

New UP veterinary complex to increase veterinary graduates

2 March 2016 - On Friday 19 February, the Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Mr GF Qonde, officially opened the new Lesedi complex under the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

The well-designed learning centre will contribute significantly towards addressing the previously low veterinary professional profile in our country. The University of Pretoria remains the only accredited institution offering full professional training in this field, for over 90 years.

The veterinary profession and the State in South Africa face an enormous challenge to provide all sections of the community with the necessary infrastructure to ensure the continued supply of veterinary services for the agricultural community.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Training has acknowledged that Veterinary Science is a scarce skill in South Africa, and has therefore called for the intervention to significantly expand the University of Pretoria's Veterinary Science facilities, and ensure that it increases its student intake to reflect the country's social demographics.

Thus at the request of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr BE Nzimande, a working group on Veterinary Sciences was convened in 2010, under the chairpersonship of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, Prof de la Rey.

This group comprised representatives of the University of Pretoria, North-West University, Tshwane University of Technology and the University of South Africa.

Its purpose was to assist the Department in expanding existing veterinary sciences programme and improving the geographical spread of the students and equality profiles of student and staff.

It reported an urgent need for an increase in the number of veterinarians in South Africa by expanding the annual intake of students in the BVSc veterinary programme within the University of Pretoria.

The proposed increase in student numbers is aimed at meeting the requirements with regard to food security and economic growth in South Africa and the region, as well as the health, wellbeing and production of animal and veterinary public health.

The Department of Higher Education and Training thus responded to the call and through the National Skills Fund sponsored the extensions at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Health Sciences and Faculty of Veterinary Sciences.

Government policies, in particular the National Plan for Higher Education, expect the higher education sector to deliver increased numbers of high quality skills, research and innovation for the socio-economic development of our country. Inadequate infrastructure is a constraint underpinning government's commitment.

In 2007, Government launched a programme of *Infrastructure and Efficiency Funding*, a partnering approach with institutions of higher learning. Through this programme, government has injected significant funding into universities with the intention to stimulate additional contributions from industry and the private sector in general.

The Department of Higher Education and Training's contributions towards this programme has positively mobilised universities' own resources towards successfully implementing innovative infrastructure projects.

The vast amount of investment in infrastructure in the university sector has not been possible without the commitment from Government.

During the first Infrastructure and Efficiency cycle over the period 2007/08 to 2009/10, a total amount of R3.6 billion was allocated to all universities for infrastructure.

During the second infrastructure and efficiency cycle, over the period of 2010/11 to 2011/12, a total amount of R3.3 billion was allocated and over the third infrastructure cycle 2012/13 to 2014/15, an amount of R6 billion was allocated.

To date, the Department has allocated a total of R393.7 million towards infrastructure development at the University of Pretoria (UP) through the infrastructure and efficiency programme. In the first infrastructure cycle an amount of

R170 million was allocated to UP; in the second R135.6 million was allocated and in the third a further R88 million was allocated to UP for infrastructure development.

In addition to this, in June 2012, the Department approved a discretionary allocation of R113 million for UP from the National Skills Fund (NSF) for infrastructure development specifically at UP's Onderstepoort Campus.

The Lesedi Complex has been designed to form the new gateway to the Onderstepoort Campus as it is situated between the Animal Hospital and Sir Arnold Theiler buildings integrating this part of the Campus architecturally and functionally.

The Lesedi Complex resembles a sculptural organic architectural expression with strong, modern South African architectural elements.

Since the opening of the Phase 1 Development, the applications from new Undergraduate students have been rising, hence it must be mentioned that Onderstepoort's Faculty of Veterinary Science is the only Faculty of its kind in South Africa and the second oldest in Africa.

The architects have built on the experience gained from the previous Phase to develop the new additions to the Onderstepoort Family.

The buildings have been designed to be as energy efficient as possible, from orientation, internal layout, insulated wall cavities, to the technicalities of solar water heating and water saving sanitary fittings.

Natural lighting has been incorporated into the design to minimise the need for artificial lighting during the daytime.

All of this contributes to a more comfortable living environment, ideal for studying, socialising and growing.

With regards to the infrastructure priorities and allocations over the next 4 years (2015/16 – 2018/19), the Department will be allocating funds in line with the National Macro Infrastructure Plan, which should be completed by the end of March 2016.

The Macro Infrastructure Plan for the system is currently being developed based on the campus master plans, disability audits and maintenance plans submitted by universities.

The Department has set aside a total amount of R1.98 billion to support university infrastructure and efficiency projects in the 2015/16 financial year.