

New engineering library to boost mining skills

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Gold Fields Limited (Gold Fields) and the University of the Witwatersrand officially opened the Gold Fields Engineering Library at the Wits Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment on 7 November 2012.

The Gold Fields Engineering Library, located in the Chamber of Mines building on Wits' Braamfontein campus, provides modern and innovative facilities for undergraduate and postgraduate engineering students, academics, and researchers. As part of the refurbishment of the Chamber of Mines building, the library was relocated to the ground floor to make it more accessible to students.

Librarian Maryna van den Heever says that the library offers improved reading and consultation facilities for students and researchers; state-of-the-art computer workstations; a prominent display and browsing area for new books, journal subscriptions, and exhibitions; and a fully equipped information skills electronic classroom. 'Other key features include the provision of electronic resources alongside traditional printed materials, the acquisition of a self-check circulation unit, as well as convenient access points for persons with disabilities', she adds.

The library is the key project in Gold Fields' three-year R18 million sponsorship of the Wits School of Mining Engineering and will make a major contribution towards the alleviation of skills shortages in the South Africa mining sector.

The partnership between Gold Fields and Wits University was solidified in 2010 when the company pledged R26 million in a three-year sponsorship deal comprising investments in the mining engineering faculties at Wits as well as the University of Johannesburg.

This comes amidst the critical shortage of mining skills in South Africa, particularly mining engineers, with the average age of mining engineers estimated to be well into the 50s and skills being poached by offshore mining companies. The Wits School of Mining Engineering graduates about 70 mining engineers every year and plans to raise this number to about 100 in five years' time.

'We are pleased to see that our investment is yielding positive results. The library is core to our long-term investment in the School of Mining Engineering and we are confident it will make studying and teaching a lot easier and more fun for engineering students at Wits. Mining engineering is a core skill needed to sustain not only Gold Fields' operations, but the local mining industry as a whole', says Nick Holland, CEO of Gold Fields.

Professor Loyiso Nongxa, Wits Vice-Chancellor and Principal, says: 'We are hugely appreciative of the investment made by Gold Fields into the School of Mining Engineering. It is an example of how a creative partnership between Wits and the private sector brings together our traditional strengths that enable direct benefits for our current students. More importantly, this investment will go a long way towards securing the future of the next generation'.

Gold Fields also currently funds bursaries for 13 undergraduate and several postgraduate students in the Wits School of Mining Engineering. In addition, the company provides vacation work for all students who do not have bursaries, thus allowing them to graduate and enter the market place. In 2011, the company accommodated 40 students for vacation work.

Other projects funded through the Gold Fields sponsorship include the equipping of the Mine Design Computer Laboratory, a substantial upgrade of the Rock Engineering Laboratory, and the establishment of the Gold Fields Associate Lectureship programme.

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To listen to audio clips of the speeches delivered by Nick Holland, CEO of Gold Fields, and Professor Loyiso Nongxa, Vice-Chancellor of Wits University, go to http://www.wits.ac.za/newsroom/newsitems/201211/18373/news_item_18373.html.