

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DR BE NZIMANDE'S ADDRESS DURING THE 2019 SONA DEBATE

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thandi Modise,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Mr Amos Masondo,
Deputy President David Mabuza,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Honourable Members

A Dream for a better South Africa

In opening his SONA speech on Thursday last week, the President made a seemingly impressive but yet very fundamental observation that, “We gather here at an extremely difficult and challenging time in the life of our young democracy. Yet, we are also at a moment in our history that holds great hope and promise.

The President can be said to be reminding some of us about Karl Marx’s important observation about history and its struggles that “Men make history but under circumstances not of their own choosing”, yet this must be no reason to succumb and shy away from the task of seeking to change those very conditions in favor of the majority of our people!

I welcome the President’s focus on the economy as well as the priorities that has to be achieved. Higher Education, Science and Technology will improve on aligning its programmes to support the priorities as outlined by the President. Therefore, this makes this sector a cutting edge to implement the overall government programme of growing our economy.

Indeed, the ANC is confident, so should the President be, that the ANC is and still the best placed organization to lead the effort of changing the lives of our people for the better.

Let me highlight progress and plans in higher education, skills development, science and technology and the gains and achievements made over the past 25 years.

In 1994 the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), spent about **R71m** in supporting poor and mainly black students to access higher education, yet by 2018 this has hugely increased to **R15b**, and having benefitted more than 2 million students, most of whom being the first in the history of their families to acquire a university degree or a college certificate or diploma.

For the first time since 2016 there are more black students studying engineering at university ever in the history of our country. Since 2009 government introduced NSFAS in TVET colleges with an amount of **R100m** and by 2018/19 this amount has increased to **5b**.

Against this backdrop there is now a stronger alignment between education and training institutions and work; with a significant focus on student success; growing and strengthening of the TVET college sector; new Community Education and Training colleges; and improving the capacity of the whole sector to provide quality education and training opportunities to more South Africans.

The Department has just completed the National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NPPSET), which will soon be released to give further impetus to these policy goals and objectives.

NPPSET is a consolidated roadmap for a more integrated, transformed, articulated and effective post-school system.

I also welcome the President's focus, since ascending to office, on a development strategy for our country that is based on systematic and planning focusing on the 44 District Municipalities of our country.

Our department aims to ensure that within the next 10 year's there is no district municipality that have access to a post school training institution.

Our plan is to significantly expand infrastructure for TVET colleges, including new institutions and campuses, as well as upgrading of ICT so that our TVET colleges become part of the modern digital era in all the 44 districts.

Improved Access for the working class and poor

In line with the President's focus, over the next 10-year period our department will focus on the effectiveness and expansion of the new bursary scheme in both the university and TVET college sectors.

This requires a strong partnership between government, responsible for the provision of funding and its oversight, the institutions who interface with students and provide academic

and other forms of support, and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which is the implementing agency for the provision of financial support to poor and working-class students.

Students from families earning less than R350 000 per annum receive comprehensive support in the form of a bursary for the duration of their studies. Over the 2019 MTEF period, the investment amounts to R82 billion for university students and R20.4 billion for TVET college students.

Student Accommodation

An infrastructure priority for the 6th administration includes the development of decent, affordable student housing for universities and TVET colleges. Further details will be outlined in the Department budget vote. Safe to say government plans a massive investment in student accommodation.

Meeting the challenges of the economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The new Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) Landscape will be implemented from 1 April 2020. The aim of the new landscape is to strengthen, realign and repurpose the SETA system to support our skills development and human resource development plans.

Artisan development remains a priority while expanding workplace-based learning through learnerships, work integrated learning and internships.

The recently launched Centres of Specialisation (CoS) pilot is being prioritized for the training of 780 youth in artisan skills and will assist 26 TVET college campuses to improve their capacity to develop artisans with industry partners in 13 priority trades/occupations.

The National Skills Fund has made available **R150 million** to upgrade workshops at TVET colleges to meet industry requirements.

There are four employer associations participating in this initiative, i.e. Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of South Africa (SEIFSA), Retail Motor Industry (RMI), Institute of Plumbing South Africa (IOPSA) and Southern African Institute of Welding (SAIW).

The SETAs has ensured that all participating employers in the Centres of Specialisation programme received a discretionary grant.

On further interventions required in our sector

We welcome the following commitments by the President.

“We will expand our high-tech industry by ensuring that the legal and regulatory framework promotes innovation, scaling up skills development for young people in new technologies, and reducing data costs.”

“We have the opportunity to be at the forefront of green growth, of low-carbon industrialisation, of pioneering new technologies and of taking quantum leaps towards the economy of the future.”

“We also have to prepare our young people for the jobs of the future. This is why we are introducing subjects like coding and data analytics at a primary school level”

Mr President you will be pleased to know that this government has started to implement some of the programmes that you are calling for.

The DST has been funding the DSIDE programme for capacity building over the past five years. Over this period more than 190 third and fourth year, as well as Honours and Masters degrees students.

DST already in November 2011, established the Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research in order to take advantage of the convergence of technologies and to be a key driver for advancement of the South African economy in response to the Fourth Industrial revolution (4IR).

Government adopted the White Paper on Science and Innovation under your leadership. This White Paper recognized that the 4IR and the accompanying rapid technological changes are creating opportunities for improved quality of life and increased national competitiveness, much as new inventions are also putting some traditional jobs at risk.

In recent years, the DST, has enabled the development of individual 4IR technologies (ICT), robotics, photonics and additive manufacturing.

Our Department of Science, Technology is also supporting other specific sectors of our economy in the following ways:

- DST in partnership with the Minerals Councils of South Africa (MCSA) is implementing the South Africa Mining Extraction Research, Development and Innovation (SAMERDI) strategy, which is aimed at renewing mining competitiveness and sustainability in defined areas such as longevity of current mines; mechanized drill and blast.
- The Department of Science and Technology has Bioeconomy Strategy aimed at supporting agriculture by boosting innovation to ensure food security, enhance nutrition and improve health, as well as enable job creation through the expansion and intensification of sustainable agricultural production.
- In acknowledging the growing impact of rapid technological developments on the post-school education and training system, government has already initiated a project to ensure that by 2021 all university and TVET college campuses are connected to high-speed broadband connectivity.
- A national Open Learning System is being developed, which is aimed at improving access to high-quality learning materials and resources, as well as learning opportunities, through an online open learning platform.

Aligning higher education and training with Science and technology

Speaker,

President, your combining of higher education and training together with science and technology will further open huge opportunities in the production of both knowledge and skills and significantly contribute innovation in our country.

In other words, the integration of DST and DHET under a single Ministry offers the country with a unique set of strategic opportunities to realign, reposition and project their joint capabilities in new ways.

This combination will improve coordination between higher education institutions and the science councils and address the uneven and contradictory relationship between the core outputs of both Higher Education system and STI systems, including increasing the presence use of science, technology and innovation in the informal, township, rural and social enterprise sectors.

As the ANC we call upon our Allies, labour, business, civil society, especially the workers and the poor to rollout their sleeves to realise our dream of a better South Africa for all, in the true style of '**Thuma Mina**'.

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