

15 March 2019

**THE NATIONAL SKILLS AUTHORITY IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CONVENED A SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL SKILLS CONFERENCE AND SKILLS AWARDS**

The National Skills Conference and Skills Awards 2019 took place at Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre in Boksburg on the 14 and 15 March 2019 under the theme: “***Building a demand-led skills development system that focuses on inclusive economic growth.***”

The conference brought together all education, training and skills development role-players to solicit solutions to the challenges and blockages experienced in the implementation of skills development interventions. The role-players included, among others, organised labour, business, private institutions, community-based organisations, government departments, as well as international guests.

The conference was graced by the presence of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mrs Naledi Pandor, the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and the Director General of the Department of Small Business Development, Mr Lindokuhle Mkhumane who represented the Minister, Ms Lindiwe Zulu.

Opening the conference, Minister Pandor said “*Our purpose here is to identify and discuss practical steps to improve the skills training sector. During this two day conference, I am keen to hear your views and ideas about how we make our skills system work better.*”

Minister Pandor specifically noted the fourth industrial revolution stating that South Africa is fully capable of undertaking projects that require digital skills, remarking on initiatives such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). She also lauded Professor Mashudu Tshifularo, an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital, and his team for their ground-breaking work in developing a pioneering surgical procedure using 3D-printed middle ear bones to improve hearing. Minister Pandor noted that *“If we intend to take full advantage of the fourth industrial revolution, all universities and colleges should be offering such courses.”*

The Minister concluded that informed skills planning is required across the education and training system. Noting that the National List of Occupations in High Demand (OIHD) 2018 supports enrolment planning at Universities and TVET colleges and macro-planning at a national level, the Minister stated that, as part of its responsibility, the Department should identify the priority skills needs of South Africa in order to properly inform skills planning.

The conference also saw the handover to and official release by the Minister of three key reports, namely:

The National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS III) 2011-2016 Evaluation Report handed over on behalf of the NSA by the Chairperson of the National Skills Authority (NSA), Ms Lulama Nare. The report evaluates the work performed under the strategy and the impact of the work on the development of a ‘skilled and capable workforce’;

The Organisation for European Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report on Community Education and Training handed over by Ms Marieke Vanderweyer, a Labour Market Economist in the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Directorate of the OECD. The OECD report focuses on adult learning in South Africa and follows the OECD report released in July 2017 and entitled “*Getting Skills Right, a South African Report focused on how it measures its skills needs, policies and initiatives*”. The report seeks to address imbalances, provides recommendations and best practices for alignment of skills demand and supply; and

The report on the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) Landscape Beyond 2020 presented by Mr Gwebinkundla Qonde, the Director General of the Department of Higher Education and Training. When presenting the NSDP, Mr Qonde assured delegates that wide consultation with relevant stakeholders was conducted to ensure that the final product is reflective of and responds to the skills challenges faced by the country. The NSDP was gazetted on the 7 March 2019 for public consideration.

Minister Pandor welcomed and officially released the reports, encouraging delegates to make time to read and act on them.

A key message of the conference was the need for proper monitoring and evaluation systems. The Minister in the Presidency responsible for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, provided excellent guidance on how the government can best ensure and promote efficiency through the monitoring and evaluation of its work. The

Minister noted that the evaluation of work must include qualitative measures in order to understand its true impact.

Other plenary presentations were from the Statistician General, Mr Risenga Maluleke, Professor Haroon Bhorat from the University of Cape Town, Ms Laura Brewer from the International Labour Organisation, and Dr Vijay Reddy from the Human Sciences Research Council who updated the conference on the progress made during the first phase of the Labour Market Intelligence Partnership project as well as the intentions and plans for the second phase of the project.

The Skills Awards Ceremony took place on the first night of the conference and was intended to mobilise role-players in the skills development sector to ensure the realisation of the goals of the NSDS III. Role-players were recognised for their achievements in promoting the training and development of people in the workplace, the unemployed and those not in training through the various learning programmes including artisan development, FET graduate placement, universities graduate placement, learnerships and internships.

The conference also sponsored fifty stalls for career guidance exhibitions and organised for delegates and learners from the neighbouring schools to attend the exhibition and gain exposure to career opportunities.

Key recommendations arising from the conference include the need to:

- Link skills development to more localized priorities and not only to national and global requirements.

- Work on ensuring that there is more inclusivity, particularly of people with disabilities.
- Create more partnerships with employers to make workplaces a place of learning.
- Strongly address issues around the transition between training and work needs.
- *Build a demand-led system* by putting in place the necessary partnerships to build brokering capacity with a focus on addressing the specific needs of small and micro businesses and actively support their participation.
- Address data challenges with a focus on data management, analysis and monitoring.
- Identify specialised quality and relevant technical skills that will enable the absorption of unemployed people into the employment cycle.
- Promote stronger foundation skills and enhance digital skills training for the fourth industrial revolution; and foster core employability and transferrable skills.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation function to ensure an efficient and seamless education and training system for the production of necessary skills.
- Focus on STEM skills and specialized management skills that are in high demand.
- Develop inter-SETA partnerships and collaboration.
- Measure the Return on Investment (ROI) on the R63 billion spent on skills development to date.
- Turnaround TVET colleges to produce the quality graduates needed by business; and business should become more active in addressing the skills development challenge.

The conference concluded with pledges made by Organised Labour, Organised Business, Community, Training Providers and State to implement the outcomes of the conference.

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