

**Remarks by Minister of Higher Education And Training Dr Blade
Nzimande
on Opportunities For Matric Class 2016 in Post-School Education
and Training**

Press Conference, Pretoria, 12 January 2017

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Class of 2016 who passed their National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, and especially those who fared particularly well.

I would also like to encourage those who have not succeeded, either to rewrite their examinations or to pursue other opportunities within the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system.

It is very pleasing to note that of the 610 178 Grade 12 learners who wrote their Matric examinations:

- 162 374 learners are eligible for admission to bachelor studies;
- 179 619 learners are eligible for admission to diploma studies; and
- 100 486 learners are eligible for admission to higher certificate studies.

The NSC examination is an important milestone in the lives of our young people and the Department of Higher Education and Training wants to ensure that all these students are aware of the approximately 505 731 opportunities that are available to them within the PSET system to further their studies.

In 2017, our 26 public universities will provide access to about 197 400 new entrants wishing to pursue their studies across all general, technical and professional fields.

Included here are the three new universities: Sol Plaatje University (SPU), the University of Mpumalanga (UMP) and the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU).

It has been most encouraging to witness the growth of these new universities which focus on specific skills areas for our economy.

The 2017 university enrolment planning process addresses specific scarce skills areas, which have been identified as critical to achieve the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP), New Growth Path and Industrial Policy Action Plan in engineering sciences, animal and human health sciences, natural and physical sciences and teacher education.

Of the 197 400 new university entrants in 2017, about 63 950 students will be enrolling in scarce fields that include Engineering programmes, Life and Physical Sciences programmes, Human Health programmes, and Veterinary Sciences programmes.

The mandate of the Department of Higher Education and Training is to develop a skilled and capable workforce that can contribute to an inclusive growth path.

Central to achieving this mandate is ensuring student access to, and success in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, leading to intermediate and high-level skills.

Indeed, TVET colleges play a very pivotal role in addressing South Africa's skills needs and cater for a wide spectrum and growing numbers of students. They offer flexible and diverse courses ranging from full qualifications to short courses, skills programmes and learnerships.

Let me also say that while education is a key priority of government, we want to make technical and vocational education and training an apex of the post-school education and training. We aim to produce employable young people with high quality occupational and vocational education and training skills.

In pursuit of the Department's mandate to increase access and success in TVET college learning programmes, and to transform TVET colleges into institutions of choice, three new campuses will come into operation during 2017 namely:

- Thabazimbi Campus at the Waterberg TVET College in Limpopo;
- Bambanani Campus at uMfolozi TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal; and
- Nkandla A Campus at uMfolozi TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal.

All in all, those who have completed Grade 12 with a minimum of a higher certificate achievement can consider studying further at one of the 50 public TVET colleges. In 2017, 207 510 new entrant opportunities will be provided by TVET colleges.

The National Development Plan further requires that by 2030 at least 30 000 qualified artisans be produced per year.

To this end, learners must continue to seek and utilise Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) or National Skills Fund (NSF) funded artisan learnerships or apprenticeship opportunities to access artisan training in the various fields of engineering and services areas.

Learners who have an inclination to become artisans — such as being motor mechanics, plumbers, electricians and hairdressers — can register at the National Artisan Development Support Centre (NADSC) by going to their website: <http://nadsc.dhet.gov.za>, or calling the NADSC Call Centre on 086 999 0125 or by emailing copies of their qualifications to nadscinfo@dhet.gov.za or nadscplacements@dhet.gov.za.

They can also approach Student Support Services at any of the public TVET colleges or the Khetha Career Development Services at the Department for more information.

It is critical to note that in order to be accepted into an artisan-training programme, learners must have passed Mathematics with a minimum mark of 50% and a pass in Science.

Learners who pass but do not achieve the required achievement level in Mathematics and wish to consider a career as an artisan may also register for the Generic Trade Preparation Programmes, a bridging course for artisan training at NADSC.

NADSC, in consultation with SETAs, NSF and TVET colleges, will assist in the facilitation of the placement of these prospective artisan applicants.

Out-of-school youth who wish to enter the world of work, or need to increase their skills capabilities, can also consider the options of learnerships, apprenticeships and skills programmes.

TVET colleges also offer occupationally directed programmes that are accredited by SETAs under the auspices of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations.

SETAs will be providing 100 821 learning programme opportunities in the form of 34 469 learnerships, 17 824 bursaries, 5 819 internships, 26 193 skills programmes, 9 486 work integrated learning and 7 030 apprenticeship opportunities.

The NSF will continue to invest in TVET colleges, funding ±15 000 learners per annum in occupationally directed programmes which are linked to scarce and critical skills areas.

All of this signals progress, but we cannot and should not do it all alone.

That is why we work with industry through the Setas, and through a multitude of other partnerships and cooperations to ensure that our country opens as many opportunities to young matriculants as humanly possible. We are grateful to all who put effort into this, and we will continue in 2017 to work with whoever we can to ensure as many opportunities for as many young people as possible across the economy.

We call on business and the state owned enterprises, municipalities and other employers to redouble their efforts, join hands with us, and ensure

that as many young people who are able to are actually afforded an opportunity to gain skills and make a life for themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, a tremendous amount of progress has been made, particularly with regards to expanding access to the poor through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which has funded over 1.7 million students since 1994.

In 2016, NSFAS supported approximately 480 000 poor undergraduate students to access universities and TVET colleges. In 2016, NSFAS also disbursed loans and bursaries totalling R14 billion.

During the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, government announced that it will provide an additional R9 billion for NSFAS over the period ahead, raising its funding by over 18% to universities over the next three years to assist poor and missing middle students.

Most commendably, NSFAS will be funding 205 000 first time entering and continuing eligible students at universities and 200 000 students at TVET colleges in 2017, by providing student loans and bursaries totalling R15.2 billion.

You will also have seen a number of interventions that have been announced to assist students who come from poor and working class families.

Government will pay the fee increase, capped at 8%, for all qualifying registered students with a gross combined family income up to R600 000 per annum in 2017. This is a grant, which covers the increases for

tuition fees and university or college-managed accommodation, and will not have to be repaid by qualifying students.

This will benefit more than 75% of university and TVET college students, and in some institutions, more than 90% of students.

We have also gone further and made arrangements through NSFAS to pay the registration fees for all NSFAS funded students as an upfront payment to universities and TVET colleges in January each year. Therefore, NSFAS qualifying students will not pay any registration or upfront fees in 2017.

Government has also addressed the issue of historical debt of NSFAS qualifying students. All NSFAS qualifying students who were registered in 2016, and were successful in their studies, but who have accumulated historical student debt with institutions of higher education, will be allowed to register in 2017.

All universities will also develop processes to enable academically successful “missing middle” students who have outstanding student debt to register in 2017.

Universities have also been requested to manage student debt through fair and transparent debt management policies in order to ensure that outstanding student debt is recovered over a reasonable period.

During 2017, the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme model, which is aimed at assisting the “missing middle”, will be piloted at six universities and one TVET college. The pilot will fund the studies of ap-

proximately 1 500 students studying in a number of general formative degrees as well as seven professional qualifications and one artisan qualification for the duration of their studies.

It is also important to note that in addition to the money that NSFAS has received from the funds voted by Parliament, the NSF makes further annual allocations aimed at funding the full cost of study towards critical skills programmes that are most needed for the growth and development of the economy.

NSFAS has been allocated over R718 million for full bursaries for scarce and critical skills for the current year from the NSF. This funding is made available through the financial aid offices at institutions, and students wishing to make use of these bursaries are advised to enroll for critical skills study programmes which include science, commerce, health sciences and engineering.

The Department is also committed to expanding access and success in our institutions for students who have special needs. At our TVET colleges, for example, government pays 80% of the programme cost of the student's choice, with an additional allocation being made dependent on the type and severity of the disability.

In addition, NSFAS has earmarked R76.6 million in the 2017 academic year to provide financial aid to disabled students in universities.

In order to assist learners to make informed career and study choices, the Department also operates the Khetha multi-channel platform career development service which provides free access to career information,

advice and guidance through telephone, SMS, social media, face-to-face and outreaches to schools among others. Over the past 2½ years, almost 51 000 individuals have made use of this service.

Through the Khetha radio programme, the Department also reaches about 3.5 million listeners on 10 SABC African language radio stations, including Afrikaans, on a weekly basis.

I want to encourage learners who still need information, advice and guidance on where to go after Grade 12, to contact one of these services.

The Department is also, again, operating the Central Application Clearing House (CACH) this month (January) and next month. The CACH service has been developed to assist learners who are eligible for higher education studies and have applied for a space at an institution, but have not been offered a place at the institution of their choice after the Grade 12 results were released.

The CACH service aims to continually increase the placement ratio of prospective applicants into PSET opportunities. It is also accessible to those learners who did not apply before the closing dates last year and now find that they are eligible for higher education studies.

For the 2016 year, a placement ratio of 40% was achieved, of which 53% was in university education.

Learners looking for spaces at PSET institutions can contact the toll free call centre on 0800 356 635, or send an SMS with their name, ID and

contact number to 49200 and they will be called back. They can also access the system via the website <http://cach.dhet.gov.za> or send an email to CACH@dhet.gov.za.

The CACH service will verify the learner's information and forward it to institutions that still have unfilled places. Where places exist and applicants meet the admission requirements, institutions will contact learners to offer them available places.

Finally, the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Funding of Higher Education and Training is also set to release its final report in mid-2017, making recommendations on the feasibility of implementing fee-free higher education and training in South Africa.

As Minister of Higher Education and Training, I am convinced that all these initiatives and campaigns create awareness and provide useful information to our youth about career and funding options for post-school education and training.

We must again underline that there are national processes in place designed to identify a long term solution to the question of university funding and fees. The Presidential Commission will report this year, and we urge all stakeholders to co-operate with this important process and give space to the finalization of this matter.

As the facts and figures I have just mentioned show clearly, government has already done an enormous amount to meet the demands of those raising genuine issues, including a fee rise moratorium now in its second year.

At the same time, however, legitimate student demands for accessible quality education may be, they have also shown a darker side. A variety of vested financial and political interests have also entered the scene, essentially hoping to reap benefits from these demands. For instance, we have noted with deep concern how individuals with vested political and ideological interests have managed to turn what was essentially a peaceful student led, intersectional struggle into one characterized by violence and anarchy.

It is also becoming more evident that some business interests are looking on with glee at what they hope will signal the collapse of the public higher education system. The expectation is that the current crisis will drive quality and confidence in the public system to the point where scores will seek refuge in more stable and reliable private institutions. The casualties will be the poor and working class students, whilst students from the middle and upper class families will opt for private provision or studying abroad. Experienced academics frustrated with the chaos in the public sector will also be attracted abroad or to a more stable and better paying private sector.

This means that those student leaders and organisations genuinely concerned about access and affordability should maintain high levels of vigilance, as there are opportunists in their midst, ready to hijack their noble cause. On our part as government, we recommit ourselves to a genuine and honest process of engagement with key players. We are also pleased with the role played by progressive parent groupings and the clergy in a common endeavor to resolve the current crisis. The active involvement of broader society can only bode well for higher education, moving forward.

South Africa needs to focus on diverse options, not a disproportionate focus on universities, to ensure we produce skilled youth at different levels for our country's economic growth.

I thank you.