



FOR PROFESSIONALS  
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## Infrastructure spend problem must be addressed to ensure security of engineering profession

04 June 2015: Confidence among engineering professionals that government is effectively delivering on its promised infrastructure spend has declined by two percentage points quarter-on-quarter - and a staggering 15 percentage points since the inception of the survey in 2012 - to reach 33%. This is according to the fourth quarter 2014 PPS survey conducted among nearly 600 engineers.

Macy Seperepere, Manager: Professional Associations at PPS, says that despite comments by the Finance Minister in the 2015 budget announcement that Government will spend R813 billion on infrastructure over the next three years, it appears that engineers are not confident that this spend will be properly allocated.

Commenting on the results, Vaughan Rimbault, Chief Executive Officer of the South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering (SAIMechE) says that engineering professionals recognise that the public sector is becoming increasingly incapable of delivering on infrastructure spend, largely as a result of a diminished professional engineering capacity in the sector. "The public sector has been particularly aggressive in encouraging skilled professionals to leave their service, but has failed to augment this exodus through proper training and development of those that followed. Without good professional engineering capacity, infrastructure spend will never meet expectations."

Furthermore, a concern about available employment opportunities for new entrants to the profession was also raised, with 50% of the survey respondents saying they feel there are not enough opportunities for young engineers in the profession.

"SA needs more experienced engineering professionals, and the private sector is struggling to play a meaningful role here," says Rimbault. He suggests that the public sector, through the Ministry of Public Works, should introduce voluntary national service for all unemployed engineering graduates.

He says that in exchange for a short-term contract of three to five years at junior officer pay (R10k per month) the public sector could provide basic hands-on training, followed by deployment for experiential learning (the candidate phase), into the various public sector projects at national, provincial and local level. "Most infrastructure projects involve fairly low-level, well-documented engineering, and these are ideal places for the development of skills in young professionals."

In addition, he says a properly structured and managed candidate phase, in partnership with professional institutions such as SAIMechE, would accelerate both the development of competent professionals and the roll-out of the National Development Plan.

The results of the survey reveal that it is imperative that the problem of infrastructure spend is investigated properly in order to improve the perception of the engineering profession. “It is also important to consider ways in which to address the unemployment rate of engineers in order to promote the profession to the youth and better ensure the sustainability of the profession as a whole,” concludes Seperepere.