

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**DR. BE NZIMANDE, MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**NATIONAL ARTISAN DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

**ESKOM CONFERENCE CENTRE, MIDRAND**

**WEDNESDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2012**

Programme Director

Honorable Cabinet Colleagues

Organised Labour, Business and State Colleagues

Distinguished guests

Comrades

Ladies and gentlemen

Since taking office in April 2009, I have been looking forward to this opportunity to start a formal and ongoing conversation with the artisan development community in our country. The need for the development of qualified artisans to support the economy remains a high priority. This is especially so in the light of the government's intention to strengthen manufacturing in our country in line with the New Growth Path and the Industrial Policy Action Plan II. The growth of industry, as well as the strategic infrastructure projects announced by the President in January – some of which are already being rolled out – require a significant number of qualified and competent artisans.

These projects – and the economic activities that they will stimulate – will require qualified and capable workforce particularly in the manufacturing, construction, operations, maintenance and heavy industrial sectors. Unless we accelerate the training of artisans, their numbers will fall short of the demands of industry, and therefore adversely affect both production and job creation. The impact will be felt in inadequate economic growth and government's reduced ability to provide basic and other welfare services to our people.

Some of the milestones that we have achieved include the establishment of our national artisan development programme and I also released the first ever list of occupations that are regarded as artisan trades in our country and globally. That list will go a long way to clarify, in the minds of a lot of our people, exactly what an artisan trade is. Today I would like us to focus on very specific issues that are related to the purpose, desired outcomes and theme of this conference

With the opening of today's session I am establishing, directly under my auspices, a platform that will annually review the state of artisan development in South Africa and allow for discussion and consultation on how to continually improve the National Programme for Artisan Development; the **"7-Steps to Becoming a Qualified Artisan"**. Although we are starting today with a small, developmental conference, we are nevertheless building on some important advances over the past three years and my intent is that we progressively expand this discourse across all the provinces so that when we come together again next year, we have a much louder and clearer voice on national artisan development that is implemented in all provinces.

There is no doubt in my mind that we need to accelerate the process for improving the status and profile of artisan trades as inspirational careers for the large numbers of young South Africans. This conference and the provincially based discussions that will follow will require all our partners to commit to the "7-Steps" in support of accelerating the development of these key labourforce skills.

On 12 January 2012, my Department successfully launched a Green Paper on Post School Education and Training. I must express my appreciation for the resounding response and support to this process, which has helped to shape the thinking in the DHET on the challenges, purpose, organisation and priorities of the post school system in South Africa. Those of you who are familiar with the Green Paper, you would have noted that artisan training and other forms of workplace-based training are a central

part of our strategy to expand education and training opportunities for our people and especially our youth.

Closely associated with the expansion of education and training opportunities is the question of raising the status of vocational training. The idea that trades and other vocational programmes are only for those who can't get into university is deeply ingrained in our society and has a detrimental effect on our ability to develop the skills required by our labour market, not to mention the status of those who make a very important contribution to our economy and society. We need to work towards making FET Colleges and the artisan and other career-based training programmes that they offer the option of choice for the majority of those who take this route.

The National Artisan Moderation Body or NAMB that I established on 30 November 2010, is charged with the responsibility to coordinate artisan development in the country. It has reported to me that a process has been started to open NAMB Offices in provinces, located in engineering campuses of public FET colleges. The first task of each of these offices will be to coordinate, in collaboration with the SETAs and FET colleges in their respective provinces, to organise provincial conferences so that we can raise the profile and impetus of artisan development through the provinces, districts and local municipality structures. Ideally these conferences should be held at FET college campuses so that we can continue to locate our public FET colleges at the centre of all national artisan development processes.

The theme, **“7-Steps – Becoming a Qualified Artisan”** advocates the National Programme for Artisan Development and allows for a common national, cross-SETA and cross-sector understanding of processes involved in becoming an artisan. To a large extent, institutional and general public knowledge of this process has been lost to South Africans. The conflated and confusing sector-based skills development system has created huge blockages to a simple and easy-to-understand artisan development system. This conference therefore offers us the opportunity to re-introduce and re-

emphasise the basic steps of becoming an artisan and how these steps can be efficiently and effectively implemented. The theme of this conference allows for a structured discussion on each of the “7 steps”, especially on those critical particular issues that we need to pay attention to, which I will briefly reflect on.

**Step 1** is about **career guidance and management**. Here we need to work with our partners in career advice and the DHET’s Kheta Campaign to rally young people, at a much younger age, possible around grade 7, to start thinking seriously about career options in technical and vocational programmes that would ultimately lead them to become qualified artisans. The conference needs to look at ways on how the country can achieve this artisan career bias. We should also consider how we can assist qualified artisans who might be now stuck in a job with no apparent prospects for advancement, to access options for further progression. Some of the best engineers in our country do not come out of the university system but were artisans that studied further, gained experience and sat for exams to become government-certificated engineers. We need to get all the positive elements of that system revitalized and improved upon, as soon as possible.

**Step 2 (Fundamental Theory)** relates to fundamental vocational engineering theory that is taught primarily at public FET Colleges. This is learning that lays the foundation for any person who wants to progress into an engineering career. It includes, in particular, mathematics, engineering science, and engineering drawing. There is a growing need to start including language to enrich such a curriculum.

While many young people can enter and enjoy such learning, I would particularly like to draw your attention to the millions of young South Africans, mainly under the age of 25, who, for one reason or another, dropped out of school. It is incumbent upon us to try to get these young people, who are neither in employment, in education nor training, youngsters that we commonly refer to as “NEETs”, into bridging programmes that can get them qualified with this basic fundamental engineering theory. The quality

assurance of these programmes is the domain of UMALUSI, so I look forward to ideas from this critical body on how we can improve opportunities for the “NEETs” in our society.

**Step 3 (Learner Programme Registration)** is where the SETAs, as custodians of artisan learner agreements and contracts, start to play a critical role. This is really the start of the artisan learner data pipeline, without playing down the link between this step and the two preceding steps. It would bring me great pleasure if all learners who enter FET colleges to do a NATED programme (or N-course) did so already having an agreement or contract for an artisan programme, but that is not the reality today in South Africa. We lost that link in the early 80s’. I invite all stakeholders in this conference to suggest concrete ways that would help us to get the link back.

Critical to step 3 is also the development and implementation of a single, guaranteed funding and learner administration system for all artisan trades applicable to all sectors. This has been raised with the Human Resource Development Council as the key blockage to national artisan development. So we must provide a real positive and definitive way forward on this matter. I am also aware that there is a plan approved by the Director-General of my Department to set up a national artisan data centre at Ekurhuleni East FET College in Kwa-Thema (Gauteng Province) to facilitate the balance between supply and demand pipelines. This is good news as we will have the FET College system at the centre of artisan development data management.

**Step 4 (Trade knowledge and practical training) and Step 5 (Workplace experience)** takes our artisan learners into the real practical space on artisan training and development. The learners become exposed to the application of trade theory of their chosen artisan trade. The learner practices this trade in a simulated environment at a training centre and then apply the knowledge in the workplace. I am aware that there are numerous variations of this process, depending on the sector and whether the programme is a learnership or an apprenticeship. I think there could be some

simplification of these steps but the technical aspects of each trade will determine that. The examples I have observed in Germany and Switzerland of the dual system of apprenticeship training is something I think we seriously need to investigate. There is currently a Steering Committee, coordinated by the NAMB, which is busy with a pilot project in this regard. At the centre of such a dual system must be the public FET colleges. As the dual system requires very close cooperation between a training centre and an employer, the SETAs will also have to become involved with the FET colleges as the dual system is developed.

**Step 6** of artisan development process is known as **trade testing**, but also known as summative assessment. This has been an area of concern for some time now as it seems that there are a lot of rather unsavoury activities going on around trade testing. There are disturbing reports of bribery linked to the easy passing of trade tests. So we need to move forward as soon as possible into an environment that fosters good controls around trade testing. It is essential that such a critical environment is centrally controlled by the NAMB as the nucleus of its work.

Included in the area of trade testing is the matter of Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL. This is an area where, if we apply our minds, we can double, even triple, the number of persons who qualify as artisans. There is currently a pilot process underway to RPL at least 200 artisans aides from, among others, COSATU and FEDUSA affiliated union members. To all involved, lets make sure that the process moves as fast as humanly possible. As you may know, I have appointed a Ministerial Task Team to develop a framework for the implementation of RPL, and I am confident that the output of its work will help facilitate the expansion of access and throughputs.

**The last and seventh step** for artisan development, known as **Quality Assurance and Certification**, falls under the legislative control of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), but is delegated to the NAMB through service-level agreements and delegations to the Director-General. This relationship between the QCTO and the

NAMB is a key partnership since the “T” in QCTO stands for TRADES, which denotes a very special relationship between the two structures. This relationship will surely bring about improved quality in the competence of our artisans as the QCTO and NAMB start to implement national processes of accreditation, moderation and quality assurance over the next few years.

While this role has to date been largely carried out by the SETAs for occupational qualifications such as the trades, the SETAs will provide the much needed monitoring role to ensure that the national policies and practices of quality assurance as developed by QCTO and NAMB are implemented. The QCTO and NAMB relationship is implementing a process within the Department to remove the practices associated with the Manpower Training Act of 1981 and replace them with the new artisan development regime provided for in the Skills Development Act as amended in 2008.

All the above must translate into practical programmes that will produce artisans in various trades and in the numbers we need. This conference will have to focus on practical strategies to increase the production of artisans, and the kinds of partnerships we need to forge or strengthen in order to realise our objective of the increased production of skills.

Let me conclude by expressing my utmost appreciation and gratitude for the unwavering support and sponsorship received from the SETAs for this ground-breaking conference as reflected in the programme. I am sure that together with the public FET colleges in all provinces, we will see unsurpassed commitment and support, and that the fruits of your hard work will find expression in sustained benefits to generations of our aspirant and current artisans.

Indeed in our discussions and plans we also need to strongly factor in the National Skills Accord with its prioritisation of work-placement for apprenticeships and the exposure of

FET college lecturers to current technology in industry. The Skills accord is a very important platform and weapon to realise increased artisan production.

I'd like to conclude by thanking you all for responding to the invitation to attend this conference; your attendance and participation is highly acknowledged. I have no doubt that the conference will achieve its objectives and wish you well in your deliberations. Although I am unable to remain with you throughout the conference, I look forward eagerly to receiving the detailed conference report.

Thank you.