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Allow me to direct a few words to employers, both public and private. Your involvement in ensuring a continuing pipeline of well-trained and skilled people across all sectors is critical to our economy. And doing so is arguably of even greater significance to the future of your businesses, whether in manufacturing, repairing, retailing or services.

We thank those who see post-school skills and vocational training as core to their businesses. And we appeal to those who are still hesitant to join in and contribute fully to upskilling.

To support closer cooperation, the Human Resource Development Council recently launched the "Adopt a TVET college" initiative. This creates working partnerships between colleges and business to ensure an adequate supply of TVET graduates with skills where they are needed most.

Artisan development

Artisan development is a key TVET component. We are recapitalising and modernising the Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment Skills and Labour Assessments, "Indlela". This financial year we aim to produce over 21 000 skilled artisans. This is a significant step towards the NDP target of 30 000 annually by 2030.

Community Colleges

About 18-million adults want to learn outside of universities and TVET colleges. We are building a Community Education and Training sector to improve and expand post-school education and training. With nongovernmental and community-based organisations, we will grow this into a flourishing sector.

We are doing so at least partly in response to issues most recently raised by the Statistician General. He confirms what we are aware of, and working on.

That is why last year I committed to establishing a DHET Branch for Community Education and Training. It is in place. I committed to piloting the Community College concept. This has happened in partnership with the Catholic Institute for Education. We are now securing additional sites and resources for further colleges.

The increased efforts we are putting into vocational and community colleges are important measures to expand a diversified post school education and training sector.

Universities

Of all our areas of work, the universities have in recent months been under the strongest spotlight.

For all of the protests, and despite the wanton destruction by a small minority, this year the vast majority of students have returned to their studies and our universities continue to produce graduates and research that makes our nation proud and contributes to our economy and the wellbeing of our country.

We should thank our universities, including staff and students, for their continued efforts in ensuring that South Africa remains at the forefront of teaching, learning and research on our continent.

We have made additional funds available to our universities despite

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EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE:

Real increases to the DHET's budget celebrated



ALLOCATING RESOURCES FOR QUALITY:
Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande.

the difficult fiscal environment, and we continue to increase access to university education for South Africans who, just a few years ago, would have had no hope of achieving their true potential this way. That is remarkable, and we should not forget it, whatever the challenges.

Key to our strategy of expanded university access are our new institutions. Sol Plaatje University, in the Northern Cape, and the University of Mpumalanga in February admitted their third intake, with enrolments up from 130 and 140 in 2014 to 710 and 1329 respectively. R1.6-billion was invested and 17 new buildings built, enabling this expansion. New infrastructure for further expansion in 2017 valued at R1.26-billion is under construction. The Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University in Pretoria entered its second year of operation with an intake of 1 300 students.

South Africa's ninth medical school, at the University of Limpopo, opened its doors in January to its first 60 students. This is linked to the Limpopo academic hospital Presidential Project.

Student accommodation

We are addressing the shortage of student accommodation. I will this year launch the Student Housing Infrastructure Programme. At a Student Housing Symposium in June, we will lay out a long-term, sustainable programme using new funding models and innovative building technologies to provide secure and affordable residences.

In the meantime we are also working together with the Minister

of Public Works, Thulas Nxesi, to identify government buildings that are either under-utilised or unused to convert them into affordable and comfortable student housing for both universities and TVET colleges.

Access and Success

While access to university education is important, it is time to focus on success. Part of dealing with the high first-year dropout rate is to support underprepared students with our focused programs.

University transformation

University transformation remains a critical task. We need to intensify the struggle to build transformed and non-racial universities. I continue engaging on accelerating transformation agreed by the second Higher Education Summit, in October last year, and we have told the institutions we expect their implementation plans for the summit resolutions by the end of June. The Higher Education Bill now in Parliament tasks university councils with driving transformation much more vigorously.

Last year I announced two programmes to accelerate academic transformation. The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework, and its New Generation of Academics Programme, or nGAP, have to date filled 102 posts with black South Africans, 55 of them women. A further 100 new nGAP academics will be appointed in the coming months.

But although these numbers

are good, they are not good enough. I will soon announce a Ministerial Task Team to look into and propose solutions to the obstacles to the production of South African black academics.

Improving Teaching and Learning

We are committed to improving teaching and learning across all education sectors, and with R200-million from the European Union, my Department is implementing the Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme to strengthen universities in developing teachers in the Early Childhood, special needs, primary, technical and vocational, and community education sectors.

No fee increase for 2016

After the agreement on no fee increase for 2016, we are redoubling efforts to ensure support going forward for those who cannot afford to pay fees. We have provided R1.9-billion of the R2.3-billion shortfall resulting from the agreement.

We have reprioritised more than R5.7-billion over the 2016/17 to 2018/19 Medium Term Expenditure Framework period to universities, to ensure that the fee freeze in 2016 does not lead to unmanageable fee increases in the future.

Another R4.57-billion is allocated to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, in 2016/17, made up of R2.54-billion to ensure that 71 753 students who

were not or insufficiently funded in 2013 to 2015 can pay their debts, and R2.03-billion to ensure that these students and poor students entering universities for the first time can study.

This amounts to a whopping 47.3% increase in baseline funding for NSFAS in 2016. This, together with the other NSFAS funds, will this year put 205 000 through university, and another 200 000 through TVET colleges. That is a total of 405 000 students receiving government support, a massive achievement by anybody's standards.

We also have a plan for the "missing middle" — students whose family income lies above the NSFAS threshold, but who still can't afford university. We aim to test our new model in 2017 and fully implement it in 2018. Let me thank NSFAS Chairperson Sizwe Nxasana for the effort he is putting into reforming and improving the system.

The Presidential Commission is investigating the feasibility of fee-free education for university and TVET students. Let me appeal, colleagues, to everyone in the house and the student movement to support the Commission with inputs and ideas.

We value the energy and criticism of our young people very highly. We admire their courage and determination and their activism in putting crucial issues facing higher education squarely on the agenda.

Nobody, however, gains from destruction. Nobody is empowered by burning laboratories or libraries. Burnt paintings educate nobody.

Those who have engaged in this destruction must ask themselves who they are hurting, and why? They must ask themselves whether their violence and destruction builds and transforms society. They should recognise the vast majority of students are hard at work, determined to get their qualifications and empower themselves, their families and their communities.

Our universities must be transformed and not destroyed!

It is a tragedy that universities are being forced by a minority to spend millions on additional security because this tiny group rejects the power of words, debate and dialogue, the cornerstones of our democracy.

Skills planning

Substantial progress has been made on skills planning. This includes a labour market skills intelligence system, a career development system and the integration of the post-school education and training information systems. Together, these will allow efficient distribution of skills development resources.

A new career guidance system is before Cabinet. For the 2016/17 financial year, the Department has, through an "Occupations in Demand," list, identified priority occupations, including civil engineers, construction project managers, quantity surveyors and 13 trades, including bricklayers, millwrights, boilermakers and riggers. Increasing the numbers with these skills is important in realising the NDP's goals, growing and transforming the economy, creating jobs and attracting investment.

The Department is identifying universities and TVET colleges to upscale training in these areas.