

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE  
DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MR GF QONDE, AT THE  
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FOR TECHNICAL AND  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
COLLEGES' TOP PERFORMING STUDENTS**

Programme Director

Our Honoured Guests for the day, our Students

Representatives from the Centre for Education Policy  
Development

Student Support Services Officials from our TVET  
colleges

Representatives from the Sector Education and Training  
Authorities

Distinguished Presenters

Officials from the Department of Higher Education and  
Training

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Good Day**, I am truly honoured to be amongst the  
“*crème de la crème*”, the “*best of the best*”, in the TVET  
college sector and the first ever TVET students’  
academic dialogue. Congratulations on being the first  
recipients of such an auspicious occasion. Look to your

neighbour, shake their hand and say “*congratulations on working hard to earn this spot.*”

**Programme Director**, today I will not be long, as the day belongs to our young brilliant minds and I would like to afford the presenters enough time to deliberate on their chosen topics on the programme.

Allow me to take you back in time and highlight why we, as the Department, focus on “*TVET month*”. In 2013, the Department declared August as the month to celebrate the TVET College sector. The vision was informed by the realization that a large majority of South African citizens, both young and old, had limited access to information or had misconceptions on the TVET College sector and its envisaged role within society and the economy. What was disheartening, was the realisation that many people did not understand the importance, and in fact underestimated the role the sector played in contributing towards skills development and thereby improving the country’s economy, as well as the social status of many in our poverty stricken communities.

Declaring August as “*TVET month*” provides greater access to information for many on the opportunities and programmes offered in our TVET colleges. Furthermore, the rationale is to ensure that TVET colleges are institutions of first choice because government look towards these institutions to address the skills shortage in our country and curb the high unemployment rate amongst our young people.

**Programme Director**, the theme of “*Taking the TVET Colleges to the College Community*”, was inspired by the fact that members in our communities, who are recipients of our TVET college services, usually lack information on the role of TVET colleges and how they can work with our colleges, to assist them in acquiring the necessary skills that would allow them to address their social challenges. The aim is to have collaborative efforts between colleges and surrounding communities that seek to respond to their local needs.

Having reminded you of the importance of this sector in which you have entrusted your future, I believe that each and every one of you are ambassadors for your respective colleges during this month, and have

informed many in your communities about your colleges. I hope that you will continue to be ambassadors of the TVET College system beyond your time as students.

One of the primary objectives of the Department is to ensure access and success in the post-school education and training sector. This will be achieved by producing well-rounded academically disciplined graduates, who are empowered and enabled to participate fully in the economy. I am certain you have heard this many times before, but I have to remind you yet again, our country has about 3 million young people who are Neither in Education, Employment or Training, often referred to as the “*NEETs*”. This presents a serious challenge for the trajectory of the country, as there is no country that could expect itself to prosper, if its youth is left outside the economic mainstream.

**To our young brilliant minds**, I am certain you are wondering why you have been invited as our honoured guests and participants at this roundtable discussion. Over the years, the Department with its stakeholders have had deliberations with many experts to understand the reasons behind the continuously

disappointingly low certification and throughput rates in our colleges. We have had many sleepless nights as officials in the Department trying to find solutions to this “*lacuna*”. We have asked ourselves a number of questions in trying to address the challenges of low certification and throughput rates:

- *Is the curriculum too difficult?*
- *Are we attracting the right calibre of students into the correct programmes?*
- *Why are students dropping out in huge numbers?*
- *Is there sufficient career guidance in the colleges?*
- *Do colleges have effective and well-coordinated academic support programmes?*
- *Is teaching and learning qualitative*

You will agree with me, that these were and still are important questions to be asked, especially after this Government has invested billions of rands, in not only restructuring the colleges, but also ensuring that students who are financially needy and academically deserving, receive financial aid through the DHET TVET

Colleges Bursary Scheme. As you know, many of your peers and some college officials have and continue to abuse the bursary scheme and have turned it into a social grant to support their social lives. This is a great tragedy to the sector, since it robs those who are really in need of financial assistance.

The purpose of this occasion is to ensure that you are part of the discussion and solution on matters that affect you regarding teaching and learning. This forum will grant you the opportunity to deliberate, contribute and come forward with possible solutions on how we can move the academic landscape of the TVET sector to greater heights. My wish is that through robust engagements, based on your experiences as recipients of our investment into the TVET sector, we will listen and take your advice to influence our future policy decisions.

The current state of certification and throughput rates is appalling. Certification rates in some subjects for students, who actually write and pass the examination, are as low as 34% with approximately only 1 out of 6 students who registered at the start of a programme

completing with a certificate. This is not acceptable and should not be the norm, we must find ways to improve our certification and throughput rates. For the College sector to be taken seriously, we need to produce quality and employable graduates, and we can only do that by ensuring that our academic performance improves and it starts with the commitment and drive from individual students.

We acknowledge that there are many factors, which contribute to the low certification and throughput rates, but today's programme will concentrate on how you as students can contribute in the improvement of the pass and certification rates. Be assured that challenges involving lecturer development and governance are being addressed at different platforms.

Without wasting precious time, let me take this opportunity to thank the Centre for Education Policy Development who has made it possible for the Department to host this event. It is through partnerships such as these that we are able to be creative in our thinking, and for that, we are grateful.

Remember, as Tata Madiba used to say, “*education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*” therefore use it wisely. You have an opportunity that most people never had and some still wish to attain. Do not let it go to waste, seize it and break the barriers of poverty and unemployment.

I thank you and wish you well in your deliberations today.