

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, MR BUTI MANAMELA, TO THE PWC  
25TH HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE

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Programme Director

CEO of the PWC – Mr Dion Shango

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Leaders of our post school education and training institutions

Conference participants

Thank you for giving me the privilege of addressing this 25th PWC Higher Education Conference. I am sure that you will agree with me when I say that the post school education and training landscape has changed substantially over this 25 year period. And it will continue changing as we respond to both internal and external factors that have a bearing on post school education and training. South Africa has a large youth population. According to Statistics South Africa (Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Q2: 2018), young people aged 15–34 years account for a larger share of the working-age population than adults. The South African working-age population is standing at 37.8 million of which 20.26 million (53.5%) were youth aged 15-34 years and 17.6 million (46.5%) were adults (35-64 years).

They furthermore reported that in 2018, out of the total 10.3 million individuals aged 15-24 years, 3.3 million (31.6%) were neither employed nor attending an educational institution. This situation has not improved in recent times and points not only to a grave wastage of talent, but also to possible serious social disruption.

I am mindful that this is a gala dinner so I don't want to bore you with statistics. But it is important to highlight the serious plight of youth that are not in employment, education or training.

Our post school education and training system must respond to this import cohort of young people and give them hope.

The DHET's Strategic Plan: 2015 to 2020 is to substantially expand access to education and training for youth and adults, regardless of whether they have completed school or not' and to diversify provision based on open learning principles to improve learning opportunities across the post-school education and training sector.

The fourth industrial revolution is changing how we live, work, and communicate. It is reshaping government, education, healthcare and commerce—almost every aspect of life. In the future, it can also change the things we value and the way we value them. It can change our relationships, our opportunities and our identities as it changes the physical and virtual worlds we inhabit. It will definitely reshape how people learn and interact in an education and training environment.

The digital world is increasingly penetrating the education and training domain, with technology gradually being used to deliver education, knowledge and skills in new and innovative ways, but also how people interact with each other and with information, and how people construct knowledge.

Many countries in the world have started paying more attention and devoting sufficient funds on improving digital communication technologies and for some members of society, such as 'digital natives', using technology is natural, but this is not necessarily the case for all. Therefore, it is the

mandate of the government to ensure that every citizen develops the necessary skills to remain active and included in an increasingly digital society.

In the PSET sector we have to respond to the challenges and advantages of the 4th Industrial Revolution by moving in more agile and responsive manners in education and training.

The DHET has adopted 'open learning' as a strategy to increase access to education and training opportunities for all and to construct quality learning environments which take account of a dynamic global environment, learners' context and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies.

The DHET supports the development of open learning opportunities as an integral part of the PSET system, and not as an add-on or second-best to face-to-face and/or classroom engagements. There is an intention to forge networks of providers and learner support centres, and to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning.

Inevitably, the DHET is harnessing digitisation to improve access to and cost-effectiveness of education and training. It also works towards enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, lecturer development and educational planning and management.

Open learning enables many people to take advantage of cost-effective and meaningful, quality education and training opportunities throughout their lives, mainly through the use of appropriate technologies and e-learning methodologies.

Important to note is that the DHET does not view open learning as a cure-all for the many challenges in the post-school sector in South Africa. Rather, the Department is committed to encouraging provider institutions to adopt an open learning approach, and to supporting institutions to introduce open learning practices as one practical way of addressing crucial issues of widening access to affordable, quality learning opportunities.

In specific, the DHET supports an institutional platform to take forward open learning that facilitates distributed learning. The DHET has therefore invested in the development of a National Open Learning System (NOLS) that aims to:

progressively harness open learning principles in all PSET institutions;

provide students in the PSET system with an efficient open learning system with viable options for learning;

use ICT as an enabler for teaching and learning in PSET; and

make high quality, shared teaching and learning resources increasingly available as Open Education Resources

Through collaboration with PSET institutions, experts, industry, entities and associations/formations the DHET is developing learning opportunities with high quality open learning materials that is made available as OER on the NOLS. In specific, the DHET commenced the development of interactive, self-directed e-learning materials for the National Occupational Certificate for Electricians and the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA).

The DHET encourages institutions to collaborate within and across sectors (universities, TVET and CET colleges and skills development providers) and with industry in designing and providing professional development in the types of course design, materials development and administrative/management required in open learning.

We are also prioritising collaboration with the Departments of Telecommunication and Postal Services and Science and Technology and other government departments and stakeholders to facilitate increased bandwidth and reduced costs for educational purposes, with particular emphasis on reaching those in more remote areas; engaging with stakeholders to negotiate easier access to and reduced costs for Internet-enabled devices; providing funds to ensure that a comprehensive, enabling ICT connectivity infrastructure is put in place for all providers of ICT.

All university campuses are already connected to the South African National Education and research Network (SANREN).

The DHET is currently connecting all TVET college campuses (despite the rural locations of most of them) to the same network providing high speed, high quality and excess bandwidth.

Government cannot respond to the challenges and opportunities that the 4th Industrial Revolution brings alone. We need partnerships with the private sector to complement and strengthen our efforts.

Allow me to give two specific examples of this partnership.

Earlier this year we launched a partnership with Multi Choice and the University of Pretoria, wherein Multi Choice sponsored a Machine Learning Chair at the university. The Chair will enable us to address this scarce skill area through the creation of a pipeline of engineers focused on building and contributing to the digital future and global competitiveness of our country.

The sponsorship includes support for Masters and Doctoral students as well as for research in the critical areas of Engineering, Big Data Science and Communication Science.

Another partnership model is with Siemens. Siemens has provided equipment specifically related to industrial automation that enables integrated engineering to 13 engineering faculties at universities and colleges in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Kenya. The company sees this as an opportunity, especially in Africa, to embrace new and exponential technologies combined with human talent to accelerate industrialization and drive economic growth.

To this effect, factory automation and electrical engineering equipment have been made available to selected TVET colleges, Universities and Universities of Technology all over South Africa.

Siemens has collaborated with each institution to ensure they received the products suited to their specific training needs.

It is going to take partnerships like these to advance our digitalisation and employment agenda for the present and for the future.

The DHET is progressively harnessing the offerings of modern digital technology and digitisation to

respond to the need for increased access to high quality teaching and learning in the country. I hope that you will join us in supporting these efforts.

I thank you.