

GMSA, NMMU renew skills development deal

By [Lee-Anne Butler](#)

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General Motors South Africa has renewed a partnership deal with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's mechatronics department, aimed at ensuring continued skills development for motor manufacturing in Port Elizabeth.



NMMU Mechatronics Engineering graduate, Nathan Kops (left) is now a full-time employee at GMSA. Inspecting one of the robotic systems in the Struandale assembly plant with him is automation technician, Rais Sallie.

According to GMSA spokeswoman Gishma Johnson, manufacturers around the world have become more dependent on computerised and robotic machinery, increasing the need to align the skills base. NMMU is the only university in the Eastern Cape offering a Bachelor of Engineering degree in mechatronics.

"Mechatronics is a vital skill so it is important we increase our pool of available engineers by training students at the university," Johnson said.

"It is very important to improve this skills base, not just for the automotive sector but also for any manufacturing facility that uses robotic technology."

Mechatronics combines a number of aspects of engineering, including mechanical and electrical engineering, robotics, programming and computer-aided design. NMMU mechatronics chair Professor Igor Gorlach said the university had first approached GMSA when it decided to introduce the degree.

"There were challenges in becoming the first institution to introduce this new degree and at the time we believed we needed strong support from industry," Gorlach said.

"We approached local automotive companies for support in order to establish the degree. The degree needs to be accredited by the engineering council, so we needed to convince them of the academic content as well as the industrial base."

Industry readiness

According to Gorlach, GMSA has contributed R4m to the department and also provides students with access to the latest technologies.

"Because of this partnership, our students are well prepared for industry, with up-to-date theoretical technologies.

"They are very marketable and graduated students are appointed locally, nationally and internationally."

He said GMSA also benefited by the students developing new products and systems for them.

Training and organisational development manager Wayne Osborne, said the partnership provided the opportunity for students to complete their in-service training at the company, acquiring critical on-the-job training and experience. He said GMSA had noted an increase in student numbers over the years, and the growing number of women who graduated in mechatronics.

Source: Herald

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