

Bridge building competition helps develop interest in engineering careers

The third annual South African National Roads Agency (Sanral) Bridge Building Competition took place during the July school holidays in Port Elizabeth.



Winners of the 2017 Sanral Bridge Building Competition

The event was hosted at Sanral Southern Region's Road Materials Testing Lab in Struandale, in conjunction with Unity in Africa Foundation's Incubating Great Engineering Minds (iGEMs), a leadership development incubator and education to employment programme. The programme promotes engineering career fields amongst youth in high schools who have potential to go into undergraduate engineering studies at a tertiary level, and then enter future engineering fields after graduation.

The Sanral Bridge Building Competition was one of a series of workshops, site visits and projects during the July school holiday for the iGEMs learners. The holiday programme is an integral first phase in a four stage leadership development programme, which incubates incumbents for about seven years.

Around 34 academically-deserving Grade 11 and 12 pupils from disadvantaged and socio-economic vulnerable backgrounds from 18 schools in Nelson Mandela Bay participated in the competition. The event offered a glimpse into the world of civil engineering but also allowed learners to put their creativity, team skills and future engineering skills to the test.

Based on the format and rules on the South African Institution of Civil Engineering's (SAICE) bridge building competition, learners had to design and then build model bridges using only wooden sticks, rope and glue in a limited time frame following functional specifications and construction methods.

The bridges were judged on aesthetics, weight and structural strength. In relation to the latter, suspended weights literally stretched the bridges to breaking point in an ultimate showdown between the 10 teams.

Scholarship induction

Sanral announced that later this month it will host an induction event for the scholarships and bursaries that will be awarded to pupils in the Eastern Cape.

In the past financial year, Sanral awarded 180 bursaries to learners in various schools and 300 scholarships for engineering-related studies at a tertiary level with an estimated combined value of approximately R8 million.

Mbulelo Peterson, Sanral Southern Region Manager explained that agency takes an integrated approach at development of South African youth for future roles and careers in engineering.

"We begin with initiatives like today's iGEMS programme which supports the development of youth in high schools. In addition to this, we offer scholarships and a maths/science programme for high school learners. When high school learners enrol for formal studies, Sanral offers bursary options.

"Once students have graduated, we provide on the through a structured and formal graduate training centre which provides real world road engineering experience," Peterson said.

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