

Final round of maths olympiad to reveal SA's top young mathematician

Next Friday, 12 September marks the final round of the South African Mathematics Olympiad (SAMO), when South Africa's top young mathematician will be revealed, to be announced at the SAMF Annual Gala Awards in October.



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Sponsored by Harmony Gold Mining Company Limited (Harmony) and the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), the SAMO is the biggest olympiad in the country and has been taking place on an annual basis since 1966. It is organised by the South African Mathematics Foundation (SAMF), an organisation that was established as an initiative of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa (AMESA) and the South African Mathematical Society (SAMS). It consists of three rounds each, in both a junior division (Grades 8-10) and senior division (Grades 11-12).

In March this year, 82,291 high school learners took part in the first round of the SAMO and 16,330 of those learners scored 50% or above, thus qualifying for the second round that took place in May. Only the top 100 senior and 100 junior learners of the second round qualify for the third round.

The Western Cape leads this year's participation with 88 high school learners from 35 schools followed by Gauteng with 54 learners from 33 high schools.

Out of the 198 third round qualifiers, 15 learners are participants in the Siyanqoba Regional Olympiad Training Programme. This programme, supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), offers classes on a regular basis for high school learners who show a particular interest in understanding of mathematical concepts and has ten training centres throughout the country. It is one of the various learner and teacher development programmes offered by the SAMF.

Prof Johann Engelbrecht, Executive Director at the SAMF, explains that participation in the SAMO and other SAMF programmes ultimately prepares a learner for tertiary education. The type of mathematical problems that participants are faced with during each round of the olympiad is very similar to what can be expected at university level. Engelbrecht strongly recommends that all learners who plan to further their education at university take part in the olympiad from an

early age. "Our learner development programmes start at Grade 4 and the majority of past winners of the high school olympiad have been taking part in our programmes since they were 10 years old," he says.

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Mashego Mashego, Executive Director from Harmony Gold Mining Co. Ltd cannot emphasise the importance of mathematics education enough. "The top 15 highest earning university careers have one thing in common - mathematical skills. By taking part in the olympiad, students will get an opportunity to practice not only number skills but also critical thinking and problem solving, which are crucial to any career regardless of whether it requires working with numbers."

"Reaching the second round and ultimately the final is a great achievement," says Chantyl Mulder, Senior Executive: Transformation and Growth at SAICA. "It shows not just a talent for mathematics and problem solving, but also demonstrates a willingness to learn and challenge yourself. The chartered accountancy profession is in dire need of talented learners who are studying core mathematics."

Here's an example of a question from last year's senior division from the final round: "2013 is the first year since the Middle Ages that consists of four consecutive digits. How many such years are there still to come after 2013 (and before the year 10,000)?"

The top 10 contestants per division will be announced at the SAMF Annual Gala Awards evening scheduled to take place on 11 October in Cape Town.

Registration for the 2015 SAMO takes place in January each year. For more information, please call the SAMF office at 012 392 9362 or send an e-mail to info@samf.ac.za.

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