



PO Box 1758
Pretoria 0001
South Africa
Tel: (012) 392 9300
Fax: (012) 320 7803
Int. Code: +27 12
info@saasta.ac.za

www.saasta.ac.za

Media Release

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For immediate release:

Randfontein High School to take a bite of the Big Apple

National SAASTA schools debate awards top young scientific minds.

Randfontein High School from Gauteng scooped the 2016 South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) National Schools Debates Competition coveted top prize last night (06 October 2016).

“Biotechnology to address food security in South Africa.” This is the topic that was debated yesterday by nine schools from all the provinces in South Africa and the final took place in Johannesburg.

The SAASTA National Schools Debates Competition is an annual programme that aims to encourage young people to address key issues around science and technology that are faced by their communities.

In addition to increasing their knowledge and gaining experience in the debating arena, Randfontein High School will be awarded with a trip to New York, which includes scientific exploration as well as tourism.

Randfontein High School went head-to-head against eight other competing high schools from around the country, all of whom are provincial finalists out of 90 schools that competed in the regional rounds of the competition in April 2016.

Cravenby Secondary School from the Western Cape and Queens Boys College from the Eastern Cape came second and third in the competition.

The topic for the 2016 SAASTA National Schools Debates Competition was: *South Africa faces high levels of poverty, resulting in a significant number of households being classified as food insecure and high levels of malnutrition, particularly in children. How can biotechnology be used to address food security in South African households?*

Competing schools were tasked to argue this topic from four different perspectives, these being: Application and Benefit, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Political. The contestants are only allowed to pre-prepare their opening statements but subsequent responses and closing speeches must be prepared during the competition.

“Developing a culture that embraces science, engineering, technology and innovation is linked to the overall economic development of any country,” said Michael Ellis, Manager of Science Communication for SAASTA.

“In South Africa, we have many pressing socio-economic challenges, which require a skilled workforce to help steer the nation towards international competitiveness, economic growth and to generally improve the lives of its citizens. SAASTA’s goal is to steer young South African minds towards careers in science, engineering, technology and innovation.”

“Debate is a lively and valuable platform that makes scientific information relevant to learners; it’s the spark that can light the fire which fuels a lifelong quest for innovation,” added Ellis.

Conceived and hosted by SAASTA, a business unit of the National Research Foundation, the programme seeks to foster the confidence to speak about science in high school students from Grades 9 to 11. It also gives participants the opportunity to develop research, critical thinking and information literacy skills, as well as the ability to work as a team to present logical, clear arguments.

These top schools and regional debate winners are:

- Kimberley Girls High – Northern Cape
- Queens Boys College - Eastern Cape
- Randfontein High - Gauteng
- Mashising Secondary School - Mpumalanga
- Solvista Secondary School – KZN
- Hentie Cilliers High School - Free State
- Dendron Secondary School – Limpopo
- Cravenby Secondary School – Western Cape
- High School for Girls Potchefstroom – North West

For background information on the competition visit:
<http://www.saasta.ac.za/competitions/national-schools-debates/>

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Issued by:

Mr Zamuxolo Matiwana

Media Coordinator at SAASTA

Email: zamuxolo@saasta.ac.za

Telephone number 012 392 9319

For interviews, please contact:

SAASTA

Science Communication Manager: Mr Michael Ellis

Cell: 072 2877496

Randfontein High School:

Educator's name: Jason Fisher

0834551406

Craveby Secondary School:

Educator's name: Angie Naidu

0798886322

Queenstown Boys College:

Educator's name: Louise Charasika

0780735347

About SAASTA:

South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) is a business unit of the National Research Foundation. The role of SAASTA is to coordinate science engagement programmes, activities and strategy through science awareness, communication and education.

About the NRF

The National Research Foundation (NRF) was established on 1 April 1999 as an independent statutory body in accordance with the National Research Foundation Act. The NRF is a key public entity responsible for supporting the development of human resources for research and innovation in all fields of science and technology. The organisation is one of the major players in educating and training a new generation of scientists able to deal with South African and African needs. The organisation encourages public awareness and appreciation of science, engineering and technology, and facilitates dialogue between science and society. Its vision is to contribute to a prosperous South Africa based on a knowledge economy. For more information on the operations and programs within the NRF please visit www.nrf.ac.za