

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING, DR BLADE NZIMANDE, AT
THE CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HEADS OF MISSION, 28 AUGUST 2014**

Programme Director

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers present

High Commissioners and Ambassadors

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be given this opportunity to share with you some of the work that my Department is undertaking and inform you of our key priorities. This is indeed a critical forum in which we can strengthen the partnerships and cooperation between government departments and our missions abroad.

I have been asked to engage with you on ***training and skills development in South Africa, and progress regarding the establishment of new higher education institutions.***

Since my last presentation to this meeting of heads of mission, we have made important advances in training and skills development. We have expanded enrolments in all post school institutions, including a 130% increase in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college enrolment. Three new universities have been established, which I will talk more about later, the National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences has been established, and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has seen a 270% increase in disbursements since 2008 and now funds TVET college students as well as university students.

But in spite of the advances that we' ve made, there is much that still needs to be done. Our post-school education and training system does not offer sufficient places to the many youth and adults seeking education and training; deep-seated inequalities still exist; and over 3.4 million youths are not in employment, education or training. We have a shortage of skills in the economy, low levels of access and equity, poor

quality, high repetition and dropout rates, low graduation rates, weak links between education and the workplace, and insufficient employer involvement in training.

National Development Plan

The National Development Plan (NDP) lists the following objectives for post-school education and training: expanding the college system to the recommended participation rate of 25%, as well as improving quality; providing one million learning opportunities through Community Education and Training Centres; and, producing 30 000 artisans per year. In higher education, the objectives are to increase university enrolments by at least 70% to about 1.6 million; increasing the number of students eligible to study towards maths- and science-based degrees to 450 000; increasing the percentage of PhD qualified staff to over 75%; producing more than 5 000 doctoral graduates per year; and expanding science, technology and innovation outputs by increasing research and development spending by government, encouraging industry to do the same.

The actions listed in the NDP include supporting the development of specialised programmes in universities with a focus on training college lecturers; and building the capacity of colleges to become the preferred institutions for vocational education and training. In addition, implementing a national programme to develop the Next Generation of Academics for Higher Education; and providing all students who qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme access to full funding through loans and bursaries. The NDP also identifies the construction of two new universities in Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape; a new medical school in Limpopo and a number of academic hospitals; the expansion of infrastructure at existing institutions and allowing all universities to use distance education to reach more learners.

White Paper

In January this year, I launched the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, which defines the DHET's focus and priorities and enables it to shape its strategies

and plans for the future. The White Paper aims to create a responsive system that addresses broader societal and developmental objectives by expanding access, improving quality, increasing diversity and creating opportunities for workplace-based learning.

The White Paper does this by emphasising the crucial role of technical and vocational education; seeking to improve alignment between universities, TVET colleges, and SETAs; prioritising funding to enable access to post-school institutions for the marginalized; expansion of post-graduate studies to ensure the academic profession and the development of high level knowledge and skills.

TVET: Access

Our top priority is to expand the TVET colleges, while improving their quality. As I mentioned earlier, TVET enrolments have more than doubled over the past four years. The ambition of the White Paper is to enrol 2.5 million learners in TVET by 2030. In order to achieve this it means a 9% growth in enrolments annually, from the estimated 800 000 enrolments for 2014.

These enrolments will require both infrastructure development and alternative methods of delivery, such as open and distance education, which potentially could reach more learners than through traditional facilities. Work towards this has started, and it is the intention to deliver 6 new TVET College campuses within the next year and 12 campuses in the next 5 years. Construction on the first three campuses has been commissioned and it is anticipated that contractors will be on site imminently.

TVET: Throughput

In order to ensure value for money it is critical that the learners who enter the TVET system not only enter, but successfully conclude their studies. In order to achieve this, our focus is on improving the quality of teaching and strengthening governance and management.

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme is required in colleges. We will be establishing the South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET), which will develop curricula and materials, train staff, undertake research and monitoring and evaluation of the TVET sector. We are engaging with Germany for advice on this, particularly their Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

TVET: Employability and workplace-based learning

The main objective of colleges is to prepare learners for the workplace. Linkages between colleges and employers are varied, with some good practices. In general however, workplace linkages are poor and learners struggle to make the transition from college. With assistance from our Swiss partners, the dual system of training is being piloted at present and much emphasis is going into establishing structural methods of aligning colleges with workplaces.

The Department places great emphasis on linking education and the workplace. We have established a Work Integrated Learning and Partnerships unit, which directly deals with the placement of graduates. This unit keeps and continuously updates a database with a list of all graduates who need to be placed. This is one of the fundamental areas, vital in addressing unemployment.

A clear strategy to turn every workplace into a training space is being developed and we are finalising Work-Based Learning Programme Regulations, with the purpose of making it easier for SETAs to fund workplace-based learning. The relationship between SETAs and employers will also assist in ensuring that learners get placed after their training. The Department is working with the Department of Trade and Industry to develop an implementation guide on the Skills Development Component of the reviewed Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) codes to be implemented.

In addition to facilitating cooperation between education and training institutions and workplaces, the White Paper directs that SETAs' roles be focused on obtaining accurate data about workplace skills needs. Progress has been made in establishing academic research chairs to enhance sector skills planning.

SIPS

Since the launch of the Strategic Integrated Projects of the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission (PICC), my Department has been working to determine the skills needed to build and maintain the massive new infrastructure plans of government. The Department will be launching a report on the anticipated skills shortages for the SIPS in September 2014.

Artisanship Development

The NDP requires that by 2030 at least 30 000 qualified Artisans are produced per year. Currently the country produces an average of 12 000 qualified artisans per year. My department is on a serious mission to champion artisanship as a career of choice, a lucrative career pathway for consideration by the youth, hence a slogan that says "it is cool to be an artisan" . In pursuit of this, 2013 was declared the "Year of the Artisan" , and from 2014 my Department declared the "Decade of the Artisan" .

Community Colleges

To make provision for the millions of South African youth who leave school without being able to access opportunities for further education, and adults who wish to study further, we are creating a new institutional type to be known as Community Education and Training colleges. These will be established by grouping together clusters of adult learning centres and strengthening their infrastructure, staffing and programmes.

National Skills Fund

The White Paper re-emphasises that the NSF will be responsible for skills development aligned to national development strategies and priorities, including building linkages

within the skills system and providing funds for government strategies such as youth programmes, building small businesses and cooperatives, and rural development. It also funds research and innovation that is not confined to a particular sector.

Universities

The university education system will continue to expand from headcount enrolment of just over 950 000 in 2012 to 1.1 million by 2019, with a target of 1.6 million students in public universities by 2030. We also need to focus on quality and student success, improving graduate production. To support this we are expanding foundation programmes and increasing investment in teaching and learning development.

New Universities

I have established three new universities over the past year. The University of Mpumalanga (UMP) and Sol Plaatje University (SPU) opened their doors to their first cohort of students earlier this year. Both universities are comprehensive universities designed to offer a range of formative and technology focused undergraduate programmes that cater for articulation from TVET Colleges (NCV), secondary schools (NSC), and other universities across the country, to ensure mobility of graduates into programmes of choice.

The University of Mpumalanga has been established to serve a province that hitherto had been without a university of its own. With the primary economic basis of the province founded in the fields of agriculture and tourism, in its first year the University of Mpumalanga will offer diplomas in Agriculture and Hospitality, as well as a Bachelor Degree in Foundation Phase Education. Over time it will increase its capacity and its programme and qualification range to encompass degrees in Life Sciences, Business Economics and Management Studies, Communications and Health and related sciences.

Sol Plaatje University is based in Kimberley in the Northern Cape. The university is offering three programmes in its first year: a Diploma in Information Technology: Applications; a Diploma in Retail Management; and a Bachelor of Education Degree for

secondary school and TVET teachers of mathematics, natural science and technology. Future programmes are still under discussion, but the areas envisaged include renewable energy, African languages, mining, arid-terrain agriculture, commerce, heritage studies, museum studies, restoration architecture and archaeology. Given its proximity to the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) and the South African Large Telescope (SALT), Sol Plaatje University will also develop knowledge and skills in disciplines related to space exploration.

The initial enrolments of these two new universities are modest and based on available infrastructure. The growth in student numbers will therefore match the planned developments in infrastructure. It is planned that the University of Mpumalanga will, in its full capacity, provide spaces to 15 000 students and Sol Plaatje will accommodate 5 000 students.

The third new institution, the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) was legally established in May this year and will formally incorporate the Medunsa Campus of the University of Limpopo later this year. This is the first comprehensive health and allied sciences university in South Africa. Its first intake of students will be in the 2015 academic year.

Teacher Education and Academics

The Department has maintained a strong focus on strengthening the production of school teachers over the last five years. In the next five years we will expand the focus from basic education teachers to include the production of teachers for the whole system, including early childhood development, TVET colleges, the planned community colleges and public universities.

We are also working to address the shortage of academics and improve their qualifications. Our aim is ensure that we increase the number of university academics with PhDs and at the same time ensure that they develop their teaching capability and

their productivity in research and innovation. Concern still remains over the underrepresentation of African and female academic staff at institutions, particularly in the senior academic ranks. Data suggests that at least 1,200 new academics need to be recruited per annum.

My Department is developing a Staffing South Africa's Universities Scheme, which is expected in the long-term to meet the bulk of staff needs at universities. The ongoing appointment of additional staff will continue to be necessary however. This includes accessing retired academics, and expertise located in industry and professions. A further possibility is the appointment of staff from countries of both the North and the South, on fixed term contracts, so that they can contribute to South Africa's needs, benefit from the experience and return to their home countries.

There is absolute need to drastically increase PhDs in our higher education system and beyond. Our system on its own is unable to train PhDs in the numbers we need. Therefore MA and PhD spaces in especially overseas universities is an absolute priority and a space where many of you can play an important role.

Research

Research is key to providing insights into the post-school education and training system and the constituencies it serves, about the success or otherwise of policies and their implementation and about the experiences of other countries with similar challenges. Collaborative research projects with other countries carry significant benefits and will be encouraged. In particular, research partnerships involving African countries and other developing countries, including the BRICS nations. My Department is developing a research agenda, and there is wide scope for local, regional and international partnerships in research projects that have a direct interest in advancing access, equity, quality and efficiency of post-school education and training.

Green Economy

There are interesting developments in the area of renewable energy, which the Department supports. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology, with support from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), is establishing the South African Renewable Energy Technology Centre (SARETEC) at the Bellville Campus of CPUT, the first of its kind in the country and the continent. My department, through the NSF, allocated R105 million between 2013 and 2016 for infrastructure and initial running costs.

GIZ also provides support for the greening of TVET colleges, training of lecturers and the development of new “green” subjects to be offered as part of identified college curricula through the Skills for Green Jobs programme.

I am happy to inform you that in August 2014, the Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence was launched at the Northern Cape Rural TVET College, Upington Campus.

Internationalisation

In 2013 my Department finalised its international relations strategy, which outlines the Department’ s aims and goals for the internationalization of higher education and training. Internationalisation provides an opportunity to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education offerings through the sharing of best practices in teaching, learning and research.

Our institutions pursue their own international partnerships, and many universities have exchange programmes with foreign institutions. These engagements strengthen our system and enable us to remain comparable to other strong higher education and training systems around the world. We are developing a questionnaire for universities on the range of partnerships that they have entered into with their counterparts abroad. Our aim is to support these engagements as well as to provide guidance to ensure better alignment with our foreign policy. I recently made a call for our

institutions to review their ties with countries who are committing serious human rights violations.

We are working on the development of a policy framework to guide internationalization of the higher education sector, and a reference team of international scholars is in the process of being established.

Our recruitment of international students is biased towards postgraduates because of the high demand for undergraduate places by South African students. Postgraduates are most likely to add value to our system in terms of research productivity and teaching, particularly in our historically disadvantaged institutions, and by strengthening existing centres of excellence. We cannot at this stage afford to become market oriented in our internationalization agenda.

In 2012, there were just over 71,000 international students at our universities, the vast majority from the SADC region, followed by the rest of the continent. The South African government subsidises SADC students in the same way as our own students. This is as a result of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, which requires SADC countries to treat each other's students as home students for the purposes of fees.

Recognition of qualifications

Last year I signed a Recognition of Qualifications agreement with Russia. This agreement is the first of its kind between South Africa and another country and took a number of years to negotiate and finalise. The South African Qualifications Authority was the main interlocutor for South Africa, although other quality assurance bodies were also involved in the process. We are now engaging with China and Malaysia on signing similar agreements with them.

Chief Directorate: International Relations and Attaché

The Chief Directorate for International Relations continues to pursue its educational diplomacy function, ensuring that our international activities are aligned to the Department's priorities as well as the objectives of our foreign policy. In the current conservative fiscal climate, the unit is small with limited human and financial resources available. Missions need to be understanding that there are only a few officials trying to cover many countries.

Given the benefits that we accrue from our international engagements, I appointed an education attaché in Paris two years ago, to work specifically on UNESCO and the ILO, and bilaterally with Switzerland, Germany and the European Union (EU). The idea is to optimise South African participation and international cooperation with these entities in order to secure the achievement of our objectives.

UNESCO and BRICS

The landmark BRICS-UNESCO Ministerial Consultation on Education was held in November 2013 on the margins of the 37th session of UNESCO's General Conference. This brought together Education Ministers from BRICS countries to discuss collaboration with UNESCO in education. We agreed that BRICS and the wider international community can benefit hugely from enhanced cooperation amongst the BRICS countries in education.

As a result of this engagement, UNESCO drafted a report on the education and training systems of the five BRICS countries, which will be launched in September during the UN General Assembly. The report was developed in consultation with BRICS countries and makes a number of recommendations for cooperation.

The BRICS Think Tanks Council was established in South Africa in 2013, following a decision at the 2011 Summit that deeper cooperation among BRICS research institutions was needed through regular think tanks meetings. The Human Sciences Research

Council (HSRC) leads the South African Think Tank, with a key mandate to act as a knowledge hub and provide sound, evidence based policy advice on BRICS.

The HSRC is also responsible for coordinating and convening the BRICS Academic Forum, ensuring that the academic input and recommendations are presented to BRICS leaders for consideration in policy and decision making. The Academic Forum provides a platform for scholars to share ideas and reflect on a variety of topics. The aim is to generate and promote intra-BRICS knowledge base and exchange, to reduce dependency on western powers as sources of knowledge on individual BRICS members.

OECD

Last year I held a knowledge sharing seminar with the OECD on Skills Beyond School in Paris. It was an opportunity for the OECD and South Africa to share perspectives on education and skills, and to explore options for future collaboration. This culminated in the OECD conducting a review of our TVET college system, which we anticipate being published by the end of 2014.

Scholarships

The Department is setting up a small unit to deal with scholarships that are offered to the South African government as we recognize that this is an area that has presented challenges, not only within the DHET, but across government. We receive many offers of partial scholarships, some of which we cannot take up because of the costs that are not covered. We urge our missions to encourage offers of fewer scholarships that are more fully funded. The Department also relies on missions for more detailed information about scholarship offers, such as cost of living for students, and the quality of some institutions.

Development Support

Although there has been a sharp decrease in official development assistance to the education sector in South Africa, the Department continues to receive support from some development partners for niche priority areas, of which the EU is the largest.

If we are to meet our enrolment targets there are huge investments required in infrastructure and operational costs. Progress will certainly be affected by the amount of development resources we are able to access for the sector.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the need to engage strategically with our international partners in order to support our efforts to deal with the challenges in the higher education and training sector. My Department will be requesting missions to complete a questionnaire on the comparative advantages of individual countries in higher education and training. The information we receive will be used to identify, target and prioritise areas of potential cooperation. I would like to request your support in this and also to thank you for your ongoing support for our work.

Thank you.

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