struggling to produce enough graduates in these fields to satisfy current demand, let alone supply increased numbers of graduates to industry. For example, Michael Boer, Associate Lecturer in Aircraft Design and Performance at the University of the Witwatersrand says that on average about 100 first year students enrol for aeronautical engineering studies at Wits. However, by the end of the four year course only around 14 students graduate in this specialisation.

As the Organisers of AAD are close to their respective industries, there is a clear understanding and appreciation of this problem. “We saw the need for AAD to tangibly show its commitment to the aerospace and defence sector as well as the lesser privileged communities” says Hamilton. “We are therefore launching a new look AAD Youth Development Programme (YDP) that is focussed on encouraging our learners from disadvantaged communities to excel in Science and Maths as well as promote the career options available in the Aerospace and Defence related industries” he explains.

One of the focal points of the YDP has been a Science Essay Competition for Mathematics and Science learners in Grade 9, 10 and 11, sponsored by the Air Traffic and Navigation Services (ATNS). Captain Mpho Mamashela, Chairperson of the ATNS Board, and an SAA rated senior captain on the Airbus 340 applauds the aim behind the science competition and ATNS’s sponsorship thereof. “With the critical skills shortage facing the Aerospace and Defence Sector in South Africa the aim of this competition was

to encourage young people to pursue an interest in science and mathematics and embark on scientific related careers. It highlighted the many opportunities that the world of science can offer to young people”, he says.

The competition required entrants to produce an essay chosen from a selection of fifteen high technology subjects, like aerospace design, rocketry, ergonomics and robotics. Entries, many of a high standard, were received from a variety of learners most from previously disadvantaged secondary schools throughout South Africa. The finalists were selected on 1 September and teams of twenty finalists will be travelling to Cape Town to attend and further participate in the YDP.

A special programme of activities has been developed that will challenge, educate and entertain the young finalists during their time at the YDP.

In order to encourage secondary schools to motivate their learners to participate in science based competitions, ATNS has donated three high spec desk top computers which will be awarded to those schools attended by the first, second and third prize winners in the competition. The official prize giving for the ATNS Science Competition is due to take place on Friday 19 September 2008.

From 17 to 19 September 2008, the YDP has invited 400 learners per day from disadvantaged schools in the Western Cape to attend educational “sessions” over the three day period. Over the weekend of the 20th and 21st September 2008, the YDP will be open to the general public visiting the exhibition. The YDP will feature the following exciting activities:

- 1 The ATNS Theatre offering documentary material, lectures and interactive workshops;
- 2 Model-building, including scale aircraft and shop models to build and take home;
- 3 Simulators on which youngsters can try their hand at “flying”;
- 4 Virtual aviation monitors with which learners can interact; and
- 5 Daily career guidance information and exhibitions provided by experts in the Aerospace and Defence sector.

It is hoped that this relatively small initiative will plant enough seeds of inspiration and encouragement in the minds of our youth that over time will yield an increase in the number of pilots, engineers and technicians in the critical Aerospace and Defence sector of our economy. The Aerospace and Defence sector will also progressively grow in importance in Africa and if South Africa’s capacity in this regard is not allowed to erode, South Africa will be well placed to play a developmental role on the African Continent.

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