

PRESS RELEASE

Polytech Africa, EM collaborate on unique Mechatronics Academy

19 March 2019: Leading supplier ElectroMechanica (EM) has set a new benchmark in the automation industry by collaborating with Polytech Africa in establishing the first Mechatronics Academy to be accredited by the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (merSETA).

Creating such a unique Mechatronics Academy has been the lifelong dream of Polytech Africa Founding Director **Astrid Straussner**, who has over 20 years' experience in the education and engineering fields. Polytech Africa is a start-up business with Level 4 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) accreditation.

Straussner's teaching bug bit when she assisted as a lecturer with evening classes after graduating in technical engineering at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college. After leaving her previous employer, she continued with automation courses and products at varying internationally-based corporates. She then approached EM to assist her in realising her dream of launching a Mechatronics Academy.

"I have always wanted a full-time Academy, ever since I began lecturing. Apart from being known as a trainer and a lecturer, I also have distinct project management and consultancy skills. However, I knew from the outset that I had to get both the private sector and the government onboard," Straussner points out.

Her qualifications include a BTech degree in Education and an Engineering Diploma in Light Current – Electronics. She is currently in the final year of her Master's in Science and Technology, specialising in the latter. Career achievements include representation at PDNA Mott MacDonald, the CAD Corporation Draughting Academy, the Advisory Committee at the Unisa Faculty of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, and the MERSETA Mechatronics Learnership design team.

In addition, she was Chairperson of the South African Roads Agency (SARF) Education Committee, and many more. Straussner continues to be a beacon of hope to all women in the engineering field, championing her cause at diverse platforms such as the Women in Engineering Conference, the IDC Skills Crisis Conference, and the Western Cape Province Workplace Integration for Engineering Lecturers.

The Mechatronics Academy will focus on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 2 learnership. This is based on essential aspects of precision mechanical engineering, electronics, and computer design systems used to control and automate mechanical products with electrical signals. Here EM plays a vital role, as its specialised products include the Delta industrial automation range.

Mechatronics is a combination of mechanics and electronics, comprising a multi-disciplinary engineering field that is a key player in Industry 4.0, the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. It encompasses cyber-physical systems, the Internet of things, cloud computing and cognitive computing. Industry 4.0 is commonly referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Upon completion of the NQF Level 2 qualification, certificate holders will be able to gain entry to highly-skilled sectors such as mechanical and electrical engineering, pneumatics and hydraulics, robotics, Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), Computer Numeric Control (CNC), industrial Information Technology (IT), the automotive sector, and also precision welding.

“Educational institutions cannot be islands on their own, and require the cooperation of both the government and the private sector. Here is where EM’s active involvement is so crucial, as it is important that students are exposed to the latest products and developments, especially given the fact that Industry 4.0 and the Internet of Things are a reality in South Africa,” Straussner stresses.

She adds that the Mechatronics Academy will play a vital role in addressing the skills shortage in the automation industry, particularly in Africa. “While we have a good skills base in South Africa, the main problem is the pipeline of younger people entering the field. We definitely need to enhance the existing skills and develop new ones. This is important to ensure that we are able to cope with the skills requirements of Industry 4.0 throughout the continent.”

EM Director **Andrew Nobbs** reveals that Straussner’s passion and commitment to technical education inspired the company to support the establishment of the Mechatronics Academy, which goes far beyond the definition of a traditional training facility. “We are upping the ante on the usual product training to offer a fully-accredited and recognised Academy that give learners a skills-based education to prepare them for the workplace of the future,” Nobbs highlights.

“EM has in the recent past placed a much stronger focus on training and skills development of high-potential staff, in almost all aspects. Our customers and the industry will have access to employees who are workplace-ready through on-the-job skills development, with formal accreditation. The skills pool, in turn, will become deeper and more competitive – all of this while completing an important social responsibility to ensure the next generation is ready for the future,” Nobbs stresses.

The main driver for EM in launching the Mechatronics Academy is to consolidate its training offering into accredited, standardised courses that can be offered out of Polytech Africa. “This will ensure the best quality of training possible for our customers, so they are comfortable working with our automation equipment. In turn, it will allow our staff to focus on their core responsibilities,” Nobbs comments.

The initial student intake includes two of EM’s own employees. These consist of one who has been working for the company for two years, and one who is new to the company. They will attend classes in conjunction with continuing to work at EM.

Ends

Notes to the Editor

To download hi-res images for this release, please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the ElectroMechanica link to view the company’s press office.

About ElectroMechanica

ElectroMechanica was established in 1984 by David van den Berg as a specialised direct importer and wholesale distributor of high-end industrial electrical products, motor control switchgear and electronic automation products. A wholly-owned South African company, ElectroMechanica offers its clients state-of-the-art products, sourced from leading local and international brands, all complying with recognised international safety standards and performance specifications.

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