

Search begins for SA's top maths students

 By [Marisa Louw](#)

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High Schools have until 1 February to register Grade 8 to 12 learners for the first round of the Harmony South African Mathematics Olympiad that will be taking place on 14 March.

The Olympiad, which is organised by the South African Mathematics Foundation, is an annual High School Mathematics Competition for junior- (Grades 8 and 9) and senior pupils (Grade 10 to 12).

"Last year a total of 59,448 children from 859 schools across the country completed the first round," says Prof Johann Engelbrecht, executive director of the South African Mathematics Foundation. "This year we aim to receive a record number of registrations and hope to welcome many schools as first-timers."

With roughly 6,000 high schools throughout the country there is definitely room for growth.

Mashego Mashego, executive director from Harmony Gold Mining, a sponsor of the Olympiad, cannot emphasise the importance of mathematics education enough. "The top 15 highest-earning university careers have one thing in common - mathematical skills. By taking part in the Olympiad, students will get an opportunity to practice not only number skills but also critical thinking and problem solving, which are crucial to any career regardless of whether it requires working with numbers."

Some careers that require a firm understanding of Mathematics and are considered amongst the highest paying jobs in the world include: actuary, chartered accountant, chemical engineer, computer scientist, economist and forensic analyst among others.

Moving more towards mechanical calculations, numeracy

"It is also important to remember that participation in the South African Mathematics Olympiad is not only reserved for clever, nerdy children in school," says Nwabisa Mphakalasi, project director: Marketing of the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA) who is a proud co-sponsor of the Olympiad. "Classroom Mathematics has recently moved more and more to what could be called mechanical calculations or numeracy. It is therefore very important that we continue to emphasise that Mathematics is about thinking and the discovery, and validation, of problem solving methods."

An example of a question could be: *How many three-digit odd numbers become bigger when their digits are reversed?*

For those learners who feel they need a little help in preparing for the Olympiad, a free distance learning programme has

been put in place. The South African Mathematics Olympiad Training Programme is open and free to all students, whether participating in this year's Olympiad or not, from Grade 8 to 12.

"High School students who participate in this year's Olympiad stand a chance to earn a place in the South African Mathematics team that will compete against 100 other countries at the 55th Annual International Mathematical Olympiad in 2014, hosted for the first time on the African continent at the University of Cape Town," concludes Engelbrecht.

To download the registration form, visit www.samf.ac.za. For more information e-mail info@samf.ac.za or call the South African Mathematics Foundation at 012 392 9362.

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