

Gauteng first foundry training centre launched

Gauteng's first foundry training centre was officially launched recently, to create a hub for foundry-related skills training and technology transfer. The first intake of apprentices will begin their training in January 2014.

The Gauteng Foundry Training Centre (GFTC) is funded by government with the support and input of the private sector. The project is being funded by the Gauteng Department of Economic Development (GDED) in partnership with the National Foundry Technology Network (NFTN), a DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) initiative.

Albert Chanee, Gauteng's acting HoD for Economic Development said at the launch that the GFTC will promote localisation by helping to improve the global competitiveness of the foundry industry. "The foundry industry is important to infrastructure development, which is an important factor in economic development," he said.

The Gauteng Foundry Training Centre, as it will be known, will be located at the Ekurhuleni East College in Kwa Thema. It will offer state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure for both theoretical and appropriate practical training, thus contributing to addressing the availability of skills that have been identified as scarce.

Initial focus will be artisan training

The scope of the training centre and the curriculum development has been informed by the requirements of the local foundry industry. The initial focus of the GFTC will be artisan training. Focused on new entrants and school leavers, the apprenticeship will train melters, moulders and pattern makers in the foundry industry.

Robert Bezuidenhout, training centre manager of the GFTC, explained that although artisan training will be the initial focus, the training will also encompass skills training, non-technical training and recognition of prior learning.

"The skills training will be based primarily on the SAIF training modules and focused on upskilling existing foundry employees. Non-technical training is aimed at improving literacy among foundry staff, as well as basic business skills and basic supervisory training. Finally, the GFTC will assess the skills and experience of existing foundry employees with a view to identifying gaps and addressing these through targeted training interventions," he said.

Adrie El-Mohamadi, project leader of the NFTN, said that the training centre's publicly funded equipment will be largely manual, but of sufficient scale and technology to allow training that is meaningful in an industrial context. "In other words, the aim is for a small-scale industrial foundry infrastructure rather than laboratory-scale facilities," she said.

Regional hub for other foundry-related training

El-Mohamadi said that the training centre will also function as the regional hub for other foundry-related training, including short courses as well as management training courses offered through the SAIF utilising various training providers. "The foundry training infrastructure should be used in collaboration with industry and universities for the development and prototyping of casting processes and products," she said. Discussions with specific university partners are expected to yield a career path opportunity for ambitious artisans to allow them entry into Universities of Technology.

Other collaborating partners are the merSETA, SAIF, National Tooling Initiative Programme (NTIP), University of Johannesburg Metal Casting Training Centre and the Aluminium Federation of SA (AFSA).

John Davies, CEO of SAIF, said that the training centre will focus on sand casting using both chemically bonded and green sand as well as permanent mould gravity die casting. "Given the structure of the industry in Gauteng, casting materials will initially be limited to grey cast iron and aluminium, with the possible inclusion of ductile or spheroidal graphite iron," he said.

SAIF's current training module offerings to existing foundry workers will be supplemented by the GFTC to increase the scope and impact of foundry training in Gauteng by making qualified artisans available to the industry. The NFTN and SAIF are in the process of developing a skills programme and intend to apply to the merSETA for the accreditation of this skills programme. Should accreditation be granted, it will allow companies to claim additional funding for workers undergoing the training.

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