

SA planes may fly in 'flocks'

Nov 23 2010 08:46 **Francois Williams**

Cape Town - Long-distance passenger aircraft between South Africa and Europe might soon fly in V-formation, like birds, to save fuel.

If this idea becomes a reality it will be based on research by two engineering students at the University of Cape Town (UCT), with funding from aircraft manufacturer Airbus and the Department of Trade & Industry's national aviation centre.

Nic Bizinos and Drewan Sanders are currently working towards their MSc degrees in engineering under the headship of Professor Chris Redelinghuys at UCT's Department of Mechanical Engineering. They are currently investigating technical aspects of formation flying by passenger aircraft.

Redelinghuys says the idea is not new because wartime aircraft have flown in formation since World War I.

Studies have shown that flying in formation could save aircraft up to 20% of their fuel consumption. Research on formation flying in turbulent conditions, however, is required – especially the effect of turbulence on passenger comfort in the aircraft behind the first one.

The research is part of a broad global Airbus programme to test the best ideas for building aircraft that are more efficient to operate and maintain, as well as more environmentally friendly and more comfortable for passengers.

Dale King from Airbus's engineering, research and technology division in Bristol, Britain, has at the same time announced Airbus's latest Fly Your Ideas Competition. Airbus is inviting students from universities worldwide to send in their ideas for greener aviation.

The winning team will receive €30 000 and a visit to the Airbus plant in Toulouse, France.

- Sake24

For business news in Afrikaans, go to Sake24.com.