

SA flying school and Boeing to train pilots

Eastern Cape-based 43 Air School has attracted the interest of Boeing Commercial Aviation, leading to the establishment of a pilot-training partnership between the two.

The agreement, a first for Boeing outside the US, aims to help match the supply of skilled air crew, amid projections of growing demand for new aircraft.

The "Street to Right Seat" partnership aims to cut the cost of pilot training for airlines by producing high-quality graduates who automatically qualify to serve at first officer level on Boeing aircraft.

Boeing estimates that the next 20 years will see the need for Africa to acquire 800 new aircraft worth about 100bn. Rapid growth in the East Asian markets will also lead to increased demand for air crew, which air schools are currently unable to meet.

Such high demand for air crew came alongside the changing requirements of pilot training and education due to technological changes to aircraft and air travel systems, said Boeing's director of sales for Africa and the Middle East, Joao Miguel Santos, at 43 Air School's Port Alfred campus on Tuesday.

Such considerations had prompted Boeing to involve itself in training school leavers, whereas previously the manufacturer had largely concerned itself with providing training for experienced pilots' transition to new aircraft.

The partnership aims to achieve both a higher number of pilots, and a more seamless transition from pilot training to operating aircraft, something of interest to airlines, which often run expensive training programmes themselves.

Boeing had chosen 43 Air School as an African partner, and Boeing's first, because of the quality of its facilities and the training opportunities offered by the Eastern Cape's open skies, Mr Santos said. While the US offered "plenty of training", air space was congested and training expensive. Europe's skies were "even more congested" and just as expensive, he said.

The CEO of 43 Air School, Attie Niemann, said the institution's three campuses aimed to produce up to 300 pilots a year.

The school wanted to produce graduates who were suitable for airliner training programmes, reducing the need for the airlines to search and select candidates internationally, he said.

Former South African Airways pilot Laurie Kay said this "slightly more seamless" programme would "offer incredible advantages for everybody".

Source: Business Day