



**MINISTER
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING, DR BE NZIMANDE, DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) IMBIZO AT THE LAKES HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE IN BENONI ON 3 OCTOBER 2017

Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Mr Madala Masuku;
Chairpersons and members of the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training, as well as the Select Committee on Education and Recreation;
Chairperson and members of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training College;
Leaders of business;
President and members of the South African College Principal's Organisation (SACPO);
President and members of the South African Further Education and Training Student Association (SAFETSA);
Organised Labour;
Chairpersons and CEOs of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs);
My Special Advisor, Mr Nqabekaya Nqandela;
DHET Senior Officials;
Distinguished guests;
Programme Director, DDG Mr Zukile Mvalo

Please allow me to begin by warmly welcoming you all to this key Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Imbizo, which is taking place at a momentous time for South African Higher Education.

We are meeting here today against the backdrop of two previous gatherings of a similar nature – namely, the Further Education and Training (FET) Roundtable which was held on 9 April 2010, as well as the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Conference which was held on 18 and 19 November 2014. The FET Roundtable was convened under the theme “towards finding resolutions in partnerships with stakeholders” and the TVET 2014 Conference was titled “together forging a vibrant Technical and Vocational Education and Training system in South Africa”.

With this background in mind, today's Imbizo is very appropriately taking place under the theme “defining a shared vision, removing obstacles and charting a roadmap to our destination”.

Indeed, a lot of changes have taken place in our complex system since the 2014 TVET

conference. While some of the changes were planned and a product of our engagements as we collectively continue to strive to overcome the many challenges which confront us, others emerged simply as a contingency of how events unfolded in the sector.

In this regard, this Imbizo can be considered as a necessary, perhaps even critical pause in our endeavours to deliver an effective and efficient TVET system.

Let us use it to reflect on our achievements to date, and to tackle issues that still need to be resolved so that the path is clear going forward.

We must also use the opportunity brought by this Imbizo to take into account other relevant processes that are currently unfolding, such as the development of the White Paper on Post School Education and Training Implementation Plan, as well as the review of the National Skills Development Strategy 3. This will allow us to craft an integrated approach towards achieving a common vision for the TVET Sector.

Indeed, the roadmap to our desired vision should not be an isolated or independent process, but an integral part of all the initiatives currently under way, as well as those that are being planned.

To underline this point, we need to avoid the duplication of efforts and to work in silos, particularly considering the limited resources available in the sector.

At the heart of the challenges facing the TVET system is the rupture that occurred between colleges and employers – a fissure which commenced with the introduction of ‘private students’ well before the dawn of our democracy in 1994. Some of you may recall that before that, all students had apprenticeship contracts before they enrolled at colleges.

Today we look back at this bygone era with some nostalgia as employers help to keep qualifications and programmes current, and ensure that adequate workplace learning is provided – in addition to laying the foundation for apprentices’ subsequent employment.

But it’s not all bad news. Since my Department was established in 2009, the chasm between colleges and employers has been narrowing, albeit slowly. The SETAs have played a significant role in making this happen, and I must recognise them for the work that they have done in this regard.

Allow me at this point, to turn to the other critical issue of funding. In October 2013, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) introduced a new administrative model for managing NSFAS bursaries – the new student centred model.

The new model, initially piloted at a limited number of institutions, was rolled out to all 50 TVET colleges for the 2017 academic year. In this model, the responsibility of administering funding for TVET college students has been shifted to NSFAS, and it incorporates a range of processes aimed at improving administration of the scheme.

There is no doubt that the new NSFAS systems and processes were severely challenged this year, necessitating the putting in place of an emergency management capacity to enable funding to be disbursed. But like any new system, it will take some time to adjust and optimally provide the results we require and, therefore, it’s important that we all work together to ensure that this system is improved and that eligible students receive the funding required to enable them to succeed.

Following the African National Congress' NEC meeting and NEC Lekgotla held from the 27th to the 30th of July 2017, a statement was released on 31 July 2017 resolving to introduce a measure of free higher education in 2018.

If the proposed resolution of the ANC is to be adopted as government policy, meaning that all eligible students with a combined family income of R150 000 and below should be provided with fully subsidised grants by 2018, one wonders if indeed the increase in the threshold would not accommodate or result in all students coming from the TVET sector eligible for grant funding.

Actually, and if you think about it more deeply, we are already to a lesser extent providing free education in our TVET colleges. What we have not determined as yet is the number of students falling in the missing middle category, if any. We provide tuition fees and allowances to poor students through NSFAS.

In the meantime, and as some of you may know, there is a Ministerial Task Team which was established in early 2016 to develop a funding and support model for poor and missing middle students. We are piloting a model for this. The model recommends funding through a public-private partnership between government and the private sector.

I want, once again, to thank all the institutions which have gone out of their way to ensure that they assist our learners and to provide support services to students irrespective of the funding mechanisms. It shows that these institutions have really managed to make the link between the important role of student support services to reducing student dropout rates and increased throughput.

In this regard, a plan for ensuring sufficient student housing for university and TVET students will be developed for implementation over the period 2018 to 2028. The length of time to get to the ideal level of accommodation will be dependent on the funding available, both public and private.

You will also realise colleagues that I make time to engage with student leaders very often, as I believe they are an important stakeholder in the sector.

Without doubt, students should sit at the centre of everything we aspire to do in colleges and I believe that the more we engage with our young leaders, the less protests and misunderstandings we will have in our various institutions.

On this score, I have always been impressed when engaging with students, as they always raise matters that are critical to teaching and learning, such as relevance of skills production, the availability of text books and the quality of the workshops and laboratories among other things. This bodes well for the South African economy, as well as the future of our young democracy.

TVET colleges are vital national assets which empower the next generations with very practical skills and knowledge. They make a crucial contribution to the ability of our economy to be competitive. This is despite the fact that they currently face a number of real challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am also happy to note that although 2017 has been yet another

challenging year for the higher education system, there were minimal disruptions to study programmes at our TVET colleges.

It is important for me to emphasise at this point that while students have the right to protest and bring their issues to the fore, they should always do so responsibly, without violence and intimidation – and without disruption to the study programme.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot make the public TVET colleges institutions of choice until they begin to develop more meaningful opportunities for young people – leading to further study and employment opportunities.

There is an urgent need for joined up planning with the Department of Basic Education to resolve the overlap and articulation issues between schools and TVET colleges, is key. Similarly, the critical issue of lecturers deserves close attention by this Imbizo.

As I conclude, may I urge employers, be they public or private, to ramp up their partnership with us to re-build a strong and vibrant TVET System. This is something which we must do together if you are to get the skills you need, and we are to assist students to acquire the skills needed by the economy.

And to summarise our agenda today, among some of the issues which I strongly feel that this Imbizo should grapple with are the following:

- Enrolment and funding gaps;
- Conditions of service of lecturers;
- Lecturer development;
- Curriculum review for relevance and responsiveness;
- Governance and management roles and responsibilities;
- Funding for the severely underfunded TVET system.
- Industry partnerships

This Imbizo must come up with a collective voice on how all these intractable issues can be prioritised and how we need to work smarter and more innovatively together.

I wish you robust, honest and constructive discussions that will take this sector forward.

I THANK YOU.