



higher education & training

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SPEECH BY DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MR GF QONDE, AT THE AWARD CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF (NID)

Programme Director

Chancellor of the National Institute for the Deaf College, Dr Mavis Naidoo

NID Board Members and the Chief Executive Officer

NID Management and Staff

Students and Parents

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening and warm greetings from the Department of Higher Education and Training. It is truly a great pleasure to be here this evening to be part of the celebrations. It is indeed a momentous occasion, marking an important milestone in our country's education and skills development process, that of recognising individual achievements.

As we celebrate this evening, we should perhaps reflect a bit where we come from as a country with regards to skills development for people with hearing difficulties. Historically and at present, a large percentage of South Africa's Deaf population has limited access to formal schooling, with more than half being denied access to high school for various reasons. Within the Deaf community, unemployment is very high at over 85%. The Deaf community, in its majority, is exposed to a number of vulnerabilities in society, including low-income job opportunities, leading to a total degeneration in the state of human rights and welfare of people with hearing challenges.

Communities with hearing challenges, represent 8% of the South African population, is deserving of a new, holistic development endeavor, inclusive of education and

training. There are 4 million individuals in South Africa who are hearing impaired, 2 million of whom are profoundly Deaf with Sign Language being their first language and the primary language portal through which they converse with the rest of the world. The Deaf span across the whole society, black and white, male and female; young and old; and are just ordinary people with the same needs and requirements as the hearing population.

The South African population is growing, as is the Deaf community, with an increasing demand for social development input. However, very limited steps are being undertaken to foster and train new cadres of Deaf-knowledgeable social development workers, special needs educators and specialist care-support staff. The result is that the already strained reservoir of scarce, appropriately Deaf-trained and skilled human resources is, through sheer attrition, simply drying up.

Over the past 150 years, very little tangible collective provision has been made for the Deaf in South Africa. For the Deaf, as a special needs disabled grouping, there is nationally:

- no dedicated inclusive early-detection, remedial or health support – inclusive of assistive devices and technologies;
- no appropriate pre-school or crèche foundation;
- inapt special needs-specific contextual basic, higher and adult education inclusive of critical life-preparedness;
- a mere 40-odd schools for the Deaf in the whole of South Africa, which is often grouped together with the Blind despite widely varying and uniquely differing special education needs;
- a paucity of appropriately trained educators; and
- unattainable further academic achievement prospects with Sign Language not being officially recognized, as yet.

Programme Director, as fellow citizens, equally deserving in the new South African democracy, the Deaf have been sadly overlooked, suffering neglect and alienation. For the profoundly Deaf in particular, non-vocal and non-activist by nature, their democratic right to equality without any discrimination based on disability is not being fulfilled.

The National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS III) developmental and transformation imperatives make an emphasis about people with Disabilities in terms of accelerating skills as part of its national human resources development policy, and aims to significantly open up opportunities for skills training for people experiencing barriers to employment, which is caused by various forms of physical and intellectual challenges. In a similar vein, the National Skills Fund in line with the NSDS III has been engaging in sizeable skills development initiatives that seek to provide a stepping-stone to vulnerable communities, whose access to training resources has been limited in the past.

I am told that the National Institute for the Deaf College for Occupational Skills Training, is the only national, dedicated educational and skills training institution in the post-school system catering to those with a hearing impairment in South Africa and indeed in Africa, providing a full language, academic, further and adult education; gainful skills development and occupational training continuum. This is fully augmented with appropriate Deaf-friendly, workplace/placement orientated, multi-disciplinary based learning programmes, materials and guidelines across a spectrum of Early Child Development, Hospitality, Cookery, Cosmetology and Beauty, Furniture Making and Upholstery, Construction and Agriculture. The quality of its training is of such high order that upon successful completion of their studies, its competent students are able to gainfully enter the market.

The founding purpose of the College is to initiate and increase investment in Deaf-appropriate post-school leveling education and market-place centered contextual occupational skills training, and to stimulate suitable employment opportunities for and materially assist in adequate work placement of its graduate students. Viewed against an increasing training demand countrywide and the advent of new electronic technologies and ICT proficiencies, the College has adopted a forward-looking phased expansion strategy in its provision of post-school skills training services, both vocationally and occupationally.

- **Phase 1:** Supported by the National Skills Fund, the introduction in 2010 of dedicated ICT training programmes, specifically computerisation, as a communication and employment-equalizing niche for Deaf students. Also to develop a series of ground-breaking Deaf-friendly blended learning

occupational training programmes aimed at preparing Deaf students for the workplace in the commercial and public sectors, and erection of new Deaf-appropriate hostel and training facilities, adhering to universal access and design.

- **Phase 2:** With further support from the National Skills Fund, the first step was to launch a broad-based research survey among Deaf job seekers and potential employers to determine the most significant employment-relevant training areas and to identify opportunities for Deaf trainees in an economy with a widely diverse public and private sectors. It was evident from the research that Deaf and Hearing Impaired school leavers generally are ill prepared for post-school education and training and/or employment. It was also found that a multi-faceted skills training series should be developed aimed at the commercial sector – thus opening extensive employment opportunities countrywide in areas easier for Deaf persons to enter and be more readily absorbed.

This has led to the development during 2012 to 2016 of a series of new training programmes aimed at enabling the future Deaf job seeker to enter the commercial employment sector - both private and public, with theoretical and practical skills.

The average Deaf school leaver is virtually uneducated, without the requisite life-preparedness, suffering a lack of self-esteem and being socially isolated, and unprepared for employment or even post-school training. To date, every student admitted to the College first had to be exposed to intense post-school supplementary basic 3R's instruction (reading, writing and arithmetic) and inculcation of sorely lacking foundation fundamentals, prior to being able to participate successfully in any skills training.

The College has accordingly introduced as mandatory precursor to all genre-specific training, a one-year bridging or 'leveling' Links4Life Programme to enhance entry-level students lacking personal and communications skills, and educational competencies thereby enabling them to arrive at a level at which they can participate successfully in further academic and occupational skills training at the College.

Parallel to the Links4Life Programme, a “train-the-trainer” induction and instruction programme was introduced for new and existing teaching staff to facilitate a holistic introduction to the broad scope of Deaf diversity, didactics and pedagogy, notable obstacles and barriers, self-esteem challenges, socialisation and behavioral barriers, nurturing of entrepreneurial skills, ongoing literacy/numeracy promotion and functional Sign Language. Facilitators are required to promote dual training practice through workplace/shop floor visitations aimed at identification of anticipated practical challenges, effective Deaf communication approaches and personal empowerment techniques that need to be addressed.

To optimise continued access to quality learning, post-study communication and workplace orientation, all students are fully trained in the use of and personally issued with internet-connected laptops, complete with a speech application to enable Deaf users to self-improve word articulation, and with job-related terminology to facilitate day-to-day shop floor communication. It also introduced a sustained longitudinal research programme to track all students placed and simultaneously measure employment retention. This enabled the Institute to continuously stay abreast of workplace needs and wants.

- **Phase 3:** Seen against the country’s critical technical skills requirement, Phase 3 of the National Institute for the Deaf’s expansion programme funded by the National Skills Fund, entailed the generation of a range of high-quality post-school occupational skills training programmes to provide new cadres of qualified Deaf tradesmen and technicians in the scarce technical, construction, engineering and industrial trade fields.
- **Phase 4:** Accelerating Deaf skills countrywide was an integral part of the National Institute for the Deaf’s training strategy employing new tailor-made programmes and online technology, with a dynamic outreach intervention aimed at employing local TVET colleges, adult education and training centers and even interested provincial education departments, to participate in systemically expanding the Deaf training endeavor across the country.
- **Phase 5:** From 2016 to 2017, the Department of Higher education and Training through the National Skills Fund supported the National Institute for the Deaf with

the funding of training for unemployed Deaf youth. The National Institute for the Deaf offered a range of Occupational, Artisan, and Vocational Certificates as well as skills programmes across South Africa. The target beneficiary group for this project comprised unemployed Deaf/hearing impaired youth and school-leavers. The beneficiaries of the project are thus the vast majority of Deaf persons in South Africa that have no access to Deaf-accessible skills development and are unemployed. As a result of the overall project, the National Skills Fund funded 328 learners:

- 80 Learnerships
- 132 in Skills Programmes
- 18 Work Integrated Learning opportunities
- 8 Artisans
- 47 with Short Courses
- 43 with Module Training

Despite major challenges, the National Institute for the Deaf remained successful in its undertaking, thanks to the hard work of its staff and the equally diligent efforts of its service providers. The support received from the National Skills Fund staff assigned to this project also played a pivotal role in the success achieved. Thanks to the dedication and commitment of all parties, the objectives set out in the grant agreement was achieved and in some instances surpassed.

The overall success of this project is enormous. It has afforded unemployed Deaf students the opportunity to gain employable skills for sustainable livelihoods, not only for those students who directly benefitted within the project term but future generations of students. By maintaining a high standard of excellence throughout, all project goals were achieved or exceeded in the duly allotted timeframes. The National Institute for the Deaf has also maintained an average pass rate of 98% and a work-placement rate of 97%. From 2011 until 2017, the National Skills Fund has invested just over R115.4 million to train about 1 017 Deaf students throughout South Africa which also included a fully equipped computer classroom, classrooms, a hostel and office buildings.

Programme Director, before I conclude, let me take this opportunity to bid a farewell on behalf of the Department of Higher Education and Training to the National

Institute for the Deaf's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Dion de Villiers for the hard work he did in ensuring that partnerships with different stakeholders, including government is taking place with regard to training and skilling the Deaf community. Your presence and friendly face will be sadly missed. You have proven that it is possible to open doors for the Deaf community during difficult times. We hope that you are leaving the National Institute for the Deaf to capable and willing hands that will take the revolution of skills development forward. Your good work is truly appreciated. You gave dignity to the Deaf and have shown them that through perseverance they can overcome their deafness and make an impact within their families and society at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have seen Government in particular the Department of Higher Education and Training, other departments, Sector Education and Training Authorities, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges reaffirm their commitment to address the skills development needs of the Deaf community under your leadership. Your hard work and dedication Deon, in many ways addresses economic growth, social development and transformation of Deaf learners. We understand that this work has not been easy for you as a leader. It carried with it, a lot of challenges and upheavals. I am pleased that under your leadership, the National Institute for the Deaf has ensured that Deaf learners access employment through skill development initiatives. In addition to this, you are leaving a legacy for these learners that of additional infrastructure built here at Worcester, a Deaf friendly IT system and blended learning material developed to make learning accessible to all Deaf learners across the country through virtual learning.

Lastly, to our graduates, as you get your award certificates this evening, take the challenge and go out there, use the skill you have acquired to open doors for yourselves and for other young citizens of this country. Let us give each other hope knowing that with education and relevant skills you can make our economy to grow.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my personal appreciation to the dedicated persons, both from the National Institute for the Deaf and National Skills Fund, who have unreservedly devoted their time and energy to accomplish magnificent achievements for the National Institute for the Deaf and South Africa. Such foresight and co-

operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the public sector bodies well for the future of Deaf students as key economic players in the making.

Ends

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