



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Minister Nzimande's Speech: TVET conference 18-19 November

Programme Director

Chair and Members of Parliament

College Principals

SETA Chief Executive Officers

Vice-Chancellors

Quality Councils and Entities

Business Leaders and Representatives

Union and Student Representatives

Members of the Education Alliance

Our international guests: the European Union, German and Dutch Delegations;

Swiss, Brics and SADC Representatives

Ladies and Gentleman

I would like to welcome you to our first official Technical and Vocational Education and Training College conference. As you will all know, Colleges were previously called Further Education and Training Colleges or FET Colleges. It was legislated earlier this year that these Colleges would now be officially called Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges. Because this is much more than a name change, and because it signals a whole new era for the colleges, this is an important

moment in the development of the country's post school education and training system. The spirit of what we are striving to achieve is captured in the conference theme: "Together we can forge a vibrant TVET Sector".

In the rest of the world TVET is a well-known concept. The name change therefore aligns us with international practice. It also signals the importance of integrating formal education with practical training and aligning these to the requirements of occupations. Whilst there will always be an intrinsic value in the education provided at the colleges, the critical change we are seeking to achieve is that link to the labour market and industry. I want the colleges to be viewed by employers as delivering quality programmes that meet their needs.

We must develop and deliver programmes, which provide industry with a fit for purpose workforce. As educational institutions, we will always have a social responsibility and the importance of developing our youth into responsible citizens will remain core to the ethos of our Colleges. However aligning our colleges and their programmes to the world of work is no longer negotiable. Crucially, this means colleges and employers collaborating. For the prosperity of individual citizens, as well as the economy at large, industry must be involved in every aspect of life at a TVET College.

During my first term as Minister of Higher Education and Training, we set out to do many things with one of the key objectives then and still today, to place emphasis on the college system. As with any journey you travel, it may take you into terrain that is not familiar and taking decisions along the way with intended, but also unintended consequences. The thought behind this conference was therefore to reflect on the gains that we have made, but also to reflect where we have come from and to collectively forge the way forward.

In 2010 at the start of the previous administration, we held a round table discussion with a similar purpose to this conference and that was to analyse and understand the difficulties in our system so that we could systematically address them. I am proud to say that the discussion yielded much needed input for the entire term and placed us on course to a stable and vibrant TVET sector. My wish is that we at this conference should be as productive and effective. We need to evaluate where we are and find solutions which will advance the sector not only in the next five years but also beyond.

During the discussions in 2010 a number of issues were raised, in fact too many to mention now, but I will reflect on a few. Some of the issues raised then were:

1. The need to stabilise the system
1. Moving Colleges from a Provincial to a National competence
1. The need to ensure articulation
1. The importance of expanding access to learners Not in Employment Education and Training (the so-called NEETS)
1. Addressing the issue of exclusion because of poverty and the needs to increase funding support to poor learners
1. Focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning
1. Ensuring relevance of programmes
1. Creating models of autonomy
1. Developing sustainable funding models

There were other matters raised but I think these are some of the most important and they have to a great extent informed the work of the department and the college leadership over the past five years.

Reflecting on the issues raised, I am pleased with the progress made. The sector is simply not the same as it was five years ago, in some areas we have made significant

strides. As a Department, we have put mechanisms and processes in place in almost all of the above areas and have seen colleges grow in stature.

Access and Pass Rates

Most significantly for me are the advances in access and improved pass rates of learners. Access has increased from 340 000 in 2009 targeting 800 000 learners this year. Although certificate rates are still too low, the National Certificate (Vocational) programme had an average certification rate of 9% in 2009. In 2013, the average certification rate increased to 33%, with Report 191/1 Business Studies currently at 38% and Report 19/1 Engineering Studies at 60% .

Whilst the colleges have inevitably been through a difficult period of change, I feel I am starting to get a sense that there has been some measure of stabilisation. Change generally comes with some pain, and I cannot deny that we are asking a lot, but I hope the White Paper will provide a level of stability.

NSFAS student bursary funding at TVET colleges has increased from R318 million in 2010 benefitting 61 703 students to R2.107 billion in 2014 targeting 233 958 students giving more learners access to TVET education than ever before.

Work has started on the development of the 12 new TVET College campuses in an attempt to ensure that learners especially in rural areas have access to education.

Function shift

One of the major initiatives which will soon be completed is the migration of Colleges from a Provincial to a National competence. College senior management, i.e. Principals and Deputy Principals are now employed at a national level giving the Department a lot more authority and influence over the performance of Colleges.

The remaining function shift processes will be effected on 1 April 2015. I am under no illusion that although the functions may shift, there is still a lot of work to be done. It is clear to me that the Department must have control over the Colleges to ensure focused attention and direction. While colleges are entities with their own Councils, they must know that they are public entities, here to serve the public good.

Programmes and qualifications

We have successfully concluded the National Certificate Vocational review and policy changes emanating from this review will be taken forward by Umalusi in the new year.

The Nated programmes have been re-introduced at Colleges, and a systematic review of these programmes is being undertaken by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. The first very outdated programmes have already been revised - I am pleased to say that our students will no longer have to hear about telegrams but rather hear about the internet and social media in their communication classes.

Many of our colleges are running Sector Education and Training Authorities or SETA funded occupational programmes. These programmes are commonly believed to have significant labour market currency. The importance of these programmes is that they are directly linked to employer needs and generally involve work placements as part of the programme – for example artisan programmes. For some colleges this is now a significant part of their programme offerings and income. However there are Colleges who are not delivering any occupational programmes and have very little or no relationships with SETAs or industry. So although we have made progress it is uneven.

Other initiatives

In addition to this these achievements there has been numerous other initiatives:

1. We developed a policy for lecturer qualifications – the first of its kind in this country and universities are now working toward developing our first tailor-made TVET qualifications.
1. We have entered into an agreement with the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants for financial management support at Colleges over the past two years, which was later extended to include Human Resource specialists to assist with stabilisation of labour matters at Colleges.
1. JET education services have supported the Department in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo with a prototype turnaround strategy, which I will be receiving comprehensive feedback on in the new year.
1. We developed minimum attendance criteria to ensure learners are present for learning. Instilling discipline is not just about ensuring we get value from our investments – it is an important part of preparing learners for the world of work.
1. I am in the process of establishing a committee to review the funding norms and standards for TVET Colleges.

The list simply goes on and on, and it would be amiss of me, not to thank the Director-General and his team of officials, College Principals, Council and staff members for their efforts. I think we all realise that by turning this sector around and increasing access, we have created pressure points within the system, for example the unintended consequences of expansion has been the additional pressure on the examination system.

And this really brings me to the heart of this conference, which is to look at where are the pressure points and where are systems still lacking, so that we can address them and move forward.

The Organisation of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) has undertaken a review of the TVET sector in South Africa, they will be launching this review here this morning. As part of the review, they have done an objective evaluation of the system informed by literature as well as numerous interviews and discussions held earlier this year.

This work is part of a series of reviews done in other countries and the benefits of this are that they are able to make recommendations based on lessons learnt and observations made in other countries. I am sure Dr Filed will elaborate on this in more detail.

We have a good starting point for our deliberations today and tomorrow as we can draw on these deliberations with its recommendations. We have asked the OECD to undertake this evaluation because we want to benchmark and evaluate ourselves against the best, and to confront weaknesses and challenges in the system honestly and frankly.

It will however only be useful if we all have a common vision for our TVET system. I think it is important that we take the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training as the start point for start our discussions.

In effect, the White Paper provides a vision for the TVET system going forward. In some aspects it is very explicit, whilst in others perhaps not, so let me take a few moments to share with you my thoughts on the White Paper.

First and foremost we need a system that is aligned to the labour market where learners are able to get workplace experience in real companies which will enable them to apply what they learn in the college programmes, prepare them for the world of work and ease their transition from College to work.

This then goes without saying that programmes taught at Colleges must be aligned to labour market and employment needs. To our principals in particular, our message is clear: forge closer links with both public and private employers, otherwise you are not a TVET College, but an old FET College!

I do acknowledge that expectations of colleges may in some cases be too great. A college cannot be expected to be experts in every industry. No private sector training organisation would attempt to provide for the needs of the entire economy. It is also not realistic to expect employers in every sector to engage with colleges in the way we would like them to. Employers want to see benefits from their time spent with learners and lecturers and in governance structures. It is also wasteful to have 21 SETAs all trying to do work with 150 plus college sites. I think in our vision for the future we need colleges that are diversified and specialised. It would be an achievement if we were to have one or two colleges that become institutions of choice for hospitality whilst others are focused on transport, others mining and so on. We must start to focus our efforts on certain areas of specialisation and in so doing I believe that we will be able to attract greater industry support and achieve greater efficiencies in the system.

I would like to have a system with no dead ends where college learners have the ability to move to higher education once they have completed their programmes at TVET Colleges. This is not an easy matter and the numbers moving from college to university currently are very low compared to countries such as Germany or the Netherlands where a large proportion of learners taking the technical learning pathway re-enter the academic route at a later date. Learners must be encouraged to see their time in colleges as both a route to employment and also a spring board to higher education.

The White Paper envisages the South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) playing an important role in coordinating the TVET system and supporting colleges to achieve the quality standards and relevance that we are striving for.

Most critically we have to work even harder to improve quality of our offerings in the colleges. This is one of the most important tasks in order to raise the prestige of these colleges, principally with employers, but also to enhance their image amongst our communities and students. Conference needs to also pay close attention to the issue of improving quality.

Another matter which has not yet been discussed in depth, but which I would like us to start a discussion on, is partial institutional autonomy. The OECD makes this recommendation in respect of programme offerings. I do believe that in some instances colleges are hamstrung by a generic set of rules imposed by national government. While I do not think colleges are in any way ready for full autonomy, and perhaps this should never be, I think there is a case to be made for well performing colleges to have some discretion on how they deal with particular employer needs in their programme offerings. As I say this, it is not something that we have discussed and debated fully within the Department, but I would like to hear some of your views on this matter.

I think a lot has been done to strengthen the management and governance of Colleges and most Councils are now fully functional. I am pleased to say that there are currently no colleges under administration. However, I think that change management is a critical element of any turnaround strategy and while we are turning around this sector, I think college management structures needs to set the tone at the top and manage this change. I would also therefore like the commission on

governance to give particular attention to how colleges can be supported in change management processes.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate the importance of the College sector in South Africa today. We will have some input from Professor Borat on the economy, and how this has changed in the recent past. The economy remains shaped by our Apartheid past, but at the same time is changing rapidly in response to global shifts in markets, production methods and currencies. When we ask colleges to respond to industry needs we must be aware that this is not an easy matter. For me a key question is how we can develop people who when they enter the labour market they are empowered to be able not just do today's jobs, but be able to adjust and adapt to changing requirements. This means ensuring that they have a sound foundational education linked to flexible occupational qualifications. I want us all to think carefully about the economy and how we align our efforts to meet its needs.

However, it is important that we also teach or expose our College students to other important social, life and human skills - critical and analytical thinking, study skills, human relations, etc - so that they are not just like robots, but students who have the skills to understand their environment and can also be retrainable.

I look forward to the deliberations and to hear your views on how we take the TVET system forward.

I do want to say that so often, conferences are only about talking. I would like the Director-General and his team to take the discussions and recommendations emanating from this conference forward so that "Together we can forge a vibrant TVET Sector" with your valued assistance.

I thank you for sharing these two days with us.