

Technology assistance keeps local bearings manufacturer moving ahead

GB Bearings (Pty) Ltd, manufacturer, distributor and refurbisher of industrial and white metal bearings for the South African and export markets, launched a new range of industrial bearings and further expanded its business by adding a new test rig – the only of its kind in South Africa.

These successes were made possible through the implementation of a Firm Technology Assistance Package (FTAP), one of the solutions offered by the Technology Localisation Plan of the Department of Science and Technology (DST). GB Bearings, as a supplier to state-owned companies, was selected to form part of government's drive to improve the competitiveness of local original equipment manufacturers.

The DST recognises that upgraded technologies and support are key requirements for competitiveness. Increasing the local industrial activity requires bold intervention to raise the capability and status of local manufacturing companies to that of competitive global players.

Masande Dlulisa, Project Manager at the Technology Localisation Implementation Unit (TLIU), says, "In the gap analyses conducted as part of the FTAP, GB Bearings required a new test rig to expand its capability for manufacturing and testing a range of characteristics of bearings. The TLU is a Department of Science and Technology supported initiative hosted by the CSIR.

"We opted to work with the Durban University of Technology, for reasons of expertise and proximity, to design the new rig. Subsequently, we identified suitable companies to manufacture the test rig. We also had to find

a suitable software supplier as the requirements highlighted the need for a particular software to measure the range of bearings and technology specifications. A compatible product was found in a UK company.”

It took Dlulisa and his team only eight months to get the right partners on board, design, manufacture and implement the test rig. The latter is already in operation and is the only of its kind in the country, offering GB Bearings the competitive advantage it sought.

“That is the purpose of the TLIU: to ensure that those companies we assist acquire a competitive advantage,” Dlulisa comments. “The TLIU has assisted more than 150 companies since its inception in 2013. A big contributor to the success of GB Bearings’ implementation was the commitment from its leadership and staff. They were with us all the way and took the programme to heart. It is such a pleasure to see the satisfaction of the people involved at the successful conclusion of a project.”

The partnership between the TLIU and its clients does not end after a successful implementation. Regular monitoring and evaluation is part and parcel of the journey and once all the DST’s TAP companies have had a key recommendation towards competitiveness implemented, Dlulisa foresees that the TLIU will start implementing further recommendations.