



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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## **SURVEY REVEALS SA ENGINEERS CONCERNED ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE SPEND AND EDUCATION**

*8 October 2013:* A recent PPS survey conducted among over 400 South African engineers revealed a number of concerns amongst these professionals about the engineering industry, including government's infrastructure spend, education standards of engineering graduates and the attraction of new entrants into the profession.

Respondents to the survey displayed a worrisome 42% average confidence level when asked whether they felt government was effectively delivering on its promised infrastructure spend.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, the survey results are not surprising given the wide spread concerns about infrastructure goals not being met.

Manglin Pillay, Chief Executive Officer of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), says that Government is delivering on the promises regarding the infrastructure spend announced over the past few years, but that progress is extremely slow.

"Currently the roll-out of projects is hardly making a dent in the earmarked spend of more than R870 billion. The lack of adequate roll-out has seen companies releasing civil engineering professionals, something South Africa cannot afford should the 'big' roll-out happen. Some engineers have chosen to leave the country for employment elsewhere. In addition, the National Development Plan (NDP), as well as the Millennium Development Goals, will be prejudiced, as many of the priorities are directly linked to civil engineering, which is at the heart of service delivery."

When asked whether enough is being done to attract new engineers to the profession, only 18% of respondents in the PPS survey said yes.

Joubert says this finding is in line with the recent announcement by Higher Education and Training Minister Dr Blade Nzimande that while the number of engineering graduates had increased from 8 424 in 2009 to 9 387 in 2011, this was still below the target of 10 093. "He stated that tertiary institutions indicated they required interventions in order to increase graduate output."

Pillay agrees that more needs to be done to make the profession more attractive. "For this reason SAICE is involved throughout the year in career guidance initiatives that targets primary and secondary school learners to create an understanding of what civil infrastructure engineering entails and to expose the learners to careers in civil engineering and the construction industry. SAICE's flagship competitions, AQUALIBRIUM, the SAICE Schools Water Competition and the international Bridge Building Competition, together with the Youth in Construction initiative with various sister

organizations, attracts thousands of learner participants. These projects go a long way towards creating awareness and sensitizing learners to the importance of Maths and Science and to encourage learners to consider civil engineering as a career option.”

Pillay says that finding experiential training for university of technology students especially is a huge challenge. “Due to inadequate project roll-out, companies are loath to provide crucial experience to these students. This in turn, prevents them from obtaining their qualifications. In fact, there are many students, who have completed their formal training, that are unable to qualify and thus are not gainfully employed.”

The Heads of Departments at the different faculties of civil engineering are engaging with one another to find solutions for the challenges encountered by industry when employing young graduates, says Pillay. “SAICE has embarked upon an initiative called SAICE Career Focus where experiential training jobs would be sourced by companies via a web based system – this is a small part that we play in trying to alleviate the situation.”

“The survey conducted among engineering professionals has brought some pertinent issues facing the profession to the fore. It is important that these challenges are addressed in order to attract and retain these vital professionals in the country,” concludes Joubert.