

## Chalk and Talk



# Give aviation graduates a chance, EASA director

**Dr Mugambi M'Chebere has been director of the East African School of Aviation for three years. He also deputises the chair of the Global Aviation Network. Prior to his current position, M'Chebere lectured at Moi University for a decade where he was the Head of Business Programmes with a stint in the shipping industry. M'Chebere boasts a doctorate in Strategic Management and is also trained in Civil Aviation Management from Singapore Aviation Academy and National University of Singapore.**

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**Few know EASA has been in existence for more than 60 years.**

Actually, EASA dates back to the colonial age and changed hands from the colonial government to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) where it was operated directly from the organisation's headquarters in Montreal. It was passed to the East African Community when the community was formed and in 2002, it became KCAA's (Kenya Civil Aviation Authority) training directorate. EASA is now a premier aviation training academy accredited by ICAO as the regional training centre of excellence. We are approved by the Ministry of Education as a Technical and Vocational Education and Training institution as we offer technical diploma courses that are examined by the Kenya National Examinations Council.

**What makes EASA unique from other aviation institutions in Africa?**

EASA is the only one of its kind in Kenya and the most preferred in Africa. We are the only other Approved Training Organisation in Africa excluding those in South Africa, Nigeria and Morocco. In fact, we are at par with Federal Aviation Administration of US Singapore Aviation Academy. EASA is now a full member of ICAO trainer plus, a status achieved by only 22 states globally. This means that our accreditation allows graduates to work anywhere in the world. The school has multiple-billion training equipment including training simulators that are necessary for competence-based hands-on training. In fact, many of foreign students who come here follow the allure of an exceptional combination of theory and practice in aviation training.

**What are some of the popular programmes offered at the institution?**

We offer a variety training in four main areas. We have air navigation services and maintenance, aviation safety and security management, aviation business management and the curriculum development and research

unit. We offer administrative training to people with technical qualifications who find themselves in managerial positions, mostly through short courses that may take as short as a day or a couple of months. We offer our courses in collaboration with other institutions especially Moi University where we have a diploma, a degree and a master's programme. We also collaborate with Singapore Aviation Academy, Incheon Airport Aviation Academy and the Korean Civil Aviation Training Centre. It is this collaboration that imparts on the competence of some of the courses we offer here.

**What changes have occurred at EASA, 60 years later?**

The school has gone through a lot of transformation especially in the methodology of training as we move from data centric to digital way of training. We have modernised our equipment and moved from light simulators for air traffic training to 3D full-synthetic training equipment. We have just completed building a very modern library and are in the process of setting up an executive hostel that will attract more foreign students.

**Who are your target students?**

Our students are mainly staff from civil aviation organisations across Africa. We have trained for all the 54 states of Africa. EASA usually have a small student population, about 450 at the moment, as we try to adhere to the recommended 1:1 student per instructor ratio. We also have a pool of students from airports and aviation security companies, airlines as we also train cabin crew. We also have students directly from high school who come to train for technical skills through our diploma programmes. Four leavers who come here to pursue such courses as aeronautical engineering, telecommunication engineering, navigation or other technical ground-help skills to pilots.

**Where do you get your instructors from?**

We get most of our instructors from KCAA and the airlines such as the national carrier. We, therefore, have full instructors and many part-time ones. For one to train, they must be in possession of a license and for you to keep your license valid, you must always be in the field; that is why we have part time lectures.

**Many aviation graduates trained at home complain they cannot get jobs. Why is this?**

Industry projections reveal that aviation industry is suffering from lack of skilled personnel. Because of the security situation that surrounds the industry, organisations are not willing to hire freshmen who lack experience. A fully-trained commercial license



**Dr Mugambi M'Chebere** [David Gichuru, Standard]

holder may possess about 200 flight hours yet most top airlines require that one have at least 500 flight hours. The same companies don't trust freshmen to use their flight routes to get the necessary hours. Kenya Airways looking for a captain will not take less than 5,000 flight hours. But then, someone

with such qualification is also a target by other fliers such as Fly Emirates who tend to woo this skilled resource with better terms. We suffer scarcity yet we have trained people at the bottom who are not offered opportunity to grow and meet the demand.

**What should be done to curb the shortage of pilots and engineers in the industry?**

The industry should be willing to offer internships and mentorship programmes to graduates trained locally and go ahead to absorb them. This is the only way our pilots can meet the minimum number of flight hours that make a pilot competitive on the global market. Entry in the industry is the only hurdle that once crossed guarantees job security for our youth.

**How is the situation of female enrolment in technical courses at the institution?**

They are enrolling, but not many of them. In fact, the girls' enrolment percentage for 2016/2017 academic year is at 26, against 74 of their male counterparts.

**What are some of the challenges facing aviation industry in Kenya?**

Aviation is a very expensive industry in various regards including acquisition and maintenance of equipment. It becomes even more challenging when operated in an economy with low purchasing power, such as Kenya, where its pricing can't be afforded by Kenyans. The sector is small as compared to others such as roads and this translates to small volumes of operation. Aviation is also still viewed as an elitist sector where many people can afford to fly but assume flying is for a certain group of people.

**What plans does the institution have for the near future?**

We have an elaborate plan for modernising both infrastructure and equipment. Most of our activities in future will be done online including training that will be done on an online platform to attract a wider local and international market. We have well-set plans for systems re-engineering. We also want to transform this school into a college with three training schools each with a specialised training path. We are also broadening the collaborations we have with the industry to expand the market to accommodate our graduates.

**What are some of the challenges that the institution still grapples with?**

The equipment that we use here to train is very costly in terms of acquisition, replacement and even maintenance. This is, however, mostly mitigated when KCAA comes in to meet the expenses. An ageing workforce is a global challenge that affects aviation industries which we also grapple with as we are sometimes forced to hold on to someone eligible for retirement just because there is no new skill to come in. We are at the moment unable to retain experienced personnel attracted to foreign organisations that offer better terms.