

ECSA, GDID, and UJ sign a Memorandum of Agreement

The Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development (GDID), and the University of Johannesburg (UJ), have entered into a memorandum of understanding aimed at supporting and coaching engineering students at UJ who are recipients of the GDID bursaries.

This tripartite initiative follows GDID's recognition of the need to mentor first- and second-year students, the majority of whom fail to complete their qualifications as they are unprepared for the level of academic commitment required when studying engineering. This has been linked back to the need for stronger life-skills support, and ECSA, as the custodian of the engineering profession in South Africa, has designed the pilot model for the support of students in partnership with both the GDID and UJ.

Professor Angina Parekh, Deputy Academic Vice-Chancellor at UJ, emphasized that the likelihood of students remaining within a tertiary institution's system depends on their success during the first year of study. 'The UJ has introduced a national First Year Experience (FYE) programme, as a student's overall success is linked to how well they adjust academically and socially within the university environment,' she said. This FYE has increased the success rate for students to 83%.

The Honourable Nandi Mayathula-Khoza, Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of the GDID, lauded the partnership as marking an important milestone in addressing the broader needs of Gauteng Province. 'The GDID is committed to creating and sustaining partnerships with universities in the Province as it provides an opportunity to actively support first-year students through life-skills training, mentoring, and coaching in study techniques,' she said. The support for students from the GDID will extend to grade 10 learners, who, through Sci-Bono, will receive assistance in maths and science subjects.

Mr Cyril Gamede, President of ECSA, pointed out that this initiative will allow ECSA to play a significant role in social development in South Africa.

Mr Sipho Madonsela, CEO of ECSA, expanded on this theme by emphasizing that the launch marks a proudly South African moment, and that the 'Pipeline Model' utilized in this programme is based on the Thuthuka Model, which was founded by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and which has proven to be very effective.

The priority focus areas for ECSA are:

- Improving the 'talent pipeline' and talent schools feeding into the University of Johannesburg on a pilot project basis
- Improving the poor pass rates at undergraduate level among previously disadvantaged students
- Transforming the profession by delivering high-level engineering skills with a specific focus on previously disadvantaged engineering practitioners
- Facilitating mentorship for engineering graduates.

This partnership is a true demonstration of organizations that are aimed at addressing problems that are undeniably visible in the academic environment. As ECSA, we are obliged to go beyond the regulatory function and add value to the society' Gamede concluded.

The GDID will oversee the funding and sponsorship of this project, as well as the provision of bursaries and practical experience for the students, while the UJ will be responsible for providing a healthy learning environment for the bursary recipients and meeting facilities for the engineering students.

The MEC further gave her commitment that the programme would later be extended to other universities in the province, namely the University of Pretoria and Wits University.

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